

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Jesus Teaches



Growing in God's Love

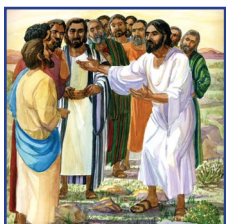
A Story Bible Curriculum

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Jesus Teaches

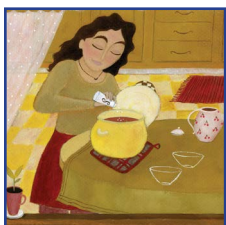
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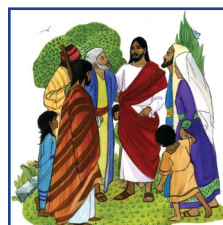
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on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

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🌱 **Goal:** To learn how to transform our own worries into trust in God and love of neighbor.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Toward the end of this sermon, Jesus shifts his focus to what his followers need to understand. Today's text, Jesus' lesson on worrying, takes some work to unpack. For some, both then and now, having food, drink, and clothing is a source of great concern, so not to worry about them or think about them is a hard word to hear. For others, for whom these basic necessities of life are in abundance, Jesus questions how their worrying obstructs their relationship with God. Consider how Eugene Peterson paraphrases verses 31–34: "What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way [God] works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how [God] works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes" (*The Message*).

For additional commentary on this text, visit bit.ly/GLMatthew6.

Connecting with the World

The following books focus on worry through stories children can understand. For more information about the first three books listed below, visit picturebooktheology.com.

- 🌱 *Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya* by Mary and Rich Chamberlin (Barefoot Books, 2006)
- 🌱 *What Do You Do with a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada (Compendium Inc., 2016)

- 🌱 *Maddi's Fridge* by Lois Brandt (Flashlight Press, 2014)
- 🌱 *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, 2010)

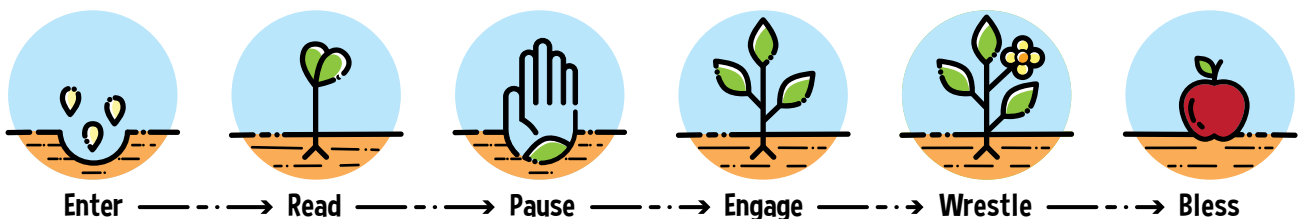
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Be aware of children in your group who seem to be especially anxious or even sensitive. Some children may have experienced trauma or have a processing or anxiety disorder, which can mean they worry about a lot of things. Other children may be just born worriers. Children are helped when they experience an evening spiritual practice of closing down their day with reading a story like "Don't Worry." Then they can talk about anything that happened during the day that caused them to worry. Questions like, "What do you need to help you go to sleep tonight?" or "What do you want to remember about the day?" can draw worries out so that they can be set aside for the night. Offer a blessing or prayer for God to hold the children close. When children experience nightly spiritual practices like this, they grow up knowing they are not alone.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

What is on your worry list? Health, children, direction/focus, job, school, finances, family, questions of doubt or faith? How do you handle these worries? Pause and think about your list. Consider Karl Jacobson's assessment: "Worry can separate us from our God and choke out our generosity" (bit.ly/GLMatthew6). In what ways do the things you worry about separate you from God? How do these worries get in the way of your generosity?

God, help me to turn my worries over to you each day. Restore my soul. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Small table or blanket and cushions
- ✓ Cross, stand-up figure of Jesus, or Christ candle
- ✓ Mural with Jesus on the mountainside from the first three sessions
- ✓ Speech bubble cut from Resource Page 1
- ✓ Drawing supplies
- ✓ Play dough
- ✓ Small magnifying glasses
- ✓ *Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya* by Mary and Rich Chamberlin (Barefoot Books, 2006), *What Do You Do with a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada (Compendium Inc., 2016), *Maddi's Fridge* by Lois Brandt (Flashlight Press, 2014), *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, 2010), or internet-connected device
- ✓ Feathers
- ✓ Flowers
- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Garden magazines
- ✓ Internet-connected device

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, Matthew 6:25–34. As you read, make a note of any questions that you might have about the story. Is this a familiar passage for you? Then read the story “Don’t Worry” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 342). What aspects of the biblical account does the story emphasize? How are the two versions of the story alike and different?

All of us, including children, worry at some time or another. As you prepare for this session, think about those times in your own life when worries loomed large. Consider how your faith may have gotten you beyond these worries. Think about how children might hear this story. What might stand out to them? Children are inherently drawn to the natural world, and this story may be particularly accessible to them given the concrete examples Jesus gives in birds and flowers. Enjoy sharing it with the children!

Set out the mural with Jesus on the mountainside from the first three sessions to connect the four sessions regarding Jesus’ teachings. As children arrive early in each session, invite them to color the picture and add people and details to the mountainside.

Set up a gathering place with a small table or space on the floor with a blanket and cushions. Place a representation of Jesus in the middle of the space, such as a cross, a stand-up figure of Jesus, or a Christ candle representing Jesus’ presence, as the teachings of Jesus are explored. Take a moment to pray for each of the children by name. Thank God for the opportunity to learn and grow alongside them.

Depending on your choices for activities below, you may need to prepare some of your materials. Set out play dough in your gathering area. If you’re going to meet outside, find a good place for the children to gather and perhaps place some feathers, flowers, and leaves for them to find, if they are not in abundance naturally. If you are meeting inside, gather some bits of nature for the children to study in your gathering space.

While the key message in this story is to focus on God and trust that God will take care of you, some of the children in your group may have very real and legitimate worries about whether they will have food to eat and clothes to wear. Be careful not to minimize or dismiss these worries (or any others the children articulate) and give pat answers. Instead, try to bring the focus back to the ways in which God is always with us, even in the midst of our worries.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, invite them to color the picture on the mountainside mural you have prepared. When all are present, encourage them to make their favorite foods or clothing out of the play dough. Invite the children into conversation about their worries, asking what they worry about and what they do when they are feeling worried.

Leading

Open with prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Dear God, /
sometimes our worries get big, /
and you feel far away. /
Stay close to us today /
and help us listen /
to your calm voice. /
Amen. /



Read a story of God's people.

Tell the children that Jesus taught his disciples and many followers. Many of his teachings were remembered and written down by the Gospel writers. Explain that Matthew's Gospel has a collection of Jesus' teachings that are called Jesus' sermon on the mountainside. Today's part of the sermon is about Jesus teaching his disciples about how worrying is not very helpful. Wonder together about why Jesus chose to talk about worrying.

Read the story "Don't Worry" from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 342).

If your weather and location permit, consider taking the group outside to read this story. If you do so, pause after reading about the birds to listen for birds that may be singing around you.



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

Give the children a moment to pause and reflect on the story they just heard. Invite the children to sit quietly and listen to creation (if you are outside) or to focus on their senses (if you are inside). Quietly ask, "What do you hear? What do you see? What do you smell?" Allow several minutes of silence.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Draw the children's attention to the mural with Jesus on the mountainside and tell the children that in this session they will have the opportunity to add people and details to the mural as well as a speech bubble with a key phrase of Jesus' teaching. Provide a speech

bubble cut from Resource Page 1 and invite a child to attach it to the mural.

Engage the children in conversation using the Hear, See, and Act questions for "Don't Worry" (p. 342).

Exploring Nature

- Hand out magnifying glasses to each child and invite them to look closely at the feathers, flowers, and leaves.
- If you are outside, invite the children to find something they think is beautiful. Wonder together about each child's selected piece of nature and why this piece of nature was clothed in this color. Imagine together other animals and plants you think are beautiful. Close this time with a prayer thanking God for the diversity found in God's creation and for how God cares for it all.
- If you are inside, lay out the garden magazines and collage materials. Encourage the children to select and cut out images they think are beautiful and create a collage out of them. Wonder together as described above and say a prayer for the beauty of everything represented in the collages.

If you have a smaller group, you may want to work together on one large collage.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Worry Stories

- Feelings of worry and anxiety can be difficult for children to identify and articulate. The children's books highlighted in "Connecting with the World" all focus on a different aspect of worry. Immersing themselves in these stories can help children identify and sort out these big, abstract feelings of worry.
- Choose one or more books to read aloud or show the YouTube video.
 - Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya* by Mary and Rich Chamberlin or "Family/Read Aloud Mama Panya's Pancakes—Kenyan Tale about Community/ Sharing" (bit.ly/GLMamaPanyasPancakes, 12:40): This book, reminiscent of the classic *Stone Soup*, is set in Kenya as a mother

prepares to make pancakes with very little money. It also teaches some words in Kiswahili along the way.

- *What Do You Do with a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada or “What Do You Do with a Problem” (bit.ly/GLProblemKobiYamada, 3:41): A young boy worries about a problem that gets bigger and bigger, until he faces it and something surprising happens.
 - *Maddi’s Fridge* by Lois Brandt or “Maddi’s Fridge” (bit.ly/GLMaddiesFridge, 13:37): Maddi and Sofia are friends with different gifts. Maddi’s refrigerator is quite empty, and Sofia must decide what to do about this situation.
There are some suggestions at the end for how children can help with the problem of food insecurity.
 - *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes or “Wemberly Worried by Kevin Henkes (Animated Book Read Aloud)” (bit.ly/GLWemberlyWorried, 5:04): Wemberly is a young girl mouse who worries about everything, including going to school for the first time.
- ✎ Discuss with the children what they might do to help themselves or someone else when they are worried. Jesus’ solution was to center our lives on God rather than our worries. Brainstorm together about how you might do this. Ask:
- What do you think Jesus would want us to spend our time thinking about instead of worrying?
 - What actions can we take to reduce worry for ourselves and others?
 - How do God’s promises to take care of us make you feel? How can we remember them when we worry?



Bless one another with God’s grace.

As the session concludes, gather the group in a circle. Turn to a child next to you and say, “God bless (*Name*), whom God loves and will take care of.” Move around the circle, sharing this blessing with each child individually. Close with prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God of flowers and birds /
and sunshine and thunderstorms, /
when we spin with worries, /
slow us down /
and help us to listen for you. /
Amen. /



Grow with more.

- Drawing the Story
 - ✎ Show the YouTube video “Do Not Worry” (bit.ly/GLDoNotWorry, 2:29), which features quickdraw illustrations of the various parts of the story.
 - ✎ Invite the children to select their favorite part of the story to illustrate. Watch which parts of the story the children choose, and make quick sketches of any scenes not covered.
 - ✎ Lay out the drawings in story order, and encourage the children to tell the story together using the pictures. It’s OK if you have multiple illustrations of the same scene—each one will be unique!
 - ✎ Note how different people connected with different parts of the story and have a conversation about why each person chose the part of the story that they did.



Don't worry!