

READ★PRAY★WONDER★PLAY

A GUIDE TO SHARING STORIES WITH CHILDREN

The Good for Nothing Tree

By Amy-Jill Levine, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, & Annie Bowler

The parable Jesus told in Luke 13:6-9 is often called the parable of the barren or unfruitful fig tree, emphasizing the lack of produce or failure to thrive. While the landowner saw no use for the undeveloped tree and was ready to have it cut down, the gardener asked for patience to help it grow. *The Good for Nothing Tree* is a retelling of this story, imagining children as the ones who have hope and tend to the tree.

Before you read the story together, wonder about the title of the book. What might it mean to be “good for nothing”? Is anything ever good for nothing? The authors explain that a parable places something side by side, in this case the story Jesus told and our own lives. Look at the question posed on the back cover of the book. What might this parable be placing side by side in our own lives?



★ ★ WONDER TOGETHER ★ ★

- Who might you be in this story? The gardener, the naysayers, one of the children, the tree? When might you be different characters in different situations?
- What did the children do to love the tree?
- What were some of the critical things people said about the tree and how do you think it felt to hear those things?
- When have you had to wait or care for something to make something happen? How did that feel?
- When have you felt like the tree, waiting to grow? If the figs are the gift the tree produces, what gifts do you think are growing in you?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?

★ ★ EXPLORE THE STORY ★ ★

- At the end of the book there is a recipe for Fig Balls. Try making them. If figs are not available, use apples: peel them, remove the core, and then cut them into tiny pieces.
- Plant seeds, tend to them, and watch them grow. Some edible suggestions are radishes, green beans, herbs, or strawberries. These can be grown indoors or outdoors. While the plant is growing, make observations and talk together about what is happening and how it feels to wait.
- Make a growth chart together and mark how your child grows. This may be height or handprints. As you mark growth, write or draw pictures of the new things your child is doing in the time between marks.

PRAY

Loving God, thank you for loving us and never seeing us as unworthy of your love and care. Thank you for knowing that we each grow in our own time and have gifts to offer, sweet and wonderful like the fig tree. Let us nurture the gifts of others. Amen.



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The gardener was ready to get rid of the tree that wasn't growing but the children said it needed to be loved. Consider the following questions:

- How does loving something change it? What are some examples?
- What are the different ways plants, people, or animals are loved? (You can do some internet research about talking or singing to plants.)
- How might the earth be loved? (You can do some internet research about earth care ideas for children.)

What gifts do you want to nurture in your child? To nurture. . .

- Empathy—Model empathy in everyday interactions, encourage emotional expression and validate those feelings, use stories and explore different perspectives, and encourage acts of kindness.
- Curiosity—Wonder aloud with your child, expose your child to different experiences and cultures, ask open-ended questions, and show acceptance and enthusiasm for your child's curiosity.
- Imagination—Read together, embrace all types of art, emphasize the creative process not the product, provide choices and encourage problem solving, and tell stories.
- Forgiveness—Model forgiving behavior, discuss feelings, use storytelling, and normalize imperfections and mistakes.
- Compassion—Act compassionately in your home and community, use words that you want to hear your child use, help your child see various perspectives of a situation to better understand others, and practice active listening.

With older children: Look at the "Note from the Authors" at the back of the book and read about parables. Consider how parables place two images side by side, from a story and our lives. In this parable, Jesus told a story about a fig tree that could be compared to how we nurture and care for one another. Write, draw, or act out a family parable together. Choose an object or image familiar to you and consider what story it might tell about your lives.

MORE TO READ & DO

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE

ADDITIONAL BOOKS BY AMY-JILL LEVINE AND SANDY EISENBERG SASSO

- [Who Is My Neighbor?](#)
- [100 Sheep: A Counting Parable](#)
- *Who Counts? 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, and 2 Sons* - Available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Korean](#)
- *The Marvelous Mustard Seed* - Available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Korean](#)
- [The Good For Nothing Tree](#)
- [A Very Big Problem](#)

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