

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Parables Jesus Told



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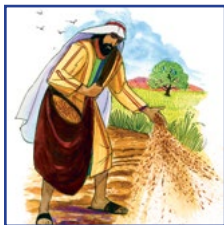
A Story Bible Curriculum

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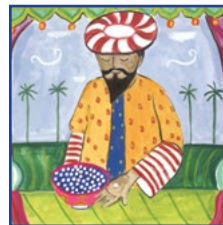
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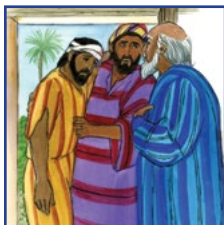
Introduction	2
Unit Overview	3
Intergenerational and Home Ideas	4



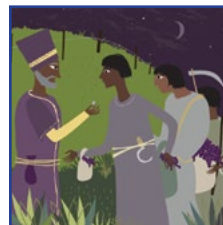
The Sower
Luke 8:4–15 9



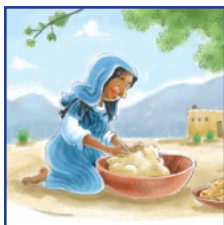
The Pearl
Matthew 13:45–46 23



The Good Neighbor
Luke 10:25–37 13



The Generous Landowner
Matthew 20:1–16 27



Something Big from
Something Small
Matthew 13:31–33 19

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 explore how we receive and radiate God's message of love.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Jesus frequently used parables in his teaching. He wanted to make us look at the things that are important in our lives, and the best way he knew to do so was to use this literary form, which would have been familiar to him from Hebrew Scriptures. Parables, as used by Jesus, are meant to disturb us, to make us think. For the purposes of teaching and reading this parable with children, be aware that some scholars think the editorial comments on the meaning of the parable (Luke 8:9-15) were added by Luke. If you read this parable in your Bible, you will see that the interpretation in *Growing in God's Love* is different from other Bible storybooks. What do you think the seed represents? Luke 8:11 suggests that the seed is God's Word. What words of God would be contained in seeds? "The Sower," as told in *Growing in God's Love*, suggests that the seed that the sower wants to spread is the message of God's love. Following this interpretation, God's love may not be able to grow in our hearts if they are full of hate, anger, or mean thoughts. God's love may not be able to grow in our hearts if they are dry and never watered with kindness. God's love may not be able to grow in our hearts if we are worried about so many things we don't have time to love or be loved.

Connecting with the World

- 🌱 Bread for the World is an organization working to fight world hunger. Visit their website (www.bread.org) to see how seeds of hope and action can help. Pay particular attention to their action tool kit.
- 🌱 What community groups are your church involved with that have as their mission sharing seeds of love and kindness?

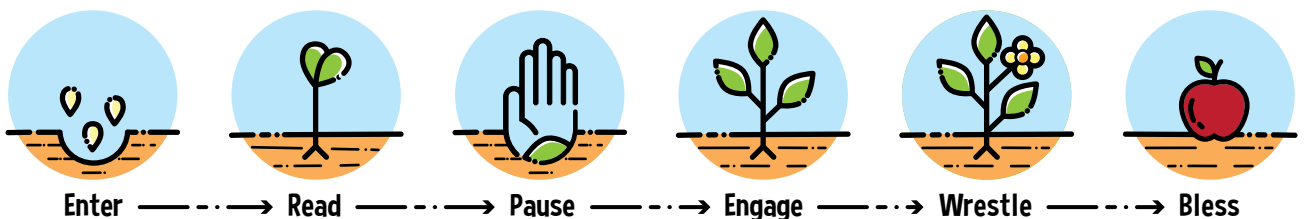
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

This parable invites children to think about themselves and how God's love either thrives in them or not. Children can see how plants grow or don't grow depending on how good the soil is and how much water is given. If they help plant a seed, tuck it in the dirt, water it, and give it light, they can watch it grow. God's love in our hearts grows just like this. Spiritual practices that tend to this seed are many, varied, and growing with us. Children can participate in the practice of hospitality and generosity. When we are kind to others, when we offer to help, the seed of love in our hearts grows.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Agronomists have measures to check the health of the soil where seeds will be planted. People of faith also have ways of checking in about the spiritual health of their souls. Do you take time to pause, to take up a spiritual practice like prayer, reading the Bible, walking in God's world, listening to a neighbor, or sharing a meal? Seeds of faith mature in our souls when we take time to be intentional about nurturing them. We all must attend to self-care—including nutritious eating, exercise, time for play, and time for family and friends—in order to live healthy lives. What attention do you give to your spiritual health? In what ways is God's love growing in you?

*Creator God, you plant seeds of love, kindness, and hope in our hearts.
Help us remember to water and feed these seeds carefully so that they will grow. Amen.*



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Floor pillows, cushions, carpet squares, or beanbag chairs
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Sketchbook, or an alternative, for each child
- ✓ Drawing supplies, such as pencils, pens, crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- ✓ Bible
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Sea bean or nut beads, pre-drilled
- ✓ Waxed thread or flexible jewelry string
- ✓ Super glue
- ✓ Shelled sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, or other edible seeds, or freshly popped popcorn with some unpopped kernels

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, Luke 8:4–15. As you read, make notes of questions it raises for you. Then read “The Sower” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 210).

As you engage with the passage, consider these questions:

- ✓ What are the farmer's actions in this parable? How do they reinforce or challenge your notions of God?
- ✓ Can you recall a time when your life was like the hard ground/path? The dehydrated rocky ground? The weed-infested ground? The good soil?
- ✓ What circumstances or people in your life have helped nurture your soil?
- ✓ As God's message of love is scattered throughout the earth, in what ways can you be part of nurturing the soil of the children you will be leading? Of the people you encounter daily? Of the stranger you encounter today? Of people you may never meet?

As you prepare to lead, is there anything blocking God's message of love from taking root in your life? Go to God in prayer, knowing that God loves you and loves the children whom you will be leading. Seek God's wisdom in how you might demonstrate God's love to these children through both words and actions this week.

Gather sketchbooks or prepare alternatives to sketchpads by using any notebook, steno pad, or three-ring binders with paper to create the parable sketchbooks. Or simply fold five sheets of paper in half, cover with cardstock or pieces cut from cereal boxes, and staple them together to make your own sketchbooks.

Before children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with floor pillows, cushions, carpet squares, or beanbag chairs in a circle.



Enter into sacred space together.

Encourage the children to gather in the seating area. Turn on the candle.

Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God, author of life, /
thank you for your words of life. /
May your stories live in and through us. /
Amen. /

Distribute sketchbooks to each child and introduce them to their “parable sketchbooks.” Each session the children will have an opportunity to write, sketch, and draw in them as a way of engaging with the parables. At the end of the unit, they will be able to take home their sketchbooks. Have everyone write their name on their book. Invite them to use the drawing supplies for their sketchbooks throughout the session.

Explain that parables are stories Jesus told to teach people. Introduce the title of today's parable as “The Sower” and invite ideas about what this word means. Some children may understand the word as someone who sews. Help make the distinction between sewing and sowing.



Read a story of God's people.

Open the Bible to Luke 8:4 and place it next to the candle and *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. Explain that today's parable comes from the New Testament book of Luke. Invite the children to listen to today's parable. Read “The Sower” (p. 210).

Leading

After reading the first two sentences in the story, invite the children to respond to the questions raised before proceeding with the rest of the story.

- ✎ Have you ever planted seeds in a garden?
- ✎ Did you notice that some seeds grow well while others struggle?

Then continue with the story.



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

Ask the children to imagine God's message of love being planted inside them. You may wish to watch the YouTube video "I Could Watch Time Lapses of Seeds Growing All Day" (bit.ly/TimeLapseSeeds, 1:33, stopping at 1:18 to avoid ads).



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Wonder together:

- ✎ What are the different soils in this story?
- ✎ What happens to the seeds in each soil?
- ✎ Why do you think Jesus compares God to a farmer?
- ✎ Why do you think Jesus compares people to different types of soils?

○ Sketchbooks

Invite the children to draw a picture of today's parable in their sketchbook. After children have had an opportunity to draw, have them turn the page to write their responses to the following prompts. Assist with writing, or encourage children to help one another, as needed.

- ✎ You are a seed. What kind of plant will you be? Begin with, "I am a . . ."
- ✎ Write the word *path*. The farmer has tossed you and you fell on a path. What does it feel like? What do you see?
- ✎ Birds are coming. What do you feel?
- ✎ Write the word *rocky*. Now imagine that you fell in rocky ground. What does that feel like?
- ✎ The sun comes out. You begin to dry up. What does that feel like?

- ✎ Next, you fall in soil. You begin to grow. Weeds grow all around you. What does that feel like?
- ✎ Finally, you are planted in rich soil. Describe this soil. What does it look like? What does it feel like? How do you grow?

Invite the children to share any pictures or words from their sketchbooks as they wish.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Engage the children in conversation about how God's message of love is like a seed planted in them.

- ✎ How is God's message of love growing in you?
- ✎ What do you need to keep it growing?
- ✎ Who in your life has shared God's love with you?
- ✎ What are some ways you can radiate God's message of love to others?

Choose one or both options:

○ Sketchbooks

- ✎ Invite the children to write about or draw a picture of how God's message of love is growing in them. Suggest that they think about the group's recent conversation for some ideas. Invite the children to share their work with the rest of the group.

Older children may enjoy writing from the point of view of someone in the parable, such as the sower or a seed that fell on good soil. Encourage them to think about what ways they see themselves in the character.

○ Watching the Parable

- ✎ Watch the YouTube video "The Parable of the Sower—Animation" (bit.ly/ParableOfTheSowerVideo, 2:56). Wonder together:
 - What can make it difficult for people to hear and receive God's message of love?
 - Removing weeds and watering improves the soil in the ground. What can we do to help nurture and improve the soil in people's lives and in our own lives?



Bless one another with God's grace.

Close with the following blessing from Ephesians 3:17–18 (CEB), inviting the children to repeat your words and motions as you say each line:

I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through
faith. (*place hands over heart*) /
As a result of having strong roots (*point to the
ground*) /
in love, (*create heart shape using two hands*) /
I ask that you'll have the power to grasp (*grasp
hands together*) /
love's width and length (*stretch out arms to the
sides*) /
height and depth, (*reach up and then reach low*) /
together with all believers. (*everyone hold hands
in a circle*) /
Amen. (*drop hands*) /

Turn off the candle. Ask children to leave their sketchbooks to use next session. Assure the children that you will keep their sketchbooks safe.



Grow with more.

- Prayer Bead Bracelets
 - ✦ Sea beans or nuts with drilled holes make nice beads for making a bracelet and can remind children of this parable. If you'd like to learn more about sea beans, go to www.seabean.com.
 - ✦ Explain that people all over the world and across religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, use prayer beads to aid them in praying. Wonder together:
 - How can wearing our seed bracelets remind us that God's message of love is planted inside us? What other reminders can you think of?
 - In what ways can we use our bracelets to help us pray?
 - ✦ String sea beans or nut beads to create a bracelet. Double knot the thread to close the bracelet. To secure the knot more fully, place a drop of super glue on it.
- Seed Snacks
 - ✦ Share a snack of shelled sunflower seeds or other edible seeds, such as pumpkin or pomegranate seeds. If edible seeds aren't available, serve freshly popped popcorn, setting aside a few unpopped kernels for the children to see. Wonder together:
 - What plant could this seed grow into?
 - Which part of the plant produces seeds?

Be mindful of any dietary restrictions and food allergies.
