

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Tell Me about God



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Unit Overview and Connecting pages written by Carol A. Wehrheim

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Connecting

What Is God's Name? Exodus 3:14; Psalm 23; Isaiah 30:23; 54:13

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible, p. 170

✦ **Goal:** To explore a multitude of names for God.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Three texts are the background for this story about how we think about names for God and how these names reveal God's relationship with humankind. God came to where Moses was. God met Moses at the burning bush. Thinking about how he would explain this theophany, Moses wanted to know God's name. And God told him in Exodus 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM" or "I will be who I will be." And we are left to conclude that God's name is revealed in the ways God acts with all creation. In Psalm 23, David uses shepherd imagery to name the ways God cares for him. The prophet Isaiah reminds God's people living under foreign rule that God can be known as provider, one who cares for humans and animals (Isa. 30:23). And in Isaiah 54:13 (CEB), God's promise of abiding peace reminds us of God's continuing presence then and now as peacemaker, the Holy One in our midst.

For additional reading about the Exodus text, go to bit.ly/GLExodus3CommentaryA and for more reading about Psalm 23, go to bit.ly/GLPsalm23Commentary.

Connecting with the World

- ✦ Read *In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Jewish Lights, 2004) or watch the YouTube video "Rev. Cathy Reads: In God's Name by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso" (bit.ly/GLInGodsName, 6:02). What new images of God do you hear?
- ✦ Read the words to Brian Wren's hymn "Bring Many Names" (*Glory to God* hymnal, #760, or bit.ly/GLBringManyNames) and/or "God of Many Names" (bit.ly/GLGodOfManyNames). Notice how God is described in these hymns. How do these images expand your understanding of God? What names might you call God?

God of many names, reveal yourself to me as I move through this week. Amen.

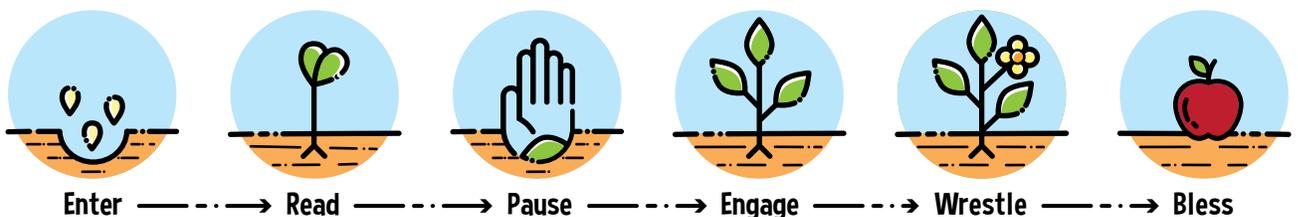
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Imagine what it would be like if children grew up hearing many names for God—like those in the illustration with this story. Think of other names you would add. When children grow up hearing many names for God, their spiritual lives are enriched. When they begin to imagine that God acts like a mother and a father with God's people, they begin to see God as not being gendered, either in name or in action.

When they hear a variety of biblical stories, they can think about a name for God that describes how God works as healer, shepherd, peacemaker, and liberator. In thinking about how names for God are revealed in God's actions, they can begin to see how we, too, can live like God, being a friend, a peacemaker, or a healer.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

This story is as important for our spiritual lives as it is for the lives of the children. Perhaps you grew up hearing only one name for God, *Father*. Maybe you yearn to hear more feminine names for God, like *Mother*. In her picture book *In God's Name*, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso helps children and adults think about how our names for God come out of our experiences in life: shepherd, healer, comforter, liberator, peacemaker, friend, father, and mother are a few that she shares. When we imagine the many ways God works in our lives and in the world, our names for God will continue to expand, revealing new understandings of who God is in relation to God's creation.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✦ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✦ Floor pillows, carpet squares, cushions, or blanket
- ✦ Battery-operated candle
- ✦ Art supplies
- ✦ *In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Jewish Lights, 2004)
- ✦ Internet-connected device
- ✦ Bibles
- ✦ Copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2
- ✦ Baby name book

Preparing to Lead

Take a few minutes to read the Old Testament passages on which this story is based: Exodus 3:14; Psalm 23; and Isaiah 30:23; 54:13. Pay special attention to the way God is addressed or described. Then read “What Is God’s Name?” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 170). Consider:

- ✦ Which of these names for God are familiar to you? Do you identify more with some than others? Which ones?
- ✦ What would these names have meant in the context of the stories of the Old Testament? How are they differently nuanced when we use them today?
- ✦ How might children experience these names for God in ways different from adults?

Today’s story highlights a key theme for this unit: God is too big to be fully understood by human minds. In this session and the other sessions of this unit, remember that you won’t be able to capture all aspects of God for the children. Sometimes the mystery of God can be frustrating for adults, who want to know things through and through. However, the enigmatic nature of God can be quite delightful for children, for whom strict definitions can be limiting. Try to set aside the need to know and let your imagination follow the children’s sense of wonder as you explore God’s names together.

Think about the children you will lead. What do you know about them? Recall their names and faces. Do you know of any children with special needs who may need particular arrangements? Are some children experiencing an especially hard time? Pray

for them and for yourself as their leader, that you all grow in your love and knowledge of God and one another.

Before the children arrive, arrange a comfortable seating area using floor pillows, carpet squares, cushions, or a blanket. Set the battery-operated candle in the center of the gathering area and turn it on.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, greet them by name and make them feel welcome. Invite them to join the circle. Draw attention to the candle and tell them that it is a way to remind us that God is with us as we are together. Show the children the art supplies and indicate that the children may use them throughout the session as they would like. When the children are settled, go around the circle, inviting each participant to share their name, even if you already know one another. Share that you will be talking about names today. Open with a prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Dear God, /
you know us through and through. /
We want to know you too. /
Be with us today /
and teach us, we pray. /
Amen. /



Read a story of God's people.

Turn to page 170 in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* and show the children the illustration for “What Is God’s Name?” Read the story aloud, pausing each time a question is asked so that children may respond. Then ask the “Hear” and “See” questions:

- ✦ Think about names for God you’ve heard at church. What names for God are sung in the songs and hymns? What names are spoken in prayers and Scripture?
- ✦ What name do you like to call God?

Leading



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

Invite the children into a time of quiet reflection. Encourage them to remember the story and the names they like to call God.

Invite the children to use the art supplies while they reflect. Sometimes children need to keep their hands busy in order to still their minds and spirits.

After a few moments have passed, tell the children that you are going to continue reflecting on God's names together.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Talk with the children about the purpose of a name. A name doesn't tell us everything about a person or animal, but it helps us talk about that person or animal. That's how it is with God's name too. God is too big and mysterious and unknown for one name to capture everything, but using different names can tell us some things about God. For example, by calling God *shepherd*, we remember that God will take care of us like a shepherd watches over and cares for their sheep. Wonder together about God's name using the questions below:

- ✎ What names for God are included in the story?
- ✎ What names do you use for God when you pray or think about God?
- ✎ What do these names tell us about God?
- ✎ What do they tell us about our relationship with God?
- ✎ What names would you add to the list from the story? Why?

Choose one or both options:

- Illustrating God's Name
 - ✎ Read *In God's Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso or show the YouTube video "Rev. Cathy Reads: In God's Name by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso" (bit.ly/GLInGodsName, 6:02). Invite the children to pick a name for God from this story, the Bible story, or one of their own choosing and illustrate that name using the art supplies.

- ✎ Encourage them to include themselves or other people in their pictures in order to illustrate how the name describes the way God interacts with us.
- ✎ As the children work, engage them in conversation.
 - Are there certain times you would call God this name?
 - Where do you hear this name used?
 - How does your illustration describe God?

If your group is particularly energetic or more interested in acting than drawing, invite the children to pick a name for God and act it out without talking while the rest of the group tries to guess it.

○ Bible Skills

- ✎ Have the children flex their Bible skills and look up verses about different names of God. Form groups of two or three children, with a reader in each group, or work together as one group. Hand out copies of Resource Page 1 and Bibles. Invite the children to find each Bible passage, have someone in their group read the passage aloud, and then connect the passage with the corresponding name and picture.

You may want to have a quick review about looking up a passage in the Bible. Point out the table of contents with the list of the books of the Bible. Explain that the first number following the book's name is the chapter number and the number following the colon is the verse number, or beginning of the passage.

- ✎ When the children have finished finding the names of God, review their answers. Explain, if necessary, that Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the language used when Revelation was written. This would be like using A and Z in English: God is the A and the Z, the beginning and the end.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

All of us like to be known, but children, especially, like to see their name written or in print, hear their name spoken, and be recognized by their name. Help the children locate themselves in this story about God's names by using the following prompts:

- ✔ How does it feel to be called by your name?
- ✔ How does it feel when someone forgets your name?
- ✔ Do you ever get called by the wrong name? How does that feel?
- ✔ Do you have a nickname, and do you have nicknames or special names for people or animals close to you? How did they come about?
- ✔ Does your name mean different things when it's used in different ways?
- ✔ What difference does it make what we call God? Is any one name for God better than others?

○ Acrostic Poems

- ✔ Explain to the children that an acrostic poem is a poem in which the first letter of every line spells out a word, which is usually the title of the poem.
- ✔ Using Resource Page 2, write an example of an acrostic based on your name. Each line should describe something about you and start with the respective letters of your name. Encourage the children to write their own name acrostic poems on the left side of Resource Page 2 by writing their name at the top of the column of Resource Page 2 and then writing it again, vertically, on one letter per line. Invite them to complete their poem by using these first letters to write descriptive words or phrases about themselves.
- ✔ Then help the children each choose a name for God to use as the basis of a poem and encourage them to repeat the process using the column on the right side of Resource Page 2.
- ✔ Invite the children to read their poems to the group.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Form a circle. Lead the children in the following active prayer, reminding them that God is always with us:

God, you are /
 the dream in our minds, (*touch forehead*) /
 the warmth in our hearts, (*cross hands over heart*) /
 the laugh in our bellies, (*place hands on belly*) /
 the strength in our stretch, (*stretch arms high*) /
 and the skip in our steps. (*tap feet on the floor*) /

God, you are before us, (*point forward*) /
 behind us, (*turn around or look behind*) /
 beside us, (*look side to side*) /
 below us, (*squat down or look down*) /
 above us, (*jump up or look up*) /
 around us, (*spin around or look all around*) /
 inside us. (*hug yourself*) /

Where we go, (*point to self with both hands*) /
 you go too, (*point to others*) /
 always and everywhere, (*point up and draw circles with fingers*) /
 thank God! (*sign "thank you" by touching chin with fingertips and lowering hand down and forward*) /

As you conclude, turn off the candle.



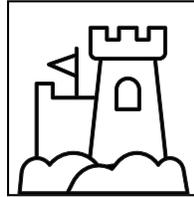
Grow with more.

○ What's in a Name?

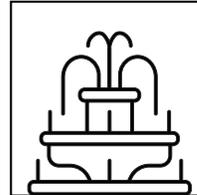
- ✔ Share stories about your names or special names you've given to your parents, your pets, your stuffed animals, your grandparents—any names you can think of!
 - What does the name mean? (see below if the meaning is not known)
 - Why did you choose this name?
 - What does the name tell you about the person or animal?
 - Are there any names you would change if you could? Why?
- ✔ If you have a name book or internet-connected device, look up a name's meaning. (For an internet search: type "meaning of" and the name. For example, "meaning of Nora.")
 - How does this meaning fit the person, animal, or item?

Look up the Bible passage and find the name of God used. Draw a line connecting the Bible reference on the left to the matching picture on the right. Write the name of God beside the picture.

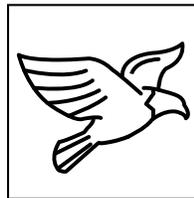
Isaiah 40:28



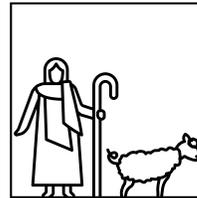
Isaiah 64:8



Revelation 1:8 and 22:13



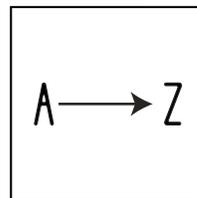
Psalms 71:3



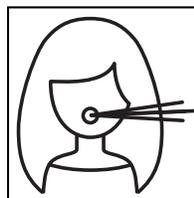
Jeremiah 17:13



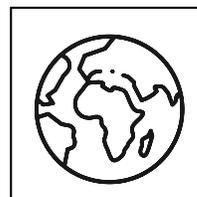
Psalms 23:1



Proverbs 1:20



Deuteronomy 32:11-12



God's Name

My Name