

# Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

## Listening for God





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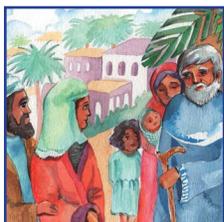
## A Story Bible Curriculum

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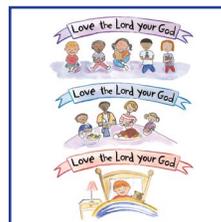
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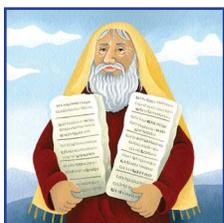
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at [www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum](http://www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum) or [www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum](http://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum). 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 listen to and celebrate God's plan for human diversity.

## Connecting with the Biblical Text

If you remember hearing about the Tower of Babel in your childhood, reading it in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* or in the Common English Bible translation will give you a fresh understanding of it. For centuries, interpreters of the text have told it the same way: After the flood, the people of Shinar were living together in one place. They started building their city with a tall tower so that they would be renowned and secure. God realized that they would soon be very powerful. God came down, mixed up their language ("babble" is related to the Hebrew word for "confusion"), and scattered them all over the earth.

Traditional interpretation has understood the building of the tower to be an act of pride and the confusing of language and diaspora to be punishments from God; difference and diversity came about as the result of God's punishment. Our version of the story takes a different tack, based off Theodore Hiebert's interpretation. This approach removes the emphasis on pride and punishment. Instead, difference and diversity are seen as part of God's plan for creation from the beginning.

For additional reading, see the study notes for Genesis 11:1-9 in the Common English Bible.

## Connecting with the World

- 🌿 These children's books celebrate the beautiful difference in God's world:
  - *God's Big Plan* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Theodore Hiebert (Flyaway Books, 2019)
  - *Today Is a Baptism Day* by Anna V. Ostenson Moore (Church Publishing, 2018)
  - *A Church for All* by Gayle E. Pitman (Albert Whitman & Company, 2018)

- 🌿 Share your experiences of diversity. At a family meal, invite one person to share a story about differences they have seen, heard, or experienced recently.

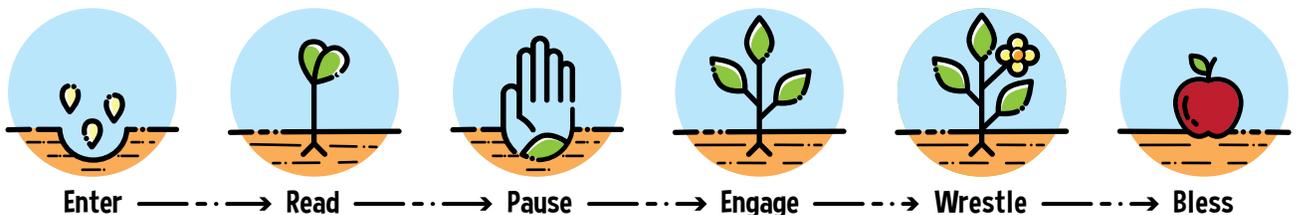
## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Our culture is littered with walls, literal and figurative. When children grow up in homes with family members who help them learn and appreciate the different ways that we are created, they know that difference is a good thing, not something to be feared or rejected. When children participate in a congregation where everyone is welcomed, everyone's baptism is celebrated, and everyone eats at the table at Jesus' invitation, their spiritual lives are nurtured in ways that will grow with them.

## Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Think back to the first time you can remember meeting someone who was different from you. What did you notice? Was it the color of their skin, the language they spoke, or the place where they were born? Were their abilities different from yours? Was their faith tradition not the same as yours? In God's economy, difference is valued; in fact it is the only way to live. In her book *Holy Envy*, Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on the importance of connection with people different from you. "My sole hope is to give God one more chance to work on me, by coming to me in the guise of a stranger who does not speak my language, asking me questions I cannot answer, until I become so interested in what can and cannot be said that the stranger and I go off to find lunch, leaving our half-built tower standing silent in the sand" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* [New York: Harper Collins, 2019], 183).

*God, you had a very big plan for our world. Sometimes it's hard to know the right thing to say or do with someone different from me. Give me your eyes, your hands, and your loving heart to live with others in the world you have given us. Amen.*



## Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ A multicolored afghan, woven blanket, or quilt
- ✓ Blocks
- ✓ Small pieces of yarn
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Bibles in various languages
- ✓ *When God Made the World* by Matthew Paul Turner (Convergent Books, 2020) or internet-connected device
- ✓ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device
- ✓ Resource Page 1

## Preparing to Lead

Find a quiet spot for your preparation. Read Psalm 46:10 as you center yourself.

Read Genesis 11:1–9 in a familiar translation. Then read it in a different translation. What stands out to you as you consider these versions side by side? Think about the passage overall, considering questions like:

- ✓ What comes before and after the selected section?
- ✓ How Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 conflict with today's story?
- ✓ What was God upset about?

This story is nestled between genealogies and attempts to explain the creation of different languages and the spread of people all over the world. As the family line expands, so does humankind's coverage of the earth. Because the people tried to establish life on their own terms, without acknowledging their need for God, God intervenes to re-establish the relationship. God is God of the whole earth, and now God's people dwell throughout it. In the story, and in the two that follow in this unit, we see God giving instructions about how to live peaceably with one another, in relationship with God. God helps the people establish unity in diversity.

Consider the children in your group. What questions might they ask about this story? What might sound odd, out of place, or confusing to them? What do you want them most to learn from your time together? Take a moment to pray for each of the children by

name. Thank God for this opportunity to learn and grow alongside them.

Arrange a gathering space with a multicolored afghan or other woven blanket or quilt for the children to sit on or around. Set out the blocks in a different area to be used as an arrival activity if needed.



## Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, invite them to build with the blocks. When you are ready to begin, gather the children around the blanket.

Greet the children by name and encourage them to greet one another. Draw the children's attention to the blanket and wonder about it together using the following questions:

- ✓ What colors do you see?
- ✓ How does this blanket stay together?
- ✓ How is it like God's creation?

Lead the children in prayer. Invite them to respond with "Thank you, God."

Dear God, your world is so beautiful and full of different colors.

**Thank you, God.**

You weave our differences together.

**Thank you, God.**

You help us follow you and live in peace.

**Thank you, God.**

**Amen**



## Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to sit in a comfortable position to listen to the story of how we all came to be so different. Open *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* to page 164 and show the children the illustrations. Ask them what they notice in the pictures and what they might tell us about the story.

Invite a volunteer to read the name of the story. Then read the first two sentences of "God's Big Plan," pausing after each question to allow the children to answer. Continue reading the rest of the story.

## Leading



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

Lead the group in three deep breaths and invite the children into quiet. Allow a few moments to rest silently in the story.



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

Read the Hear, See, and Act questions one at a time and discuss each one as a group.

Engage the children in conversation about differences between people, cultures, and languages. Consider questions such as:

- ✦ Why do you think God makes everybody different?
- ✦ What would the world be like if everyone were the same?

Entertain all answers in a nonjudgmental manner.

Choose one or both options:

- Mixed-Up Messages
  - ✦ Play the game of Telephone by sharing a message with the child at the beginning of the line and encouraging the children to pass it down the line as a whisper.
  - ✦ Use messages from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* or a Bible translation. Consider verses such as:
    - Psalm 23:1–4 (one at a time)
    - Galatians 5:22–23
    - Joshua 1:9
    - Matthew 6:24 (whole verse or in phrases)
  - ✦ After playing a few rounds, debrief the activity by asking:
    - How do you think this was like or unlike the trouble the people had with communicating after God mixed up their languages?
    - Do you think it got easier or harder for the people to communicate the farther away they got? Why?
    - Do you think God understands all the different languages?

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If a member of your group has hearing loss, have that child be at the beginning of the line. Pull them to the side so that you can say the line loudly and clearly enough for them to understand or have them read the verse. Then have them rejoin the line and pass the message to the next child.

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- Same Bible, Different Words

- ✦ Listen to the Bible read in global languages by visiting [bit.ly/GLBibleLanguages](https://bit.ly/GLBibleLanguages). Click on the version name to select a language and version; choose the passage from the drop-down menu on the right. Point out to the children that the Bible has been translated into more than 1,200 different languages!

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Children may be taken aback by the sounds of some languages and say they sound silly or weird. If this happens, explain to the children that our language sounds strange to people who don't speak it too. Because our ears are not used to the new language, our brains cannot decode it, so we do not understand the language. To a person who knows that language, it is clear and comforting. God gave people the gift of language so that those living together could communicate.

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- ✦ Gather Bibles in different languages and pass them around for children to see the different words and alphabets represented. See if the children can guess which language is which.
- ✦ Explore different versions of the Bible in English by reading the same passage in two or three versions. Find different versions at [bit.ly/GLBible](https://bit.ly/GLBible). Ask the children to listen to what is different and what is the same in each version. Discuss why different translators might make different choices about how to tell the story.



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

Highlight for the children that we are each an ongoing part of God's big plan. Emphasize that God's plan for creation did not stop on the seventh day or with the stories contained in the Bible. God's plan is continuing today, through each one of us.

## Leading

Choose one or both options:

### ○ Part of the Story

- ✔ Read *When God Made the World* by Matthew Paul Turner, or show the YouTube video “When God Made the World ([bit.ly/GLWhenGodMade](https://bit.ly/GLWhenGodMade), 9:35). Emphasize the section of the text that starts with “And God made people, people like you and me” through to the end.
- ✔ Have a discussion using the following questions:
  - What do you think creation teaches us about God?
  - What do you think the author means by “your God-given trick”?
  - What’s a purpose? Do you think we all have the same purpose or different ones?
  - How can we spread hope throughout the world and close to home?

### ○ Sharing Stories, Celebrating Differences

- ✔ Share a story about a time when you met someone very different from you. Answer the following questions in your story:
  - How did you meet them?
  - How did you feel?
  - What did you learn?
  - How were you different?
- ✔ Invite the children to share their own stories of meeting people different from them. Help them reflect on their encounter by asking them the same questions.
- ✔ Engage the children in conversation about how they can be a part of God’s big plan using the following questions:
  - What can we do as a group to continue God’s story and be a part of God’s big plan? What can you do on your own?
  - How can we meet and learn from people who are different from us?
  - What are some ways we can share God’s love with people all the way across the world?



### Bless one another with God’s grace.

Invite the children to form a circle, join hands, and sing “*Shalom, chaverim!*” using the *Glory to God* hymnal (#540) or show the YouTube video “Shalom Chaverim: A Jewish Kids’ Sing Along” ([bit.ly/GLShalomSong](https://bit.ly/GLShalomSong), 0:48). The song on the video is sung

in Hebrew first, and the English version begins at 0:21 and uses the words “We’ll see you again” instead of “Till we meet again.”

Farewell, good friends!  
Farewell, good friends!  
*Shalom, shalom!*  
Till we meet again,  
till we meet again,  
*shalom, shalom.*

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

Dear God, /  
you made us all /  
the same but different. /  
We all have hearts, /  
we all have minds, /  
and we all have bodies. /  
But we look and sound /  
and talk and live /  
in different ways. /  
No one way /  
is better than the others. /  
We are all precious to you. /  
Amen. /



### Grow with more.

### ○ Speaking Different Languages

- ✔ Invite the children to learn to say “hello” in different languages. Ask any children who know a language other than English to teach the group how to say “hello” in that language.
- ✔ Take out any cards cut from Resource Page 1 that the children have already learned. Hand out the rest of the cards, one to each child or pair of children. Have each child or pair practice saying “hello” on their own using their card. Assist with reading and pronunciation, if necessary.
- ✔ Invite the children to take turns teaching their “hello” to the rest of the group.

**God's Big Plan**  
**Resource Page 1**

**Salaam alaikum**  
(sah-LAHM ah-LAY-koom)  
Arabic

**Ni hao**  
(nee-HAWH)  
Chinese

**Goedendag**  
(GOO-den-dawg)  
Dutch

**Kalimera**  
(kal-ee-MARE-ah)  
Greek

**Shalom aleichem**  
(shah-LOHM ah-LAY-kem)  
Hebrew

**Namasté**  
(NAH-mah-stay)  
Hindi

**Konnichiwa**  
(koh-NEE-chee-wah)  
Japanese

**Anyoung haseyo**  
(ahn-YO HA-say-yo)  
Korean

**Dzień dobry**  
(JEAN DOH-bray)  
Polish

**Hola**  
(OH-lah)  
Spanish

**Habari**  
(ha-BAH-ree)  
Swahili

**Kumusta**  
(koo-muss-STAH)  
Tagalog Filipino

