



# Gracie and the Great Pearl

"One more shell," thought Gracie as she worked on the box in front of her. "I just need one more shell and I will be able to start my collection of beautiful things." Gracie was grateful that Angie Angelfish had made her some gooey plant glue so that she would be able to attach the shells easily. She had found the old wooden box in the sunken ship where her favorite plant grew and had begun to decorate it with shells she found among the coral of the Red Sea, where she lived. Gracie swam around in ever-widening circles until she found what she was looking for—a small, beautiful abalone shell wedged under a rock below her. Gracie tugged on the shell, but it would not move. She nudged it and splashed it and wiggled it, but still it would not move.

"Do you need some help, Gracie?"

Gracie whirled around to see her big friend Gus the Grouper right behind her. Ordinarily a little fish like Gracie would be afraid of a big fish like a grouper, but Gus was different. Gracie and her friends had gotten Gus out of a tight spot, and the two had been friends ever since.

Gracie said, "Oh, Gus, I could use your help. Could you get me this beautiful abalone shell for my box?"

"I think so," replied Gus, and he flicked his tail so hard that the resulting wave caused the little shell to break away from the rock, landing just in front of Gracie.

"Oh, thank you, Gus," said Gracie. She brought the shell over to her box and applied some plant glue so the shell stuck to the last open space on her box.

"What are you making, Gracie?" said Gus, in his slow, deep voice.

Gracie hadn't realized that Gus had followed her back to the ship, and she wasn't sure she wanted him to go with her on her search.

"I'm making a box to hold beautiful things that I find," said Gracie.

"Oooh! Can I go with you on your treasure hunt, Gracie? Please?" asked Gus.

"All right, Gus, as long as what we find goes into my box," said Gracie. She wanted to collect these beautiful things to decorate her fan coral home. She didn't want others to take the most beautiful ones for themselves.

The two friends began to swim around the sunken ship. Gracie spotted a shiny button. Gus found a tiny mirror. They continued to swim in and out of ancient portholes until Gracie saw another shell attached to the old ship's deck. Unlike the abalone, this shell did not have beautiful colors. It was bumpy and brownish and looked very old, but perhaps the creature inside would know where to find other beautiful things.

Gracie bubbled a greeting and asked the shell's name.

After some time, the shell replied with an ancient voice. "I am Grandmother Oyster. It is many years since any fish has asked my name. Why have you disturbed my rest, little fish?"

Gracie addressed the shell with great respect. "Oh, Grandmother Oyster, my friend Gus and I are sorry if we disturbed you, but we are looking for beautiful things. You must have seen many beautiful things as you rested in this place."



"Yes, I have, child," said Grandmother Oyster more kindly. "There are many beautiful things in the sea. We are indeed blessed. Would you like to see the beautiful thing I have made?"

"Yes, please!" said Gracie and Gus together.

Grandmother Oyster opened her shell further and displayed a large, shiny white pearl nestled in her body. "It has taken many years for me to make this pearl, layer upon layer. What do you think of my pearl?"

"It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen," replied Gracie, and she meant it. It was large and perfectly round, smooth and sparkly.

"You probably would like to have it for your collection, but are you willing to pay the price?" said Grandmother Oyster, looking at Gracie closely.

"The price?" asked Gracie. "I will give you my box and all the beautiful things we have collected."

"What would I do with a box of treasures?" replied the shell. "But if you gave all of those beautiful things to all the creatures who truly need beauty and joy in their lives here in the sea, perhaps we could share this pearl."

Gus and Gracie looked at each other, then began to swim all over the reef, giving each fish or creature they saw something from the box of beautiful things. The coral reef had never looked lovelier.

They swam back to Grandmother Oyster, and she smiled. She displayed the Great Pearl, and all the creatures of the sea joined in a song of thanksgiving to the God of the Sea who had made them all beautiful, each in its own way.



### For Younger Children

1. Invite the children to decorate their cardboard fish banks for One Great Hour of Sharing with beautiful things (sequins, shells, glitter), and talk about how the money that will go in these banks will be used to bring joy to others, much as Gracie and Gus did.
2. Tell the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price from Matthew 13:45–46. Consider together how this story is both the same as and different from Gracie's story.
3. Make a list together of beautiful things that you can share with others.

### For Older Children

1. Read the two parables in Matthew 13:44–46. Think about how they are alike and different and then how they might relate to Gracie's story. Invite the children to create their own stories based on searching for what is beautiful and kind in the places where God lives.
2. Explore the map and individual stories from this year's One Great Hour of Sharing packet. Think together about how the money that will be collected with the fish banks might benefit these real people. Imagine how this might be connected to either Gracie's story or the parables above.
3. Think about the many ways that your church may use the collection of money or other goods to help others. Choose one of these ways to become your class project this spring.