

# Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

## Jesus and Friends





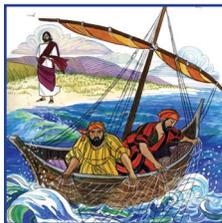
# Growing in God's Love

## A Story Bible Curriculum

Unit Overview and Connecting pages written by Carol A. Wehrheim  
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### Jesus and Friends

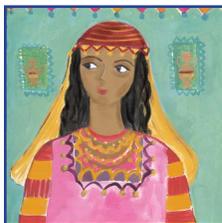
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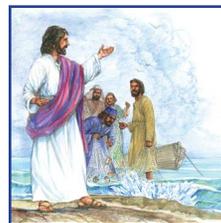
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🌿 **Goal:** To explore how the disciples answered Jesus' call and how we can too.

## Connecting with the Biblical Text

Though they are all fishermen, the two families in this story have different economic standings. Peter and Andrew have only their nets to catch fish from the shore while James and John, with their father Zebedee, have a boat to go out into deeper water. Even so, both sets of brothers respond to Jesus' call in the same way, leaving their livelihood behind to fish for people with Jesus. The power of Jesus' call is seen immediately as each one reacts in what appears to be an instant. No introduction to the task of following Jesus is necessary. In a culture dominated by the Romans, who ruled through fear, such quick decisions to turn away from all you have may seem surprising. What will the Roman rulers think of this charismatic upstart from Nazareth now that he has recruited four strong men to join him?

To dig deeper into the text, go to [bit.ly/GLMatthew412](https://bit.ly/GLMatthew412).

## Connecting with the World

- 🌿 In a world where insurance can cover nearly anything imaginable, pension plans proliferate, and financial security is at the top of our priorities, how is a decision to disregard such planning judged?
- 🌿 During the COVID-19 pandemic, people were unable to go to their workplaces. Many people used this time to reevaluate their work and made plans to enter a new field. Search for stories on the internet about changing jobs during the pandemic to see what happened and why. How might this affect the overall life of a community?

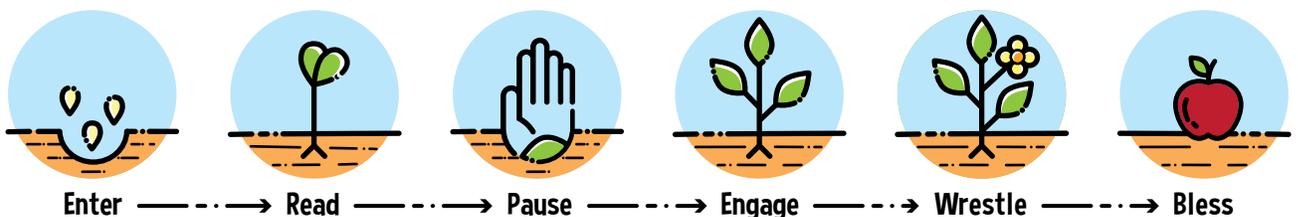
## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

This call of the four fishermen is a favorite story to tell children, whether we sing about it or act it out. But what does it mean to them, who are just beginning to understand that they can be followers of Jesus and perform acts of kindness and justice in his name? Many children in the elementary school years are joiners; they become members of choirs, sports teams, scouting programs, or other organizations. They have a good idea what it means to follow a leader. Having a goal of working together to achieve a task can be a helpful way to talk with them about being a follower of Jesus, helping to bring God's love to others. This story can be a chance for a child to recognize that she or he is called by Jesus too.

## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- 🌿 Under what circumstances can you imagine doing what these new disciples did so quickly?
- 🌿 To our knowledge, and to our relief perhaps, Jesus called only twelve disciples to travel with him from the beginning of his ministry and all the way to the cross. But he called many others, including us, to follow him and live in God's ways. How do you think you are called to follow Jesus?
- 🌿 When one is part of a family, a call is not accepted in isolation. Another way to consider God's call for you is to ask, "How is my family called to be and live as followers of Jesus?" For help in this discernment, see *Getting It Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family, and Work* by Carol Wehrheim (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

*God of love, open our hearts and minds so that we can discern your call to us.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*



## Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✔ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✔ Pictures cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2
- ✔ Internet-connected device
- ✔ Cards cut apart from Resource Page 3

## Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible of Jesus calling the disciples (Matthew 4:18–22). As you read, make note of the parts of the story that stand out to you or raise questions for you. Then read the story “Follow Me!” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 206). Think about the ways you engage this story.

- ✔ Imagine that you are at your daily job when Jesus shows up and invites you to follow him. What questions would you want to ask?
- ✔ How hard would it be for you to leave your daily tasks and routine?
- ✔ Why do you think the fishermen chose to follow Jesus and leave their old lives behind?

The choice made by the fishermen to follow Jesus changed the course of their lives forever, even though they may not have realized it at the time.

- ✔ In what ways did following Jesus change everything for them?
- ✔ What purpose did Jesus give them for joining his ministry?
- ✔ What are some ways that Jesus invites us to follow, even today?

Recall the faces and names of the children in your group. What do you know about them? Pray for them and for your time together.



### Enter into sacred space together.

Display the pictures cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2. As the children arrive, invite them to look at the pictures. Ask the children to choose one picture and to imagine a backstory for it. They can make up their own story or work with other children to answer these questions:

- ✔ What do you think these children were doing before this picture was taken?
- ✔ How did they get into the situation you see in the picture?

- ✔ What kind of surprising thing(s) might have happened?
- ✔ What choices do you think the children in these pictures might have made or need to make now?

Gather in a group and invite the children to share their imagined stories. Ask:

- ✔ Have you ever thought you knew what your day was going to be like and then something surprising turned it around?
- ✔ What was that like? Was it a good surprise or a difficult one?
- ✔ Did you have any choices to make about that surprise turn of events? What were they?
- ✔ How was the rest of the day different for you?

Explain that in today's story, two pairs of brothers experienced a surprising invitation from Jesus that changed not only their day but the rest of their lives!

Lead the children in prayer, inviting them to add their own prayers in the pause provided, if they would like:

Loving and surprising God, we thank you for surprises like . . .  
Thank you for opportunities to follow you, like . . .  
Help us to learn to follow you more and more!  
Amen.

---

When leaving openings for children to add to prayers such as this one, be sure to have a couple of examples in mind to help get the children thinking and feeling comfortable enough to participate.

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### Read a story of God's people.

Pass out paper and crayons. Explain that as you read today's story, they will hear about some fishermen who had a surprising turn of events. Ask each child to choose one disciple (James, John, Peter, or Andrew) and listen to the story while pretending to be that disciple. They might want to write their chosen disciple's name at the top of their paper to help them focus. Read “Follow Me!” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 206).

## Leading



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

Ask the children to write on their paper what their chosen disciple might be thinking or feeling, questions they might have, and so forth. They can write or draw these thoughts and feelings. Allow some time for silent reflection and drawing.



### Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Invite the children to pair up with another child and share some of the things they wrote or drew. After a few minutes, call the group back together and name some of the questions the disciples might have had for Jesus. Wonder together:

- What questions might your disciple have had for Jesus before leaving their work?
- How might this surprising event have changed their day? their life?

Write these questions where all can see them.

Choose one or both options:

#### ○ Mending Nets

- In the Bible story, James and John were working with their father to repair the fishing nets.

Wonder with the children:

- Have you ever fished with a net? What would be an advantage of using a net to fish rather than a fishing pole?
- Why would fishing nets need repairing?
- Do you think that repairing nets would be a hard job or an easy one?

- Show the YouTube video “How to Mend a Net with Commercial Fisherman Michael Oden Peele” in which an Outer Banks fisherman demonstrates how to repair a fishing net ([bit.ly/GLRepairNet](https://bit.ly/GLRepairNet), 1:13).

- How hard do you think it was for James and John to learn how to mend nets? What other things might they have learned as fishermen?
- What do you think their father thought when they left to follow Jesus?

#### ○ Fishing for People

- In the story, Jesus tells both sets of brothers, “Come and follow me! I will show you how to fish for people!” Wonder together what Jesus meant by this.

- Did Jesus mean that they would be hauling people out of the sea in nets?
- How could the disciples fish for people?
- What were some ways that they could draw people toward Jesus, like a net gathers fish?
- Why did Jesus need helpers like these four fishermen?
- Play a game to explore why Jesus needed helpers.
  - Line up the children on one side of an open space, except for one volunteer, who will be “Jesus.” Have Jesus stand in the middle of the space, facing the group. Ask the group to try to run or walk past Jesus to the other side of the room. Jesus may not move his feet but can reach out with his arms to try and tag others. If they are tagged, they join him in the middle. After the group has made it to the other side of the space, ask all who were tagged to join Jesus in the middle of the space. If all escaped untouched, let Jesus call up to four helpers to join him (depending on the size of your group). This time, all the children in the middle (Jesus and disciples) can try to tag the other children while still not moving their feet. Continue playing until everyone has been tagged.
  - Gather the group and talk about the following:
    - How hard was it for the original “Jesus” in the game to tag people?
    - Why was it easier to reach people once there were helpers?
    - Do you think that Jesus and the disciples in the Bible found the same to be true?
    - Once Jesus had some followers who wanted to share the good news, how might their working together have made that job easier?



### Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Jesus called these four brothers to follow him, and they had to make a choice: whether to leave their work and their families to see what Jesus' ministry was all about or to remain and go about business as usual. Though we don't usually see Jesus standing on the shore calling to us, we still have choices every day about whether we will follow him or go about our lives without listening to his call. Explore with the children some ways that they may choose to follow Jesus.

## Leading

### ○ Following Jesus Role Play

- ✦ Form groups of two or three children and give each group a card cut apart from Resource Page 3. Encourage them to act out the situation and a possible outcome. After each scenario is acted out, discuss the following questions:
  - Who in this scene had a decision to make?
  - How did they decide what to do?
  - What other decisions could they have made?
  - Which outcome seems most like one that follows Jesus? Why do you think so?

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The children may not agree on the answers to every question, and that's OK! We ask children questions in order to help them think through their understandings and beliefs, not to get a specific answer. For children, questions, like art, are more about the process than the product!

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### **Bless one another with God's grace.**

Invite the children to stand in a circle. Have everyone turn to the right so that they are facing the next person's back. Pray the following, inviting the children to walk forward in their circle, as you pray:

Jesus, /  
thank you for calling us /  
to follow you. /  
Help us to walk /  
in your ways each day. /  
Amen. /



### **Grow with more.**

### ○ Follow the Leader

- ✦ Play Follow the Leader. If you have a playground or outdoor space to use, that will allow more creativity, but this activity can be done in an indoor or smaller space. Rotate leaders until all children who want to have had a chance to lead.
- ✦ Then gather the group together and ask:
  - What was challenging about leading the group?
  - What was challenging about following the leader?
  - Which leaders in your life are easy to follow? Why?
  - How can we follow Jesus when we can't even see him?
  - Who in your life follows Jesus closely? What can you learn from them?









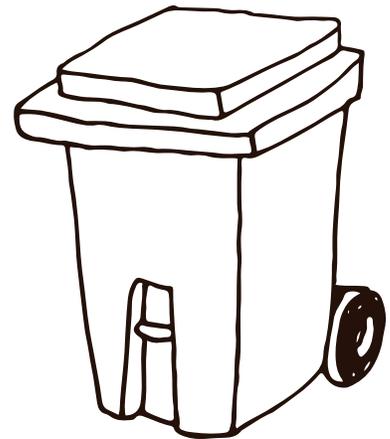
Angelica is walking toward the school bus stop one morning when she hears someone yelling. She realizes that a child in her fifth-grade class is yelling at one of the first graders who lives down the street. As she gets close, she hears Joe say, "Why are you such a crybaby?" to the little boy in a mocking voice. Angelica looks at little Sammy and realizes there are tears in his eyes. She did not hear what they were fighting about.



What could Angelica do?

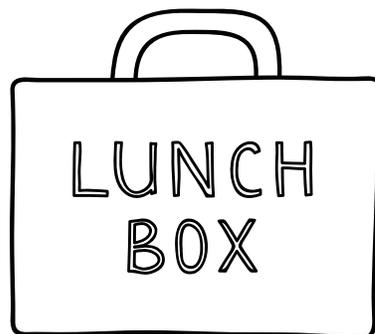
Rico is walking home from school. He knows that his mom is waiting for him and that she always wants him to come straight home. As he passes by an older neighbor, he realizes that he is struggling to get the trash bins back in his garage.

What could Rico do?



Mary is sitting with her friends in the lunchroom when she notices that Amanda does not have any lunch. "Where is your lunch box?" she asks. Amanda shrugs and says "I was supposed to bring money for lunch today, but I can't find it."

What could Mary do?



Archie and Jeff are getting ready for soccer practice. Archie notices that Jeff has a big bruise on his arm. "What happened?" he asks. Jeff tries not to answer, but Archie asks again. "Look, you can't tell anyone this, but my high school cousin got mad at me yesterday and popped me." Archie wants to tell someone, but Jeff says that the cousin will only hit him harder if he tattles to an adult.

What could Archie do?

