

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Last Things



Growing in God's Love

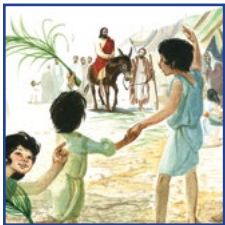
A Story Bible Curriculum

Unit Overview and Connecting page written by Elizabeth F. Caldwell

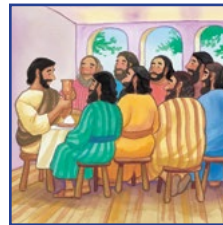
Sessions written by Nancy Speas

Last Things

Introduction	2
Unit Overview	3
Intergenerational and Home Ideas	4



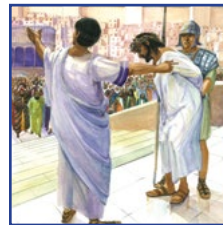
Jesus Visits Jerusalem 9
Luke 19:29–40



A Passover Meal 27
Luke 22:1–20



Remember to Love! 15
Matthew 22:36–40



Jesus Dies 33
Luke 23:1–49



Seeing Jesus 21
Matthew 25:31–46

The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

© 2020 Westminster John Knox Press

First edition

Published by Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

All rights reserved. Except where permission to photocopy is expressly granted on the material, no part of these materials may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. In some instances, adaptations have been made to make the language inclusive. Scripture quotations marked CEB are from the Common English Bible, © 2011 by Common English Bible, and are used by permission.

Every effort has been made to determine whether texts are under copyright. If through an oversight any copyrighted material has been used without permission and the publisher is notified of this, acknowledgment will be made in future printings.

Printed in the United States of America

Introduction

How do you get to know someone and form a relationship? You meet them. Get to know them. Ask questions. Discover things about them. Talk with each other. Share stories. Wrestle with what you learn. Discern your place in the relationship, with others, and with the world. Repeat.

One of the first ways we begin to understand God's self-revelation is to hear, engage, and wrestle with the written Word. In other words, it is through the stories of the Bible that we get to know God. It is through the stories of the things Jesus did and said that we get to know Jesus. It is through the Holy Spirit that we live and learn together. We get to know ourselves as beloved children of God and our place in the faith community.

In this curriculum, children will:

- read and hear stories from the Bible, adapted and told as age-appropriate stories using *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*;
- pause to let each story find its way into their hearts and minds;
- engage their curiosity and imagination with the Bible story through wondering questions and activities exploring God's presence, actions, and grace in the story; and
- wrestle with how they fit in the story, what God is calling them to do, and how they follow God's way of loving and living as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Benefits of a Multiage Setting

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum is intentionally a multiage children's curriculum. Multiage curriculum places spiritual development in a church family model and recognizes that age and development are not synonymous. It can appeal to all church sizes, with "family groups" spanning the various ages found in larger groups. There is the opportunity for the development of skills and character through encouraging disciples who support and care for one another; providing leadership and mentoring occasions; and supporting cooperation, rather than competition, as well as patience, tolerance, and compassion for those who are of different age or ability. Multiage curriculum provides a change from the typical school day and model of education. It offers open-ended materials that can challenge children and allows for developmental diversity and individual

differences. Children can develop a strong sense of community as they offer and receive support and encouragement.

Note about Supplies

Basic supplies, such as paper, newsprint, card stock, pencils, pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue, glue sticks, scissors, and tape, will not be listed in the "Gathering Supplies" section. These items are considered general supplies to have on hand. Specific items required for the lesson will be noted in each session.

Flyaway Books

Flyaway Books (www.flyawaybooks.com) is a children's picture book imprint from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation and the publisher of *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. It features books that reflect themes of diversity, inclusivity, kindness, compassion, self-esteem, and care for our world and that retell familiar religious stories in new ways. Flyaway Books titles are available at www.pcusastore.com.

Including Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Create an environment that helps children of all abilities experience God's grace by making a space welcoming and accessible. You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment—the way something is done, what is done, or where it is done. If you think a child may struggle with an activity, ask the question "How can I help this child be successful?"

Adapting the Process: Giving extra support to complete activities is an example of changing the process.

Adapting the Product: Having children make or do something different is an example of changing the product when the original plan is inaccessible for a child.

Adapting the Environment: Thinking about the room where you gather helps children feel welcome and included. Considering lighting, space, and furniture; displaying children's projects; and using liturgical seasons and symbols help children feel that the room is a place where they belong.

Unit Overview: Last Things

Remembering These Stories

We compact a lot into the week we call Holy Week. It begins with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which is told here from Luke's account. After Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, Matthew records more stories about Jesus' teaching and the questions he was getting from religious leaders. His response to a question about the most important commandment is told in "Remember to Love!" Matthew also includes Jesus' teaching about the judgment of the nations, which is unique in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' last week. "Seeing Jesus" helps children connect with what is most important. "A Passover Meal" retells the story of Jesus' final meal with his disciples and then the betrayal by Judas, and "Jesus Dies" discusses his trial and death.

This unit is rich in images and in important things to remember. It is with both gratitude for Jesus' teachings and sadness at what is to come that we walk again through this last week in the life of Jesus.

Remembering How These Stories Connect with One Another

A thread of connection, of course, runs through these stories. Each provides a snapshot of Jesus in the last week of his life. And there are always two sides—what others see and what Jesus knows is coming. The joy and excitement of those who welcomed him to Jerusalem is evident. On the shadow side is Jesus knowing what he is facing. Jesus hears the questions of those who want proof and answers them with stories and parables. Some hear these stories and reminders

and believe, while others question and ignore them. He invites disciples to an upper room for a Passover celebration. They come, not knowing it would be their last Passover with Jesus and one where he talks about a new covenant that God is making with them. The last sad snapshot in the album is where the women and other followers witness the unthinkable. Jesus, however, looks down from the cross and knows that death will not win.



Remembering Why These Stories Are Important to Our Faith

There's an old hymn titled "I Love to Tell the Story." The refrain in the chorus is, "I love to tell the story . . . of Jesus and his love" (*Glory to God*, #462). The stories in this unit remind us of good times and bad times, times of questions, and times of affirmations of faith. Each of them points to why it's important to remember Jesus' life and how

remembering the story of his life helps us to see how we are to live. These old stories stay with us and grow with us. As we grow in faith, wonder, bring questions, and struggle with meanings, we remember the most important thing of all: God's love surrounds us and sustains us.

Remembering to Wonder

- Which story is most familiar to you, perhaps one that stands out from when you were a child? As you revisit it, what new ideas or questions do you bring?
- How do these stories help you move through Holy Week and prepare for Easter?

Jesus Visits Jerusalem—Luke 19:29-40

Worship

Shouting Stones

- ✦ When the Pharisees tried to shush the crowd praising Jesus, Jesus answered, “If these were silent, the stones would shout out” (Luke 19:40). Incorporate stones or praise in your worship service.
 - Give every worshiper a small river stone and a permanent marker.
 - Encourage each person to write a word or phrase of praise or gratitude on their stone. Assist children with writing as needed.
 - At a designated time in the service, such as the call to worship or following the sermon, invite worshipers to bring their stone forward, shouting out the word or phrase on their stone and stacking them together on the Communion Table or a small table.

Joining in Praise

- ✦ Sing the child-friendly “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” by Jennette Threlfall (*Glory to God*, #197) as an opening hymn. If children made the praise signs from this session, incorporate them into an opening processional along with traditional palm branches. Invite people of all ages to join the processional.
- ✦ If your location and weather is conducive to being outdoors, consider a praise processional around the church, block, or neighborhood.

Education

Comparing Biblical Accounts

- ✦ Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is one of just a few stories told in all four Gospels. Read each of the Scripture passages below. Make a chart and compare and contrast the passages.
 - Matthew 21:1–11
 - Mark 11:1–11
 - Luke 19:28–40
 - John 12:12–19
- ✦ Wonder together:
 - What is similar, and what do you think that says about those elements?
 - What is different, and why might there be differences among the accounts?

Viewing Art

- ✦ The scene of Jesus entering Jerusalem is one of the most frequently depicted biblical stories in Western art. Perform an internet image search for “Jesus enters Jerusalem images.” View a variety of images. Have a conversation about which images you find most interesting or striking and why.

Connections

Hospitality Check

- ✦ At its root, this story is about hospitality. Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem (almost) like a king. Consider how you can develop a practice of hospitality that welcomes all people as beloved children of God.
 - How can you work across generations to make your church more welcoming?
 - How can you make the various communities to which you belong—such as your school, town, extracurricular activities, classes, and so forth—more hospitable?
 - How can you make your home a welcoming space?

Service

Visiting Others

- ✦ Jesus traveled to many towns to visit with the people and teach and preach. Jerusalem was another such trip. Wonder together who in your community would appreciate a visit. Work with your pastor or care committee to identify people who might enjoy some company. Contact a local nursing home, family shelter, or hospital to inquire about small group visits. Or consider how a small group might connect with an older member or young family who you can visit regularly.
 - Take cards or simple crafts to bring cheer to a room.
 - Bring a puzzle to put together or a simple game to play with those you are visiting.

Remember to Love!—Matthew 22:36-40

Worship

○ Call to Worship

- One: Happy are those who delight in the law of the Lord.
- Many: **They are like trees planted by streams of water.**
- One: Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?
- Many: **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**
- One: And the next?
- Many: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**
- One: Let your mercy come to us; that we may live.
- All: **For your law is our delight.**
(Adapted from Ps. 1:1–3, Matt. 22:37–39, Ps. 119:77)

Education

○ The Shema

- ✦ Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9, from which Jesus quotes the Matthew 22:36–40 passage.
- ✦ Discuss the context of the Deuteronomy passage:
 - What is the setting?
 - Who is talking to whom?
- ✦ Verses 6:5–9 are part of the Shema, a Jewish prayer that is recited in the morning and the evening. Learn more about the Shema by watching the YouTube video “Word Study: Shema – ‘Listen’” (bit.ly/ShemaVideo, 3:25). Wonder together why Jesus references this passage.

○ Memorizing Scripture

- ✦ Practice memorizing Jesus’ words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Try one of the following memory games:
 - Create motions to go with the phrases.
 - Form small groups and sit in a circle. Pass a ball to one another, saying the passage one word at a time as a group. Then try having each person say a word. Then try rolling

the ball randomly between people saying one word at a time. If one word at a time is too difficult, try breaking the passage into phrases, such as “You shall love/ the Lord your God/ with all your heart / . . .”

Connections

- A Road Sign for the Christian Journey
 - ✦ Think about road signs and the symbols they use to communicate rules. Consider what signs and symbols might be used to communicate the first command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Design and draw a sign to help remember the rule. Repeat the process with the second command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- Exploring World Religions
 - ✦ Every major world religion includes some version of “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” in their ethical framework. Using an internet-connected device, research how Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and other believers around the world express this Golden Rule.

Service

○ Sending Mail

- ✦ We all like to receive mail from a friend! Show someone love by sending mail to them. Work together to select recipients. Encourage each person to write a note or draw a picture. Assist younger children with writing as necessary. Show children how to address an envelope and place a stamp on it. Then put it in the mail.

○ Serving Together

- ✦ As a family or small group, plan a service project to do together. Some ideas to get you started include:
 - Shop for most-needed items in your community’s food bank.
 - Walk dogs and play with cats at the Humane Society.
 - Bake cookies and deliver them to first responders.
 - Clean out your closets and donate gently used and outgrown clothes to a charity thrift shop.

Seeing Jesus—Matthew 25:31-46

Worship

Being Christ's Body

- Invite people to create motions to go with the following quotation attributed to Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to
do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses
all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

- Use this quotation in a charge or sending out, and have the group lead the congregation or family.
- Dramatizing the Story
 - Rewrite Matthew 25:31–46 in modern language. Present the text as a dialogue, and have the youngest person ask the questions. Pantomime serving and turning away the “least of these.”

Education

Researching Hunger

- Action against Hunger provides a helpful overview of global hunger statistics and causes. Explore their website at www.actionagainsthunger.org.
- Visit www.presbyterianmission.org/hunger for information on how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is joining in the fight to end hunger (or visit your denominational site regarding hunger issues).
- Feeding America provides extensive background and information on hunger in the United States at www.feedingamerica.org.

Connections

- Providing the World with Clean Water
 - Visit www.bloodwater.org to learn about Blood:Water's efforts to empower local organizations to bring clean water and hygienic practices to villages across the continent of Africa.
 - Utilize their “KIDDO” platform and/or “Lemon:Aid” program to raise \$40, all that is needed for one child in Africa to have access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene for their entire life.

Service

- Fighting Hunger
 - Hold a food drive to support your local food bank. Ask the agency which items are needed most.
- Collecting Clothes
 - Collect clothes for the upcoming season. Donate them to an area shelter or clothing closet. Many schools keep extra children's clothes on hand to help out struggling families. Contact a local school's guidance counselor to inquire about needs.
- Remembering Prisoners
 - Regardless of how someone ended up there, prison is a lonely place to be! Contact the chaplain at a local prison to see what cards, letters, or small crafts can be sent. Write notes of support or make encouraging cards to be distributed to prisoners. Consider sending cards to drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. Talk together about what kinds of messages would be helpful to the recipients. Follow any rules or suggestions provided by the chaplain or administrators regarding sharing personal information and sending appropriate items.

A Passover Meal—Luke 22:1-20

Worship

- Celebrating Communion
 - Sing the communion hymn “I Come with Joy” (*Glory to God*, #515).

- ✦ Hold a “how-to” communion service, taking time to explain portions of the liturgy as you go. Visit www.how2charist.com for an example of a digitally annotated Episcopal eucharistic service. Adapt for your denomination’s practice of communion.

Education

- Exploring Scripture
 - ✦ Form three groups and assign each group one of the passages below. Have the groups read and discuss their passage. Invite them to decide how to present their findings to the whole group, such as by using drama, posters, tableaux, puppets, songs, and so forth.
 - Read Exodus 12 to learn about the institution of the first Passover.
 - Review the exodus story by reading Exodus 13–15.
 - Recall Jesus’ institution of communion by reading Matthew 26:17–30.
- Learning about Passover
 - ✦ Research the Seder plate, which contains food very specifically tied to the biblical account of the exodus from Egypt, and the Seder liturgy.
 - ✦ Check out websites such as bit.ly/WhatIsASeder, bit.ly/TheSederPlate, and bit.ly/HistoryOfPassover.
 - ✦ Watch YouTube videos such as bit.ly/SederWhatToExpect (3:57).
 - ✦ Read books or watch the corresponding YouTube videos to learn about the Passover and the Seder, such as *The Story of Passover* by David A. Adler (Holiday House, 2015; bit.ly/TheStoryOfPassover, 7:17), *Pippa’s Passover Plate* by Vivian Kirkfield (Holiday House, 2019; bit.ly/PippasPassoverPlate, 5:34), and *More Than Enough* by April Halprin Wayland (Dial Books, 2016; bit.ly/MoreThanEnoughPassoverStory, 8:02).

Connections

- Connecting with a Local Jewish Community
 - ✦ Visit a local synagogue. Call ahead and/or check the website to determine an appropriate service to visit and any customs you need to be aware of ahead of time, such as dress code, service in English and/or Hebrew, and so forth.
 - ✦ Learn more through local Jewish papers, community centers, museums, and so forth.

Service

- Supporting Bread for the World
 - ✦ Hold a letter-writing party for Bread for the World’s Offering of Letters. For more information, visit www.bread.org and click on “Activism” and then “Write to Congress.” The letter-writing campaign is updated each year.
- Serving Together
 - ✦ Invite members of a nearby synagogue or other worshiping community to join you in a service project that benefits your neighborhood.

Jesus Dies—Luke 23:1–49

Worship

- Providing Comfort Items
 - ✦ Listening to a sad and violent story can be hard for anyone, particularly children. Provide something soft to hold, such as stuffed animals or small swatches of soft fabric, to help people comfort themselves. Avoid plunging the sanctuary into total darkness, as is sometime done for dramatic effect.
- Reminder That This Is Not the End of the Story
 - ✦ Particularly if young children are present, make plain that this is a stop on the journey. To concrete thinkers, the story of Jesus’ death—without reminders of the resurrection—can be very traumatic. Include a “to be continued” benediction, such as, “We’ve come to the end of worship, but the story is not over. Love has not lost. Jesus died, but he won’t stay dead. Go in sadness and know joy will come in the morning. We leave in darkness but will return in light.”

Education

- Looking for the Friends
 - ✦ Form four groups and assign each group one of the various Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death: Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19. Locate key players in each version. Have a conversation using the following questions:
 - Where are the disciples?
 - Where are the women?
 - Who remains after Jesus’ death?
 - Who takes care of his body?

- Why do you think each person or group of people reacted the way they did?
- What might you have done if you were there?
- ✦ Gather as a whole group and share your findings and thoughts. Try to give each person in your small groups an opportunity to contribute to the conversation.

Connections

- Sharing Memories
 - ✦ In small groups, tell stories about friends or family members (including pets!) you've lost through death, relocation, or other means.
 - What was your favorite thing about them?
 - What fun things did you do together?
 - What do you miss most?
 - Who helps you make it through days when you miss your loved one very much?
 - ✦ Be careful not to compare each person's grief. Grief is personal and not relative: a child's loss of a beloved pet can be as traumatic in their world as an adult's loss of a close friend or relative.

Service

- Supporting People Who Are Grieving
 - ✦ Find out what grief services or groups are available in your church or community. Wonder together how you can share that information with others when they are in need. Perhaps you could create a flyer or brochure, make a social media post, or share that information on your church's website, if it is not already there. Encourage your church to keep grief support materials available as a way to support people grieving silently.
 - ✦ Collect boxes of soft tissues to give to families experiencing grief and to keep around the church. Lots of crying means raw noses!
 - ✦ Assemble care packages for families with a loved one in hospice care. Include small items such as lip balm, travel tissues, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, toothbrushes, mints, and so forth. Contact the local hospice chapter for more information.

✦ **Goal:** To consider the implications of Jesus' unusual entry into Jerusalem.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

We hear this text read every year, though the Gospel accounts do differ. Luke omits the hosannas that are included in the other Gospels. John describes people waving palm branches. In Luke, the disciples are sent to find a colt, not a donkey. This entry or procession into Jerusalem has a royal feel to it. People line up, praising God and adding a blessing for Jesus, whom they address as king. Some of the Pharisees object to this political language and instead call Jesus teacher. When they ask Jesus to silence the crowd, he responds with words that indicate he knows what he is facing as he enters Jerusalem for the last time. If he told them to be quiet, even the stones would shout. This story invites us to consider some questions: Where are we in the story? Where is God at work in this story? What picture of Jesus do we see here? What would shouting stones say?

For additional commentary help, see bit.ly/Luke19Commentary.

Connecting with the World

- ✦ Where do you see God at work in the world?
- ✦ Stones as markers of holy places are a familiar symbol in the Old Testament when God's people went through the wilderness and then entered the promised land. Shouting stones is a new image. Stones for memory, stones for celebration: think about stones as visible reminders of God's presence in the world. Find a good size stone. Place it near a door of your home. Decide what your stone will say to the world. What will it help you remember?

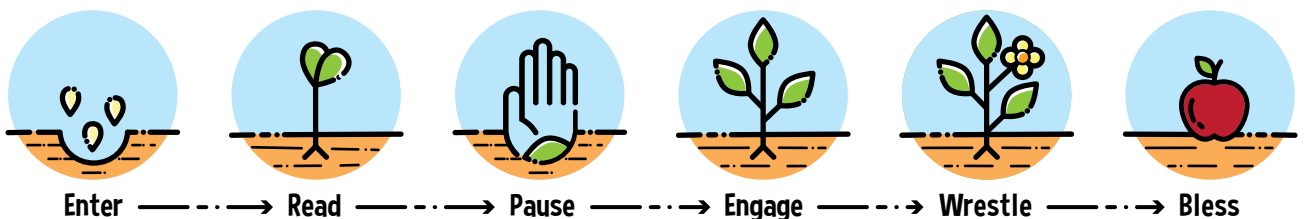
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Nearly every Christian church celebrates Palm Sunday with palms. Oftentimes there is a parade of children waving palms. Children know there is something celebratory going on in this story. The story contains foreshadowing and deeper nuances when we know what the coming week in Jesus' life will bring. Live in the moment with children, just as the crowds celebrated and waved palms for Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. Wonder together what you would shout if you saw Jesus riding in front of you on a colt. If he paused in front of you, wonder what you would say or ask. Then consider the stones. If the stones along the road could shout, what would they say?

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

We read this story knowing what's going to happen. Like Jesus, we know what he is facing. But for a moment, we celebrate the triumphal entry of one recognized as a king coming in the name of the Lord. How do people respond to Jesus in this story? What does it mean to you to recognize Jesus coming into the world? Where are you in this story? Knowing what lies ahead of him, how is this story of Jesus entering Jerusalem alike or different from the birth narrative?

Gracious God, we join with those who lined the streets of Jerusalem and give thanks for your living presence among us. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, beanbag chairs
- ✓ Purple cloth
- ✓ 5 battery-operated candles
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as crayons, markers, colored pencils
- ✓ Palm frond strips
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Four towels
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Rhythm instruments
- ✓ Streamers
- ✓ Construction paper

Preparing to Lead

Read Luke 19:29–40. Then read “Jesus Visits Jerusalem” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 270). Since this is a familiar story, pay particular attention to anything new that stands out to you. Immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and smells of the scene. Listen to the crowd cheering. Feel the dust kicked up by the donkey. Consider trips you've been on, and remember the thrill of entering a new city.

- ✓ What, if anything, did you hear differently in the biblical text?
- ✓ What stands out to you about this version of the story?

Even though we know the crowds would turn on Jesus just a few days later, the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus much like a king. Think about how you can welcome the children in your group. How can you make the physical space hospitable to them? Do you know of any children with special needs who might need particular arrangements? Recall the names and faces of the children you will teach. What do you know about them? Pray for them and for you as you prepare for your time together.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a purple cloth on the floor with five candles. Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on all five candles. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Lord of kings /
and little children, /
we welcome you /
into our holy space. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Explain the significance of the candles. Suggest that you are learning about the last things Jesus did and said before he died. Tell them that for this session and the next four, you'll light one less candle as you get closer to learning about the end of Jesus' life on earth.



Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to how Jesus' followers welcome him to Jerusalem. Read the first paragraph of “Jesus Visits Jerusalem” (pg. 270), pausing after each question to allow the children to answer.

Read the rest of the story.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to use their curiosity and imagination as they ponder this story silently. Suggest that they picture in their minds what they see, hear, and smell in the story. Point out the drawing supplies and note that they may sit quietly and illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Engage the children's curiosity in the story. Have a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✓ What was unusual about the way Jesus came into Jerusalem?
- ✓ Why do you think Jesus chose to ride a donkey?
- ✓ How did the crowd seem to feel toward Jesus?
- ✓ Why were the religious leaders upset?
- ✓ How do you think they felt toward Jesus?

Leading

- ✎ What do you think Jesus will do in Jerusalem?
- ✎ What did Jesus mean when he said that even the stones would “shout out”?

Choose one or both options:

- Palm Crosses
 - ✎ Encourage the children to make crosses with palm frond strips by following the step-by-step directions found at bit.ly/HowToFoldAPalmCross. Explain that we often make a connection between palms and crosses because, though the people celebrated Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem by waving the palms, he would die on a cross a few days later.

If you have older children in your group, consider pairing an older child with a younger child to make their palm crosses together. Encourage the older children to lead the younger children in making crosses by demonstrating and assisting and not by taking over the process.

- Holding a Parade
 - ✎ Jesus’ procession was much like a parade: people lined the streets, cheering and celebrating. Hold your own parade. Hand out palm branches and, if you choose, rhythm instruments and streamers. Lead the children in singing a simple praise song or saying, “Praise Jesus! All hail King Jesus!” Give each child a chance to lead the procession.

Invite other groups—children, youth, and adults—to join your parade.



Wrestle with our place in God’s story.

Help the children think about the meaning of the story. Wonder together:

- ✎ What was important about Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem?
- ✎ What do you think he taught his disciples and followers by entering the city this way?
- ✎ What do you think he meant when he said the “rocks would cry out”?

Choose one or more options:

- Donkey Thoughts
 - ✎ Invite the children to retell the story from the perspective of the donkey. Hand out copies of Resource Page 1 to help the children think through the donkey’s experience of the procession. Encourage the children to use their imaginations as they fill in the boxes.
- Making an Entrance
 - ✎ Watch the YouTube video “Aladdin (2019) Prince Ali—Will Smith Scene” (bit.ly/PrinceAliVideo, 3:35). Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:
 - How did Jesus’ and Prince Ali’s entries into town differ? How were they the same?
 - Why do you think Jesus chose to enter the way he did?
 - How do you think the crowd reacted to Jesus’ procession—like the crowd in the video or in a different way?
 - Which entry would you prefer for you? For someone who is going to lead you?
- Sharing Art
 - ✎ Invite the children to share any art they made during the session.



Bless one another with God’s grace.

Bless each child individually. Have the children form a parade line. As each child passes by you, have them pause. Ask if you may touch them on the arm or hold their hand and say, “(Name), you are a child of God worthy of celebrating.”

Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Dear God, /
help us follow where you lead /
every day /
in every way. /
Amen.

Encourage the child to remind their family members that they are each a child of God worthy of celebrating!



Grow with more.

○ Cloak Challenge

- ✦ People laid down their cloaks in the road as a way to honor Jesus, helping him and the donkey stay clean from the dirt and dust of the road. Use the following directions to play the cloak challenge:
 - Sort the children into two teams.
 - Give each team two towels.
 - Designate a starting line and a finish line.
 - Challenge the children to work together to get their group from the start to the finish line by standing on one “cloak,” without touching the ground, and by placing the other one in front of them, moving to that cloak, and then repeating.
 - If anyone on the team touches the ground outside the towel, the team must start over.

If you have a larger number of children, you may need to form three or more groups.

○ Praise Signs for Jesus

- ✦ When attending exciting sporting events or parades, people sometimes make signs as a way of cheering for their team. Think about what Jesus’ followers might have put on such signs. Provide construction paper and markers. Invite the children to design and decorate their own signs using words or pictures, thinking about what they would say to praise Jesus. Encourage the children to share their signs with the group.

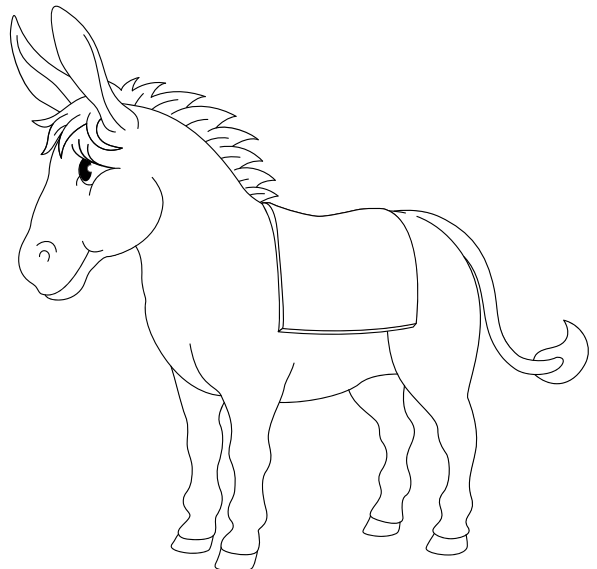
What did the donkey THINK?

What did the donkey FEEL?

What did the donkey SEE?

What did the donkey HEAR?

What did the donkey SMELL?



✦ **Goal:** To consider and remember Jesus' priority of love above all else.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

After his entry into Jerusalem, Jesus continues teaching, responding to questions from religious leaders. This questioning has been going on for a while in Matthew's Gospel. Here we see Jesus responding to a Pharisee who was trying to test him, as the text says. The religious leader, and expert in the law, wanted to know what Jesus thought was the greatest commandment. The readers of Matthew's Gospel, probably Jewish, would have been very familiar with Israel's Scriptures, especially those to do with laws. Here we see Jesus responding with the familiar commandment from Deuteronomy 6:5 which they were commanded to repeat twice a day, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul [or whole self] and with all your might." This legal expert would have known that. Then Jesus added a second commandment which he took from his knowledge of Scripture, Leviticus 19:18: "love your neighbor as yourself." The kind of love that Jesus is talking about is not a sentimental love. Rather it is love in action, love that is revealed in the ways we love our neighbor and love God. All the other laws written in the Scriptures are based on these two.

Read the rest of this chapter, Matthew 22:41-46. Notice the reaction of those who were present. Jesus' response had silenced them. There were no more questions, no more tests.

For additional reading see bit.ly/GreatestCommandmentCommentary.

Connecting with the World

- ✦ How do you love God and love neighbor?
- ✦ How is love for God expressed in the world today?
- ✦ Where in your community is there love in action by seeing and treating one another as neighbor?

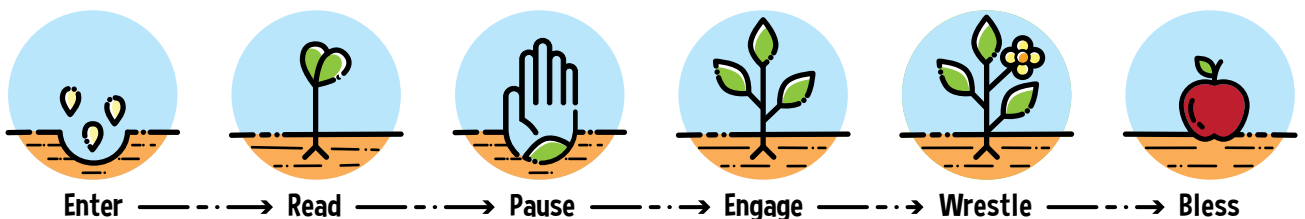
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Parents and teachers know that our lives with children focus on helping them learn right from wrong. We also want them to learn from an early age about loving and caring for others. They learn this first as we love them. The title of this story, "Remember to Love!" is probably at the top of the list of abilities we want for our children's spiritual life. The contemporary illustrations for this story in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* help children see practical ways they can follow Jesus by loving others. The Hear, See and Act prompts on p. 345 invite children's response to Jesus' invitation to love God and others.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

We live with lists—lists of things to remember to do! We remember the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses. Recall Micah's prophetic words about the three things God requires of us: justice, mercy, and kindness. We consider nine beatitudes. We read four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life. Here Jesus sums up his life, his ministry, the most important things he wanted people to remember as he continued his journey to his death with two things. We love God, and we love our neighbor when we act justly, with mercy, and kindness. So simple! So complex! This life of living in response to God's love is full of opportunities if we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to reach out.

*Loving God, remind me each day to see the world with your eyes.
Help me find the places where I can love others. Amen.*



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs
- ✓ Purple cloth
- ✓ 5 battery-operated candles
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as crayons, markers, colored pencils, and so forth
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Sticky notes
- ✓ Clean, dry rocks
- ✓ Permanent markers
- ✓ Painting supplies, such as acrylic paints, plates, brushes, water cups, paper towels, and smock (alternative: paint pens)
- ✓ Spray sealant

Preparing to Lead

Read Matthew 22:36–40. Then read “Remember to Love!” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 344).

The legal expert, who knows all the ins and outs of the many, many rules and commandments in the Scriptures, is surprised when Jesus is able to distill the teachings of the Law and the prophets into two simple sentences: Love God. Love everyone. It's that simple. This simplicity is easy for children to understand, but we adults want to make it more complicated. Do I love my neighbor if they have done *this* or haven't done *that*? Do I have to love all my neighbors? Just who is my neighbor? How do I have to love? And what is *love*, anyway? So many more questions rather than just putting love into action!

As you walk through this story with the children in your group, let their simplicity lead and teach you. While the world is a complicated and scary place, a few of Jesus' teachings are black and white. Love God. Love everyone. No exceptions. Pray for your group and your time together, that Jesus' message of love for all will be communicated loud and clear.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a purple cloth

on the floor with five candles. Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on four candles. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Loving, smiling, laughing God, /
you love us all day long. /
Teach us to love like you /
so that others will know your love too. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story of the greatest commandments of love.

Explain the significance of the candles. Suggest that you are learning about the last things Jesus did and said before he died. Tell them that for this session and the next three, you'll light one less candle as you get closer to learning about the end of Jesus' life on earth.



Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to the story. Encourage them to listen for the legal expert's questions and Jesus' answers. Read “Remember to Love!” (p. 344).



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to use their curiosity and imagination as they ponder this story silently. Suggest that they consider the question the legal expert asked and how Jesus answered him. Point out the drawing supplies and note that they may sit and quietly illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Engage the children's curiosity in the story. Have a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✓ What question did the legal expert ask Jesus?
- ✓ Why do you think Jesus was glad the man asked him this question?

Leading

- ✎ How did Jesus answer?
- ✎ Have you ever not known what the rules are? How did it feel?
- ✎ Why do you think we have rules?
- ✎ What do you think are the most important rules, or commandments, in your house? At school? At church?
- ✎ What do the illustrations tell us about this story?
- ✎ Why do you think the title of the story is “Remember to Love!”?

Choose one or both options:

○ Playing a Game

- ✎ Help the children remember that we are called to love everyone by playing a game like Fruit Basket Upset.
 - Make a circle of chairs facing inward, with one less chair than players. Select one child to stand in the middle of the circle, and have the others sit down in the chairs.
 - Encourage the child in the center to complete this sentence: “I love people who _____” (*insert a description to fill in the blank; for example, “I love people who have brown eyes,” “I love people who like to play soccer,” or “I love people who are afraid of spiders,” and so forth.*)
 - Every child who matches the description must move at least two chairs away to another seat while the child in the center attempts to take a seat as well.
 - Play continues with whomever is left standing sharing a new description.
 - When you are ready to end the game, quietly add another chair into the circle so that all players are able to find a seat.

○ Remembering the Commandments

- ✎ According to Jesus, “all the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt. 22:40, CEB). Wonder together what that verse means. Since these two commandments are so important, they are certainly worth memorizing!
 - Watch the YouTube video “You Shall Love (Matthew 22:37–39)” (bit.ly/GreatCommandmentSong, 2:26). Encourage the children to sing and do the motions along with the song.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Help the children think about the meaning of the story. Wonder together:

- ✎ Why do you think it was important for the legal scholar to ask Jesus questions about the law?
- ✎ What do you think he thought of Jesus' answer?
- ✎ How can we make these the most important rules in our lives?

Choose one or both options:

○ Illustrating the Commandments

- ✎ Ask the children:
 - How do we love God with our heart?
 - How do we love God with our soul?
 - How do we love God with our mind?
 - When was a time you felt as if you were loving God with all of you?
- ✎ Hand out copies of Resource Page 1. Encourage the children to draw or describe the time in the top box. Then ask:
 - What does it mean to love yourself?
 - How can we love other people?
 - When was a time you loved yourself and other people really well?
- ✎ Have the children draw or describe the time in the bottom box on Resource Page 1.

○ Sharing Art

- ✎ Invite the children to share any art that they made during the session.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Invite the children to stand or sit in a circle. If you learned the song and motions for Matthew 22:37–39 earlier in your gathering, sing and do the motions together.

Turn to a child next to you and say, “You are my neighbor, and I love you.” Have that child turn to the person next to them and repeat the same line. When everyone has been blessed, close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Loving God, /
who teaches us to love ourselves /
and to love our neighbors, /

Leading

show us new ways to love /
today, tomorrow, and every day. /
Amen. /

Encourage the children to say, sing, or do motions for the greatest commandments to their family!



Grow with more.

○ Asking Jesus Questions

- Today's story kicked off with a question. People had lots of questions for Jesus, but most of the ones we hear about came from the religious leaders of the time, who were seeking to trick Jesus. We also hear questions from the disciples, who were trying to make sense of his teachings. This sort of questioning is good! Asking questions is an important way to learn. Sometimes people are afraid to ask questions about God, but God is way bigger than all of our questions and can handle them.
- As a group, make a list of questions you'd like to ask Jesus. Big questions, small questions, silly questions, sad questions, deep questions, confusing questions . . . everything is fair game. How many questions can your group come up with?
- Wonder together how Jesus might answer some of your questions or where you might be able to find answers, such as the Bible, a pastor or leader, or even yourself. Help the children understand that they may not find answers to every question. Some things are part of the mystery of faith.

Jesus may have answered some of the questions on your list in the Gospels. Feel free to share the answer if you would like, but keep the emphasis in this activity on empowering the children to ask God whatever they want to. Let their wondering minds work!

○ Encouraging Notes

- Distribute sticky notes and pens. Brainstorm short sayings that the children could write on the notes to let others know that they are loved by God and by one another. Some ideas might be: "God loves you," "You are beautiful," "The

world is better with you in it," and so forth. Write these sayings on a sheet of newsprint for all to see. Have the children choose several sayings and write each saying on a sticky note. Assist with writing as needed.

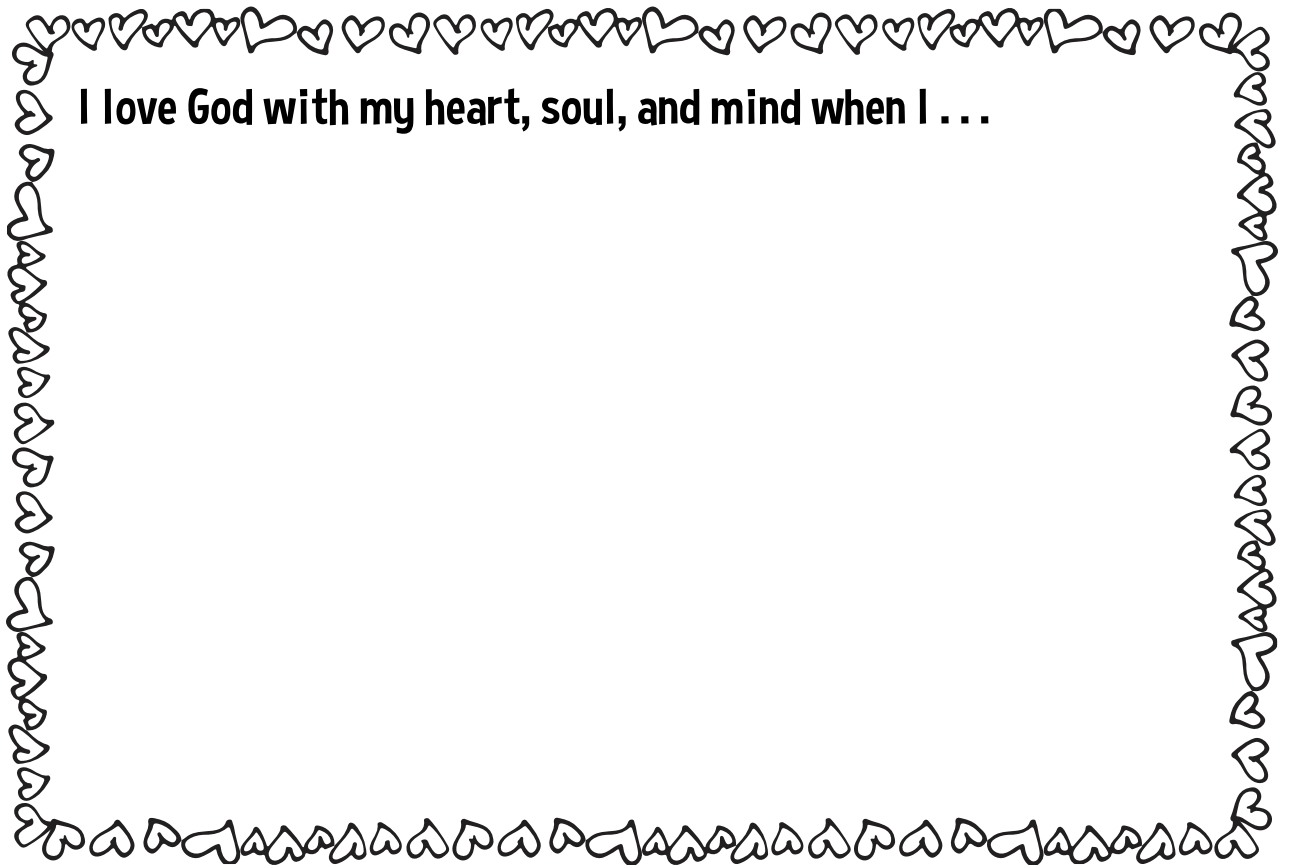
- As a group, walk around the church and stick the notes where people will find them: doors, windows, bathroom mirrors—wherever you can think to post them!

Encourage older children in your group to help the younger children write and post their encouraging notes.

○ Spreading Joy in Your Community

- Painting and hiding decorated rocks is an activity that has caught on in many communities as a simple and fun way to spread joy. Decorate a batch of rocks to hide around your church and community, anywhere someone might come across them when they need a smile.
 - Provide clean, dry rocks, permanent markers, and acrylic paints, as well as painting supplies, such as plates, brushes, water cups, paper towels, and smocks. Have the children use a permanent marker to write your church name (or other hashtag) on the back of each rock.
 - Place each rock on a small paper plate and encourage the children to paint it however they would like. They can use words, pictures, fun designs, bright colors—the sky's the limit!
 - Leave the rocks on the plates to dry. Once dry, spray each rock with sealant to protect it from the weather.
- If possible, travel as a group to hide your rocks. If not, distribute the rocks to the children with instructions to place the rocks near homes, schools, parks, or other places in your community.

For an activity without paint, have the children decorate the rocks with paint pens or permanent markers.



Connecting with the Biblical Text

This text is the last eschatological (pertaining to last things or the final realm of God) parable of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24–25. In this parable about a time in the future, Jesus describes himself as “king” and the judgment he will bring on the nations. Read this text in your Bible and then read “Seeing Jesus” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. As you read, notice the center of gravity of the text. What is most important? In Jesus’ last discourse before his last meal with the disciples, what does he want them to remember? Also think about this last teaching in light of all that has gone before. How does this parable intersect with his other teachings? All the nations (meaning Gentiles) will be gathered in front of him as Jesus speaks about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those imprisoned, welcoming strangers, and taking care of those who are sick. The people question, “when did I see you?” and Jesus’ not surprising response is, “when you did this for others, you did it for me.” If Jesus had to sum up what he is about, here it is in a parable. Jesus is always concerned about how his followers would live their lives, caring for others.

For additional commentary go to bit.ly/Matthew25Commentary.

Connecting with the World

- One Great Hour of Sharing is an offering many churches take during the Lenten season or Holy Week. This offering is a way for people to be involved actively in the kinds of things Jesus was talking about. Find out what your church is doing. Visit the Presbyterian Special Offerings website at specialofferings.pcusa.org or your denominational equivalent.

🌱 **Goal:** To connect serving others with serving God.

- 🌱 Spend time as a family talking about this text and story. How could your family make a commitment to one thing to do together for a project in your community or church or school that focuses on issues of housing/homelessness, prisoners, people who need food or clothes, or people who are alone or sick?

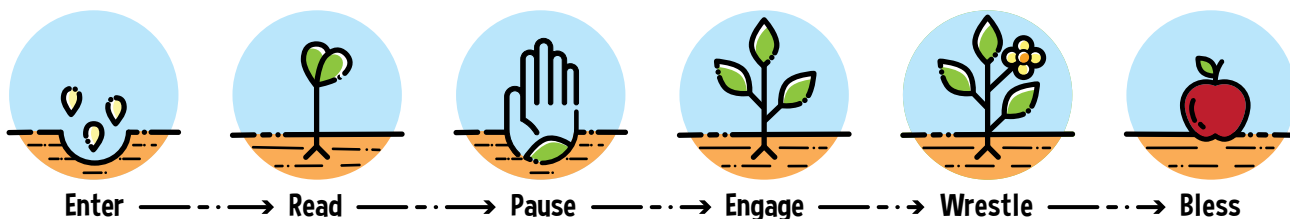
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

The story, “Seeing Jesus,” invites children to connect with the abstract concept of the ways we love God and Jesus. Helping children connect with the mysteries of God through concrete actions is a good way for them to begin to make a place in their hearts and lives for God. This story also helps them think about God in terms of a circle of God’s love and how this circle of love grows bigger, the more we share our love with others.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

In the Reformed tradition, we speak about the sacrament of baptism as marking us forever for a life of faith. It is more than a moment when water is sprinkled on our heads. All our lives give evidence of the ways we live in response to our baptismal blessing and affirmation that we belong to Jesus Christ forever. Our lives of faith grow as we respond to Jesus’ question to the people and to us, “When did I see you?” Spend some time this week seeing Jesus in those you meet. Who is hungry? Who is sick? Who is in prison of any kind? Who is a stranger who needs to be included? Who needs help with clothes? Jesus said that when you see anyone with these needs and help them, then you saw him and you lived in his name.

God, your circle of love is deep and wide and ever expanding. Open our eyes to those around us whom you see. Help us draw our circles of love deeper and wider. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs
- ✓ Purple cloth
- ✓ 5 battery-operated candles
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as crayons, markers, colored pencils, and so forth
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1

Preparing to Lead

Read Matthew 25:31–46. Then read “Seeing Jesus” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 326). Today's story takes abstract concepts, such as love and faith, and makes them concrete. It also puts flesh and bones on the concept of God, not just in Jesus but in other people. We can see Jesus in other people. Serving other people means serving God. These concepts can be difficult for children—but if they “click,” they can open up a world of understanding for our concrete and finite thinkers. In teaching, focus on the real-life applications described in the text.

Pray for your group and your time together. Who knows what brilliant ways of serving and loving are sprouting in their open minds!



Enter into sacred space together.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a purple cloth on the floor with five candles. Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on three candles. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Beautiful God, /
open our hearts /
and our minds. /
Fill us with your love /
as we learn to love each other. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story about serving God by serving others.

Explain the significance of the candles. Suggest that you are learning about the last things Jesus did and said before he died. Tell them that for this session and the next two, you'll light one less candle as you get closer to learning about the end of Jesus' life on earth.



Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to the story. Encourage the children to close their eyes while they listen. Read “Seeing Jesus” (p. 326).



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to use their curiosity and imagination as they quietly ponder this story. Invite them to think about the number one thing Jesus wants his followers to remember and why they think that's most important.

Suggest that they may sit and use the art supplies quietly to illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Have a conversation about the story using the following prompts:

- ✓ What does Jesus want his followers to do?
- ✓ Why do you think Jesus is telling his disciples all the most important things now? Why not later?
- ✓ What do you think it means to see someone in someone else? Has anyone ever said this about you and a family member?
- ✓ What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “The circle of your love can be very big”?
- ✓ How do you think Jesus' disciples felt when they heard him say these things?
- ✓ Look at the pictures. What ideas for helping people do they give you?

Leading

○ Sketching without Seeing

- ✎ Tell the children that it can be hard to follow Jesus without seeing him with our eyes! How do we know what to do? Suggest that we read stories like this one and other stories from the Bible, and we ask for help from people we trust. Invite the children to try an activity to practice following without seeing.
 - Group the children in pairs of similar ages and have them sit back to back. Give one member of each pair paper and a pencil.
 - Very quietly tell and/or show the member of each pair without paper a simple object their partner will draw.
 - The partner without paper must describe the item to the drawing partner without saying what it is. They can be as detailed as they want, but they can't say the object or peek at the drawing.
- ✎ When the drawing partners think they have completed their drawing, bring the pairs face-to-face and reveal both the drawing and the object being described.
- ✎ Reflect together:
 - How close is the drawing to the description? To the actual item?
 - What was it like to draw without knowing what you were drawing?
 - What was it like to have to describe something with words? And to describe it without seeing the picture?
 - How do you think this is like or unlike following Jesus without seeing him?
 - What instructions do we have from Jesus? How can we follow them?

Be sure to match the complexity of the drawing to the age of the children. Younger children may need a simple shape to describe, while older children can draw a more complicated item or scene.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Help the children think about the meaning of the story and its impact on their lives. Have a conversation using the following questions:

- ✎ Where do you see yourself in the story?
- ✎ How have you helped someone?

- ✎ How have you been helped by someone?
- ✎ How does our world and the rest of the world change when our circle of love increases?

Choose one or more options:

○ Finding Your Kindness

- ✎ Watch the YouTube video “Rend Collective Experiment—Find Your Kindness” (bit.ly/FindYourKindness, 4:08) to see how one person reaches across an ocean to serve others. Stop the video at 3:50 with the picture “By doing 1 small thing . . .” and leave it on the screen. The video is set to Rend Collective’s song “Find Your Kindness.” Encourage the children to listen carefully to the lyrics as you watch. Reflect on the song and the video together:
 - Show the lyrics to the song at bit.ly/FindYourKindnessLyrics. Invite volunteers to read the last line of each of the three verses. Wonder together what these lines mean, not to live off the grid, not to forget, and not to hesitate anymore.
 - What is Matt’s wish for the people of Kenya?
 - Each verse of the song ends with a plea: “I don’t want to live off the grid anymore.” / “I don’t want to forget anymore.” / “I don’t want to hesitate anymore.” What do you think these lines mean?
 - How can we each “find [our] kindness”?
 - Read Matthew 25:34–40. Who is Jesus talking about when he says “the least of these”?
 - The video ends with “By doing 1 small thing . . .” What might be your one small thing?

○ Being Blind to Needs

- ✎ Invite the children to brainstorm reasons we don’t always see other people’s needs or choose to help. Wonder together:
 - What feelings get in the way?
 - What do we not understand?
 - Who or what stops us from helping?
- ✎ Give each child a copy of Resource Page 1. Have them illustrate or write their answers on the blindfold.

○ Sharing Art

- ✎ Invite the children to share any art they made during the session.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Close with the following prayer:

Loving God, when we can't see you with our eyes or touch you with our hands, help us to see you and serve you in other people. Amen.

Lead the children in the following blessing and movements, inviting them to repeat your words and motions:

Wherever I go, (*move arms open wide*) /
 God is with me. (*hand on heart*) /
 To my right, (*step right*) /
 God is with me. (*cross arms over chest*) /
 To my left, (*step left*) /
 God is with me. (*cross arms over chest*) /
 When I am flying high, (*reach up to the sky*) /
 God is with me. (*cross arms over chest*) /
 When I am sinking low, (*crouch*) /
 God is with me. (*cross arms over chest*) /
 Everywhere I go, (*turn in circle*) /
 God is with me. (*cross arms over chest*)



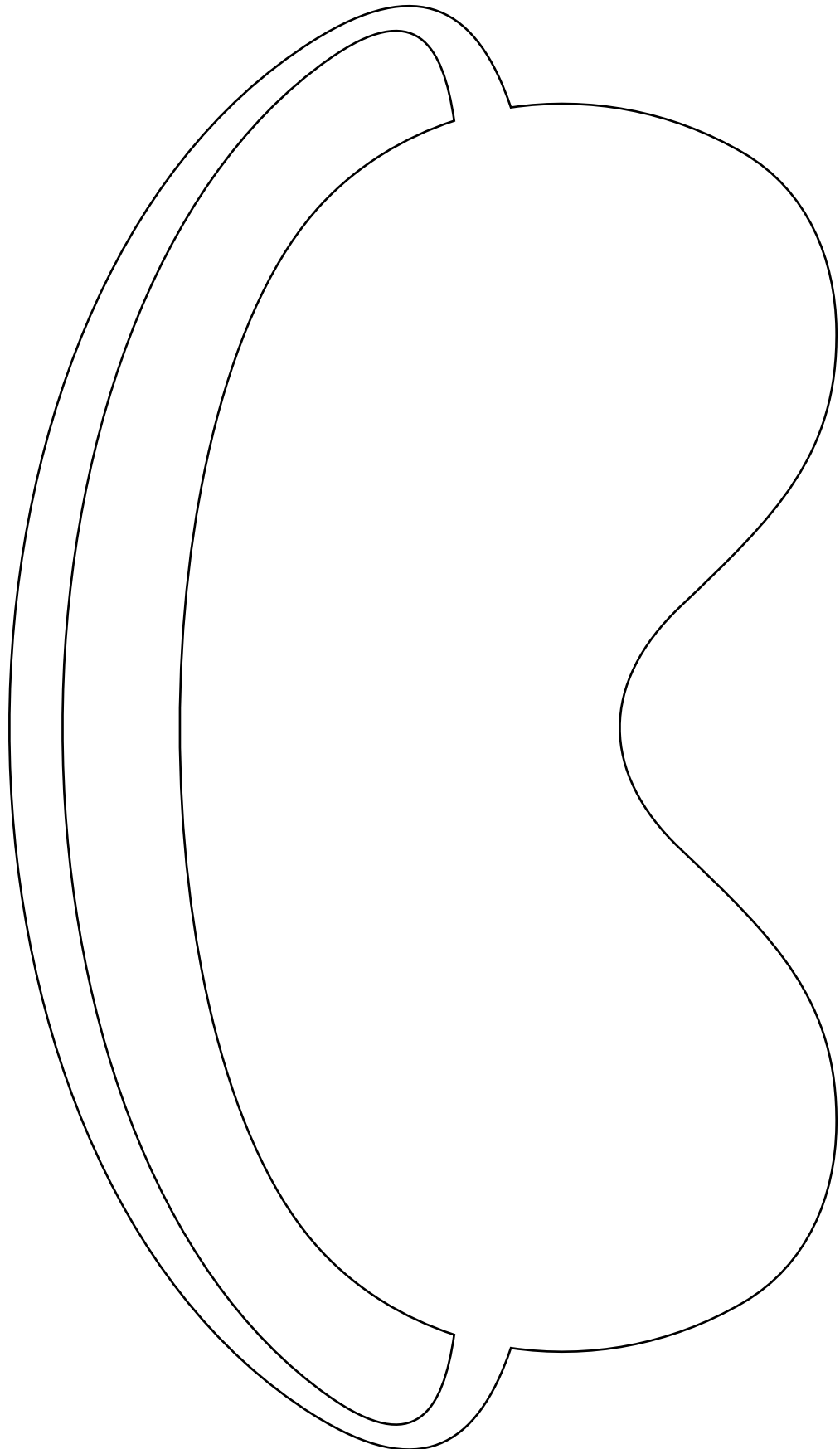
Grow with more.

Practicing 20/20 Jesus Vision

- 🌱 Tell the children that sometimes it's easy to see Jesus in other people. However, sometimes it's not. When we can easily see Jesus in others, it becomes easier to serve Jesus too. Invite the children to think about each of the situations you will describe. Explain that if they think the

child is seeing Jesus and serving others, go to the right side of the room; if not, go to the left. Tell them to stay in the middle if they are unsure or think it's in between. (Note: Some situations are intentionally ambiguous in order to prompt discussion.) After each situation, check in with the children. Ask them why they chose to stand where they did. If they think the child wasn't seeing Jesus and serving appropriately, ask them how they would change the story.

- José is having a great time on a picnic in the park with his family. However, he sees another family huddled together and staring intently at José's food. He asks if they are hungry. When they say yes, he offers to share his picnic with them.
- Addison has just moved to a new town. She's had to start at her new school in the middle of the year. Grace's mother remembers when she had to move schools as a child. It was hard! She suggests that Grace invite Addison to her birthday party. Grace refuses.
- James had just gotten home from soccer practice when the doorbell rang. It was Kenan, the little boy from next door. James knows he doesn't get a lot of attention. Kenan wants to play, but James is so tired and has homework to do. "Sorry, buddy," he says, "maybe tomorrow."
- Jayden's grandmother lives in a nursing home. It's kind of scary and smells funny. Jayden doesn't like going there, but she loves her grandmother, so she goes anyway. This time she decides to color pictures for everyone on her grandma's hall, and she delivers them in person with a shy smile.



Connecting

A Passover Meal Luke 22:1-20

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible, p. 272

✱ **Goal:** To deepen our understanding of both Jesus' celebration of Passover and our celebration of communion.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

The story of Jesus' last meal with his disciples is told in all four Gospels. Matthew's and Luke's account are most similar in recalling the story of Jesus telling his disciples to prepare for the Passover meal. This meal was and still is shared during Passover in the spring and reminds Jews of the story of their escape from slavery in Egypt into freedom in the promised land. Jesus asked his friends, Peter and John, to help make the arrangements for this special meal, one he knew might be his last with them.

Pause for a minute and recall all the meals Jesus shared with people. With whom did he eat and where? Then notice what's going on in this last meal with his friends. There are a few more things to notice in Luke's narrative. All the disciples are there. Even Judas, the one who betrays him, is there at the table. Then Jesus breaks bread and gives it to the disciples. He pours wine from the cup, gives it to them, and tells them it is a new covenant. Jesus asks them to remember him whenever they eat this meal. The disciples around the table would, of course, remember covenant language, of loving God with heart, soul, and all their strength. In talking about a new covenant, Jesus is recalling Jeremiah 31:31-34, about a new covenant God will make with God's people, one that will be written on their hearts. Today we, and Christians around the world and through the ages, celebrate this same meal, remembering God's covenant every time we eat the bread and drink from the cup.

For background on this text, go to bit.ly/Luke22 [Commentary](#).

Connecting with the World

- ✱ In what ways does sitting down at table with friends, neighbors, or family connect you to God's covenant?
- ✱ What do you know about the Passover meal? Have you ever been invited to a Seder celebrated in the home of a Jewish friend? In what ways is the Passover Seder similar to and in what ways was it different than our celebration of communion?

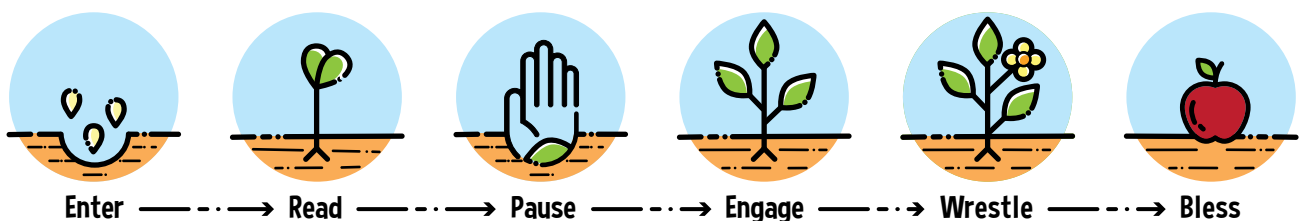
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

It is important to help children connect this story of Jesus' meal with the disciples to the fact that we still celebrate this meal today via communion in worship. Listen for their questions about this story. They will be able to understand that, just as Jewish people tell the story of their escape from Egypt at the Passover meal, so Christians remember Jesus and how he wants us to live in the world. Whenever we eat this meal at church, we remember Jesus and we celebrate how he is still alive in our hearts.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Reflect on your experiences of sharing in communion (also called Eucharist or the Lord's Supper) at church. For some it's about memory, remembering this last supper Jesus had with his disciples. Memory is also connected with memorial. Some grow up thinking of communion in this way: a memorial meal before Jesus died. Others grow up knowing another aspect of this meal as a celebration. Every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup, it's a joyful reminder of Jesus' life and the gift he gives us: showing us a new way to live. Memory and celebration are both appropriate ways to participate in this life-giving sacrament.

God of life, thank you for sending Jesus, whose life-giving love shows us a new way to live. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs
- ✓ Purple cloth
- ✓ 5 battery-operated candles
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Painting supplies, such as watercolor paints, tempera paints, paintbrushes, and smocks
- ✓ Mural paper
- ✓ Pastor, elder, or member of the worship committee
- ✓ Cup or chalice and plate
- ✓ Bread
- ✓ Grape juice
- ✓ Cups
- ✓ Resource Page 1
- ✓ Matzo crackers

Preparing to Lead

Read Luke 22:1–20. Then read “A Passover Meal” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 272).

When discussing Passover, be sensitive to the fact that you are learning about another community's holy day. As you sample the matzo and explore the other symbolic foods, be clear that you are not staging a celebration of Passover, and make sure to create a sense of respect for these ancient traditions.

Think about the children you will teach. What has been their experience of communion? Does your tradition fully include children in communion, or is it reserved for mature and/or baptized members? Your discussion of communion will likely vary depending on these questions. Also be sensitive to children who are new to the community and may not be familiar with this ritual.

Pray for your group and your time together. Enjoy this multisensory session!

Invite a pastor, elder, or member of your worship committee to talk with the children about communion. Ask them to bring a cup or chalice and plate that your congregation uses for communion, or something like them if these items are in use during your session. Obtain bread and grape juice so that the children may taste the elements as they are talked

about. Check on any food allergies and provide alternatives as necessary.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a purple cloth on the floor with five candles. Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on two candles. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God of holy days and holidays, /
boring days and blah days, /
because you are with us, /
today is special, /
and we are blessed. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story of Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples.

Explain the significance of the candles. Suggest that you are learning about the last things Jesus did and said before he died. Tell them that in each session you've been lighting one less candle as you get closer to learning about the end of Jesus' life on earth.



Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to the story. Encourage them to listen for words and phrases that they may hear in your worship services. Read “A Passover Meal” (p. 272).



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to use their curiosity and imagination as they ponder this story silently. Suggest that they consider what Jesus said and did in this story. Point out the drawing supplies and note that they may sit and quietly illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Engage the children's curiosity in the story. Have a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✦ How did the disciples find a place for their Passover meal?
- ✦ What did they eat?
- ✦ Why did Jesus say that it might be a long time before he ate with the disciples again?
- ✦ What was different about this Passover meal from the ones the disciples were used to?
- ✦ Why was celebrating Passover so important to Jesus and his friends?
- ✦ What happens to Jesus after this story?
- ✦ Why do you think Jesus says, "This bread is like my body"?
- ✦ How do you think Jesus felt during this meal? How did his disciples feel?

Choose one or both options:

Creating Last Supper Art

- ✦ Tell the children that the scene of Jesus sharing Passover with his disciples has been a favorite of artists for centuries. Invite the children to look at the illustration from the story (p. 273). Ask them what stands out to them about it.
- ✦ Perform an internet search for "last supper images." Have the children explore the various images and discuss them together.
 - How are they alike? How are they different?
 - What do you like or dislike about them?
 - What do you notice about each one?
- ✦ Distribute painting supplies. Encourage each child to create their own work of art depicting this scene.

Encourage teamwork by creating a group mural of the Last Supper on a long sheet of mural paper.

The Seder Meal

- ✦ As our story tells us, a significant part of the Passover celebration included—and still includes—a special meal. This meal is called the "Seder," and, in addition to other holiday foods, it includes specific foods that help participants remember and tell the story of the Hebrews' escape from Egypt.

- ✦ Display Resource Page 1. Using this as a guide, explain the various symbolic Passover foods and their meanings.
- ✦ Offer each child a piece of matzo (unleavened bread) to try. Remind them that at the very first Passover, the Hebrew people had to eat and leave quickly, so their bread didn't have time to rise. The flat matzo bread reminds us of their big hurry to escape.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Help the children think about the meaning of the story and its impact on their lives. Wonder together:

- ✦ Why did Jesus want his friends to remember him?
- ✦ What does it mean for us to remember Jesus?
- ✦ Why do we celebrate communion?
- ✦ How does communion help us remember Jesus? How does it help us celebrate Jesus?

Choose one or more options:

Learning about Communion

- ✦ Jesus' words and actions at the Passover meal are the basis of our practice of communion. Help children make this link by introducing a pastor, elder, or member of your worship committee who has come to talk with the group about communion. Invite your guest to talk about the cup and plate as well as the bread and juice. Encourage them to talk about the role of remembrance and celebration in communion. Allow the children an opportunity to taste and see that the Lord is good through the gifts of bread and juice. Hand out pieces of bread and cups of juice so that the children may have the sensory experience that communion also provides—a small taste of the grains and fruit of the earth.

Form two groups, one with older children and one with younger children. While one group talks with your guest, have the other tell holiday stories (see below), and then switch. Doing so will allow your guest to tailor their explanation of the practice of communion to the age of each group of children.

Leading

○ Telling Holiday Stories

- 🌿 Invite the children to tell about how their families celebrate different holidays. Use the following questions to prompt conversation:
 - How do you celebrate holidays in your family?
 - What are your favorite holidays to celebrate with your family? What makes them your favorite?
 - Do you have special meals or rituals? Do you give gifts?
 - How would you describe your favorite holiday to someone else who knew nothing about it or how it's celebrated?

If you have a group with several talkative children and a few quiet or shy ones, consider using a talking stick or ball. Tell the children that they may talk when they are holding the stick or ball and then pass it to another person, inviting them to share a story and making sure everyone gets a turn.

○ Sharing Art

- 🌿 Invite the children to share any art they made during the session.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Tell the children that our memories are like little gifts we can take with us after we leave a person or place. Ask them what memories they will have of your time together today. Have each child name what they will most remember from today's session.

Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Jesus, /
when we eat with friends /
and tell our stories, /
we remember you /
and are grateful. /
Amen. /

Encourage the children to share their special memory from today with their families.



Grow with more.

○ Remembering the Exodus

- 🌿 When Jesus met with his disciples to share a meal, they were celebrating the Passover holiday that originated from the Jewish people's experiences during the exodus. Read two stories from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* to remember this history. Start with "Terrible, Awful Things" (p. 92) and continue with "Walking on Dry Land" (p. 94). Talk with the children about how this part of history made all of the rest of the Old Testament possible.

○ Helping the Disciples Remember Jesus

- 🌿 The disciples didn't know that Jesus was going to die soon, but Jesus knew. Jesus told the disciples to remember him. It was so important to him that he said it twice. Later, after Jesus died, the disciples probably did sit around, remember, and tell stories about Jesus and their life with him.
- 🌿 Invite the children to pretend to be one of the disciples. Encourage them to think back over the stories about Jesus that they know. Wonder together:
 - Which ones stand out to you?
 - Which do you think the disciples most remembered?
 - Were there any days they probably wanted to forget?
- 🌿 Have the children each choose a story about Jesus that they want to remember. Invite them to decorate a scrapbook page to illustrate or describe that story. When everyone has completed their pages, assemble them together in a Jesus scrapbook.

PASSOVER SEDER PLATE

Beitzah: Egg, representing mourning (it's also eaten as a part of shiva, the grief ritual), rebirth, and the circle of life.

Maror: Horseradish or other bitter herbs, which also represent the bitterness of life in slavery in Egypt.

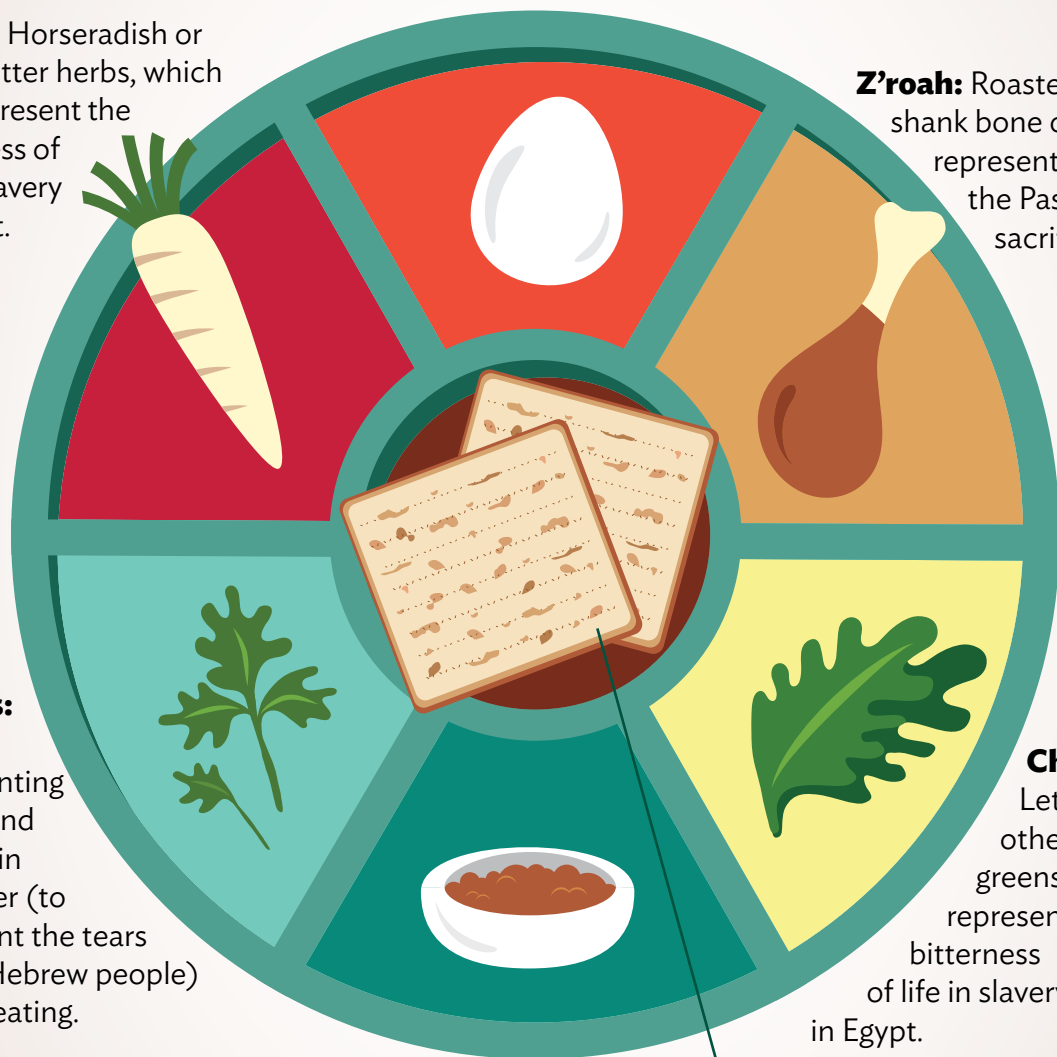
Z'roah: Roasted shank bone of meat, representing the Passover sacrifice.

Karpas: Parsley, representing spring and dipped in saltwater (to represent the tears of the Hebrew people) before eating.

Chazaret: Lettuces or other bitter greens that represent the bitterness of life in slavery in Egypt.

Charoset: A sweet and sticky fruit and nut mixture that symbolizes the mortar used by the Hebrews.

Matzo: An unleavened bread that reminds us how quickly the Hebrews had to leave Egypt.



🌱 **Goal:** To connect the story of Jesus' death to our experiences of grief.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

This chapter in Luke describes the familiar yet difficult story of Jesus' appearance before Pilate and then Herod. They could find no reason for sentencing Jesus to death because of the charges his enemies were bringing. Pilate offered an option to the crowd, to release Jesus or Barabbas, and you know what they chose. The rest of the chapter describes Jesus' death. As you read the text, notice the way Luke describes the people who were there, the crowds, the women. People who had been with him from the beginning were with him at the end.

Now consider this story as you think about teaching it to children. Rev. Juli Wilson-Black has some helpful reminders. She says it's best to use concrete language when talking about the cross —remind children that the person responsible for Jesus' death was Pilate, the Roman governor who was in charge. Some talking points may be: Some of the leaders were afraid of Jesus' power. They were jealous of the growing crowds who gathered to hear his teaching, and they were angry. They took their anger out on Jesus. No, it wasn't fair or right. But remember the good news that we know: Jesus' death is not the end of the story. In the end, God's love wins.

For background reading, go to bit.ly/Luke23Commentary.

🌱 Read about the Equal Justice Initiative. It is an organization committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. Go to www.eji.org to learn more.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Remember that our life of faith grows slowly over time as we age. The specific and concrete questions of young children give way to their ability to think more abstractly. They may or may not be curious about specific details of Jesus' death. In the sadness of this story, help them remember the good news of God's love. God sent Jesus to show us how to live. Our lives are a living witness to what we believe. That is a journey we make all the days of our lives.

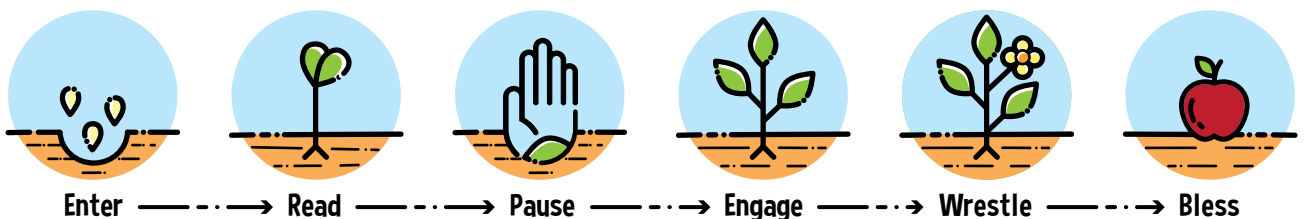
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

You may come to this story with your own questions: things of which you are most sure, things of which you are least sure; things you believed at one time about why Jesus had to die, and things you believe now. Questions and wrestling with text and beliefs is so important to our continuing growth as spiritual beings. Spend some time this week sitting with this story and what you believe.

Connecting with the World

🌱 What do you know about people today who are in prison and who have been unjustly accused of crimes they did not do? Check out the Innocence Project at www.innocenceproject.org.

God of life and hope, as we see the face of evil in the world today, help us also to see the places where your love, your mercy, and your justice are bringing hope and new life. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs
- ✓ Purple cloth
- ✓ 5 battery-operated candles
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2
- ✓ Bibles

Preparing to Lead

Read Luke 23:1–49. Then read “Jesus Dies” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 274). Jesus’ crucifixion isn’t an easy story for adults, let alone children. In fact, we usually gloss right over this story when teaching children about Easter. But it is important not to cheapen and confuse Easter. Without Jesus’ death, his resurrection doesn’t make any sense. It’s important to give children the whole story.

Before engaging children in this story, think for a moment about your own grief journeys. Are you actively grieving the loss of someone dear to you? If so, what do you need to do to take care of yourself in preparation for teaching? Could you share a bit of your story with a coleader in case a wave of grief hits you while you are leading? Be aware of your own experiences and feelings, but do not hide them from the children. Acknowledging your own sadness and sorrow helps children know that these emotions are valid when they feel them too.

Even if you aren’t experiencing a deep grief now or haven’t ever lost someone very close to you, you’ve likely had some experience of grief. We grieve all kinds of losses—friends, jobs, pets, relationships, identities, and so forth. The objects of grief are as many and varied as the objects of our love. Take a moment to inventory your major losses. Allow God to enter into your hurt. Breathe in God, and breathe out hurt.

Think about the children you will teach. Has anyone suffered a significant loss recently? If so, provide extra attention and care to this child. Let them know that if they need to share, you are there to listen, and

offer to sit close to them if they get sad. Remember that children’s worlds are often smaller than adults’, and what might seem like a minor loss to an adult can be a traumatic loss to a child.

Pray for your group and your time together. While this may be a heavier session than some, it is every bit as important, and God remains every bit as close.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, or beanbag chairs in a circle. Place a purple cloth on the floor with five candles. Invite the children to gather in the seating area.

Turn on one candle. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God of smiles /
and God of sadness, /
stay with us now /
and every day, /
in every way. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story of Jesus’ trial and death.

Explain the significance of the candles. Suggest that you are learning about the last things Jesus did and said before he died. Tell them that today just one candle will be lit, and we will extinguish it as part of our story time.



Read a story of God’s people.

Invite the children to listen to the story. Remind them that even though Jesus dies in today’s story, he doesn’t stay dead and will come alive again on Easter.

Read “Jesus Dies” (p. 274). When you finish the story, pause and turn off the candle before continuing.

Leading



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Encourage the children to use their curiosity and imagination as they ponder this story silently. Suggest that they consider who is in this story. Point out the drawing supplies and note that they may sit and quietly illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story. Remind them that if they are sad or scared by the story, they can hold someone's hand or ask an adult for help.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Engage the children's curiosity in the story. Have a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✎ When was Jesus arrested? How?
- ✎ Why do you think the temple leaders didn't like Jesus?
- ✎ How did the crowd seem to feel toward Jesus?
- ✎ How did Jesus answer the questions the judges asked? Why do you think he did this?
- ✎ Who do you think the crowd should have let go free?
- ✎ What do you think Pilate wanted to do?
- ✎ How do you think Jesus felt? How did his disciples feel?
- ✎ Why did the sky go dark when Jesus died?
- ✎ Why do you think some of the women who followed him stayed close to him, even as he was dying?

If your group is relatively young, be extra sure to emphasize that the story does not end with Jesus' death, even though that is as far as you will read today. Jesus doesn't stay dead. Reassure them that God is so powerful that God makes Jesus alive again.

Choose one or both options:

- Listening to Music
 - ✎ Tell the children that African American spirituals evolved as an expression of faith in the midst of great suffering. Enslaved people took great comfort in knowing that Jesus suffered much like they did, because it meant that God knew what it was like to be treated terribly. Explain that

over the years, this connection between faith and suffering came to be expressed in song. Suggest that these songs can help us express our deep sadness and reach out to God as we hurt.

- ✎ Play one of the songs listed below. Invite the children to listen to the words and think about how the music makes them feel. Suggest that they may close their eyes if they wish. After the song has finished, ask the children what the words in the song talk about and how they felt when they heard that song.

- YouTube video "Odetta—Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child" (bit.ly/MotherlessChildSong, 3:22).
- YouTube video "Three Mo' Tenors—Were You There—7/17/2001 (Official)" (bit.ly/WereYouThereThreeMoTenors, 4:42).

- "That's Not Fair!"

- ✎ Talk together about the fact that Jesus didn't deserve to be arrested and killed. He hadn't broken the laws they said he had. The religious leaders had him arrested because they were afraid of him and how many people were following him. It wasn't fair that Jesus was arrested and killed.
- ✎ Then invite the children to think about a time they or someone they know got in trouble for something that wasn't fair. With a partner, come up with a skit and act it out for the rest of the group. After the skits, wonder together how it felt to be blamed for something you didn't do. Ask the children how the people in the skits handled the situations they presented.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Help the children think about the meaning of the story and its impact on their lives. Wonder together:

- ✎ Why did Jesus die?
- ✎ How does it feel to you when somebody you love dies?
- ✎ Who used to be in your life but isn't anymore?
- ✎ How do you adjust?

Pay particular attention to the children as you work through these questions and this section. You may hit on some very sensitive spots. Make sure each child who wants to speak has a chance to be heard. As in every lesson, but even more so today, it's more important that the learning community remain safe and welcoming than that all the activities are completed.

Choose one or both options:

Remembering Loved Ones

- Invite the children to tell stories about some of their favorite people or a pet they have loved and lost. To help get the children's thoughts and stories going, have them fill in Resource Page 1 with information and pictures of someone or something they miss.
- Some questions you may wish to ask:
 - Why were they meaningful to you?
 - What did they teach you?
 - When do you miss them most?

Sharing Art

- Invite the children to share any art they made during the session.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Teach the children the priestly blessing from Numbers 6 (found on Resource Page 2) by having them repeat each line after you. Hand out copies of Resource Page 2 and invite the children to decorate it and take it home to remember this blessing.

The LORD bless you and protect you. /
 The LORD make his face shine on you /
 and be gracious to you. /
 The LORD lift up his face to you /
 and grant you peace. /
 —Numbers 6:24–26 (CEB)

Close with the following prayer. Invite an older child to lead the prayer and instruct the rest of the group to respond, "You are with us."

Dear God, when we are happy,
you are with us.
 When we are sad,

you are with us.

When we are scared,

you are with us.

When we are alone,

you are with us.

Wherever we go and however we feel,

you are with us.

Amen.

Encourage each child to share stories about the people they miss with their family.



Grow with more.

Investigating the Scriptures

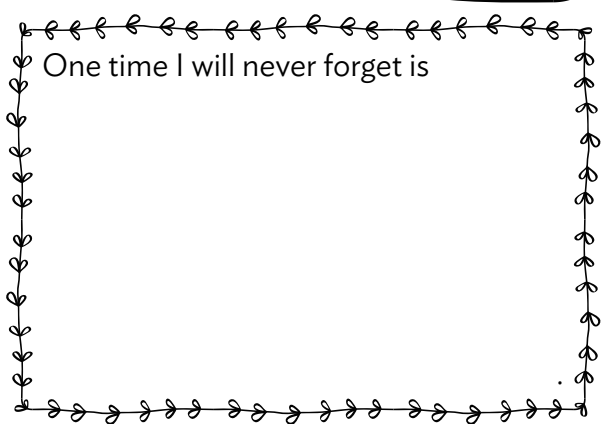
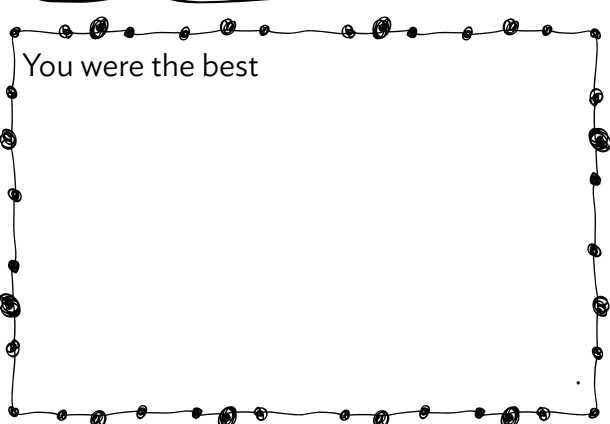
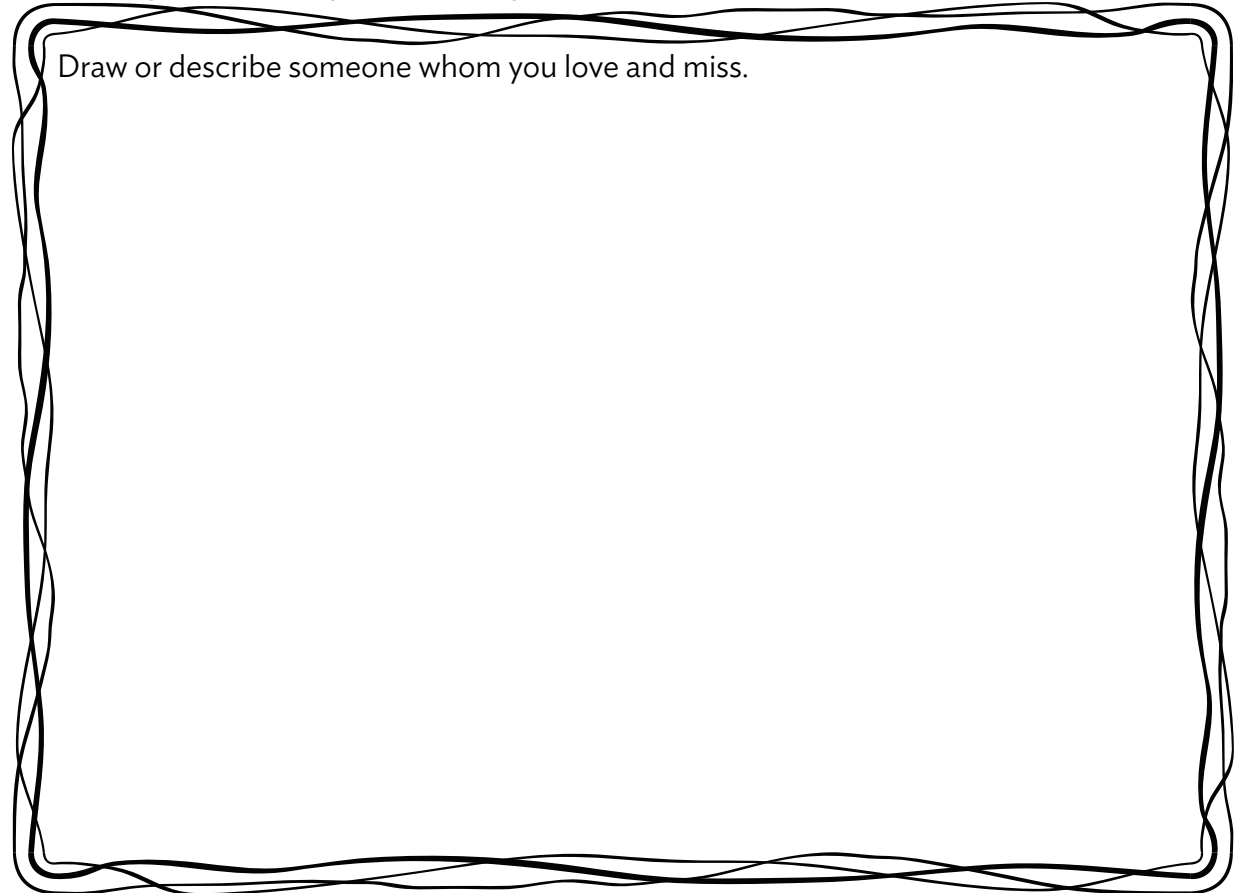
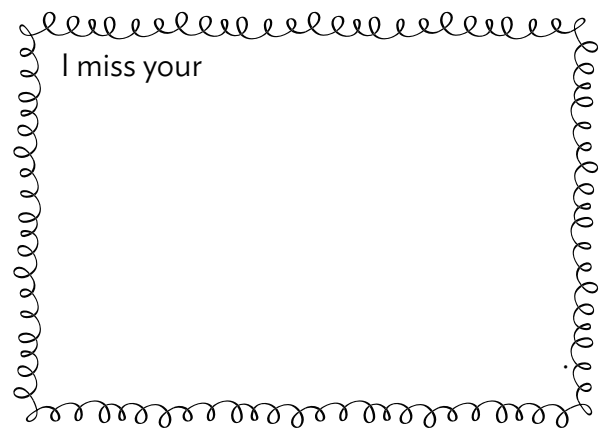
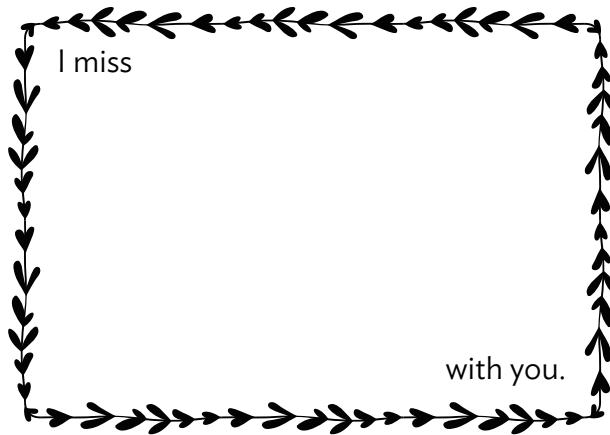
- Tell the children that much of what happened after Jesus' arrest was spoken by the prophets or was part of the Hebrew writings and tradition. Explain that these writings are a part of our Old Testament in the Bible. Hand out Bibles and have the children look up two of the Scriptures that relate to Jesus' death, summarize them, and connect them to events in "Jesus Dies."
 - Isaiah 53 describes the "suffering servant," who sounds a lot like Jesus on the cross.
 - Jesus quotes Psalm 22 when he is dying, and much of the psalm describes the scene of his death.

If your group is predominantly made up of older children, investigating the Scriptures will give them some experience looking up passages and making connections in the Bible. If your group is younger or mixed in age, have the younger children make cards.

Making Cards

- Invite the children to make cards or write notes for church members who are grieving (or are "very sad"). Brainstorm together what might be some helpful phrases or pictures to put on the cards. Provide paper and drawing supplies. Encourage the children to give their cards to someone they know who might need comfort or pass them on to a pastor or member of your care committee to distribute.

Jesus Dies
Resource Page 1



The LORD bless you
and protect you.

The LORD make
his face shine on you and
be gracious to you.

The LORD lift up
his face to you and grant
you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26 (CEB)

A Story Bible Curriculum features

- sessions based on 148 stories from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- 35 units in 3, 4, or 5 sessions that cover large biblical stories, key people in the Bible, or biblical themes
- intergenerational activities for use at church or home
- unit overview that explains how these stories connect with one another and our faith
- helps for leaders to connect the biblical story with our world and the spiritual lives of children and adults
- a free downloadable at-home kit guide with instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation

multiage
relational
exploratory
compassionate
imaginative
stillness seeking
wonder filled
curiosity driven
collaborative
community oriented
fun
intergenerational
growth encouraging

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum