

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

God's Messages



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God's Messages

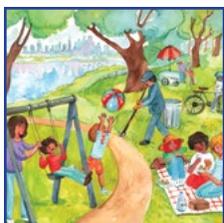
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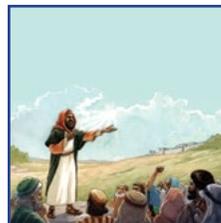
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

© 2020 Westminster John Knox Press

First edition
Published by Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

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Printed in the United States of America

Introduction

How do you get to know someone and form a relationship? You meet them. Get to know them. Ask questions. Discover things about them. Talk with each other. Share stories. Wrestle with what you learn. Discern your place in the relationship, with others, and with the world. Repeat.

One of the first ways we begin to understand God's self-revelation is to hear, engage, and wrestle with the written Word. In other words, it is through the stories of the Bible that we get to know God. It is through the stories of the things Jesus did and said that we get to know Jesus. It is through the Holy Spirit that we live and learn together. We get to know ourselves as beloved children of God and our place in the faith community.

In this curriculum, children will:

- read and hear stories from the Bible, adapted and told as age-appropriate stories using *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*;
- pause to let each story find its way into their hearts and minds;
- engage their curiosity and imagination with the Bible story through wondering questions and activities exploring God's presence, actions, and grace in the story; and
- wrestle with how they fit in the story, what God is calling them to do, and how they follow God's way of loving and living as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Benefits of a Multiage Setting

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum is intentionally a multiage children's curriculum. Multiage curriculum places spiritual development in a church family model and recognizes that age and development are not synonymous. It can appeal to all church sizes, with "family groups" spanning the various ages found in larger groups. There is the opportunity for the development of skills and character through encouraging disciples who support and care for one another; providing leadership and mentoring occasions; and supporting cooperation, rather than competition, as well as patience, tolerance, and compassion for those who are of different age or ability. Multiage curriculum provides a change from the typical school day and model of education. It offers open-ended materials that can challenge children and allows for developmental diversity and individual

differences. Children can develop a strong sense of community as they offer and receive support and encouragement.

Note about Supplies

Basic supplies, such as paper, newsprint, card stock, pencils, pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils, glue, glue sticks, scissors, and tape, will not be listed in the "Gathering Supplies" section. These items are considered general supplies to have on hand. Specific items required for the lesson will be noted in each session.

Flyaway Books

Flyaway Books (www.flyawaybooks.com) is a children's picture book imprint from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation and the publisher of *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. It features books that reflect themes of diversity, inclusivity, kindness, compassion, self-esteem, and care for our world and that retell familiar religious stories in new ways. Flyaway Books titles are available at www.pcusastore.com.

Including Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Create an environment that helps children of all abilities experience God's grace by making a space welcoming and accessible. You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment—the way something is done, what is done, or where it is done. If you think a child may struggle with an activity, ask the question "How can I help this child be successful?"

Adapting the Process: Giving extra support to complete activities is an example of changing the process.

Adapting the Product: Having children make or do something different is an example of changing the product when the original plan is inaccessible for a child.

Adapting the Environment: Thinking about the room where you gather helps children feel welcome and included. Considering lighting, space, and furniture; displaying children's projects; and using liturgical seasons and symbols help children feel that the room is a place where they belong.

Unit Overview: God's Messages

Remembering These Stories

The Old Testament has a collection of many different kinds of writing. The stories of the prophets in this unit are like short biographies of four men sent by God to speak to God's people to remind them of who they were and how God expected them to live. When we read their stories, we get a glimpse into the lives of the Israelites and come to understand why God intervened by sending prophets. Unfortunately, God's people all too often forgot God and God's ways. In this unit you will hear about the words God gave Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah to share with God's people.

Remembering How These Stories Connect with One Another

When you read stories about the prophets, there are things they share in common. Each prophetic book has a similar beginning. They begin by telling us something about the setting and background of the prophet. Each book includes the story of the prophet's calling, or how they first heard God's voice. This becomes the background for helping us understand what God was concerned about and what prophecy God sent them to give. You may see similar themes in their prophetic words. When you read these texts, you begin to understand what God saw and why God was concerned.

- ✦ Amos was concerned about economic difference between the rich and the poor and why some people were not treated as fairly as others.
- ✦ Micah shared the same concerns. The passage that is most familiar is Micah 6:6–8. It reminds the people that what God expects of them and most wants them to remember is “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly” with God.
- ✦ The story from Isaiah, “You Are Not Alone,” comes from the second major section of the book written at the end of the time when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon and before their return to Jerusalem. Here we see the prophet bringing God's words of comfort and reminding them that God knows them each by name and will always be with them.
- ✦ God wanted Jeremiah to tell the people that God would be making a new covenant with them.

This time it wouldn't be written on stone tablets but rather on their hearts.

Remembering Why These Stories Are Important to Our Faith

These prophets were people who listened for the voice of God. Then they spoke to God's people to help them remember who they were as God's people. Loved by God, they were expected to live in response to God's love. Sometimes people ask questions like: What is faith? What does it mean to say you have faith in God? What difference does faith make in your life? What do you believe about God, and why do you believe it? These are great questions, and our answers depend on

our own beliefs and experiences of faith. Sometimes people just need space to ask the questions and wrestle with their own answers. The prophets' words from God remind us of how God wants us to live faithfully: by treating one another with kindness, fairness, and respect; by working for peace in the world; and by naming and working to correct systems of injustice. These prophetic words also help us remember that, even

today, God sends us women and men to remind us that we are not alone, we are loved by God, and we are forgiven for what we do wrong. What God expects of us is the same as what God expected of people in the days of the Old Testament prophets: to walk with God.



Remembering to Wonder

- ✦ As you read about the prophets Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, what similarities and differences do you hear in their stories?
- ✦ Imagine God looking down at your church and your community. What would God see? What would most concern God? Select one of these prophets and imagine him coming to your congregation and community. What do you think he would say?
- ✦ When you think about God's word to the people spoken by these prophets, what modern-day prophets come to mind—people who remind us how we are to live by caring for each other and caring for the world?

Telling the Truth—Amos 1:1; 4:13; 5:14-15; 7:12

Worship

- Prophetic Messages
 - ✦ When in worship do we hear hard things or prophetic messages from God? During the Prayers of Confession? During Prayers of the People? During the sermon? Think about worship together and invite children to mark existing places with these messages or to help create liturgy for the bulletin that connects with prophetic messages.
 - ✦ Find out: When was the last time worship centered around messages from a prophet?

Education

- The Plumb Line
 - ✦ Explore another story of Amos (Amos 7:7-13) by reading it together and/or by watching the YouTube video “Amos and the Crumbling Kingdom—Bible Story—LifeKids (bit.ly/AmosPlumbLine, 2:34). Make your own plumb line by stringing a metal washer or other heavy object onto a long string. Play around with the plumb line and other tools, such as a level or a chalk line, as you measure how straight items are around the house or church building. Make the connection between straight or crooked walls and injustice.
- Hosea, Amos, and Micah Study
 - ✦ Have adults or youth studied Amos or other minor prophets recently? Check out the downloadable lesson from The Thoughtful Christian on Hosea, Amos, and Micah at www.thethoughtfulchristian.com.

Connections

- Letter Writing
 - ✦ Read the picture book *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2000) about fairness and advocacy or watch the YouTube video “Click Clack Moo Cows That Type Animated” (bit.ly/ClickClackCowsVideo, 9:23). Talk together about how writing or typing letters to people in

power can make a difference. Look at letters to the editor in your local paper together. Is there an issue you as a family or church group would like to address with a letter? Write or type one together.

- Modern-Day Prophet
 - ✦ Learn about a modern-day young prophet who used her voice to tell the truth, even when it was hard to hear. Amariyanna (Mari) Copeny, also known as “Little Miss Flint,” took action when her community experienced a water crisis. Explore together how she took prophetic steps and helped people in power pay attention. Read about Mari at marycopeny.com/about and/or watch the YouTube video “Mari Copeny Continues to Fight for Clean Water and Inspires Other Folks to Stand Up and Speak Up” (bit.ly/MariCopenyVideo, 7:51).

Service

- Water Justice Ministry
 - ✦ Read together: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). Explore together ways to get involved in water justice ministry. Read about two young girls who learned about how unfair access to safe drinking water is and who then did something about it: bit.ly/PaperForWaterStory. Check out their website at paperforwater.org. Also check your denominational website to discover how they are involved in water justice ministries.

What Does God Want—Micah 1:1; 4:1-4; 6:6-8

Worship

- Hymns in Worship
 - ✦ Use Hymn #70 in the *Glory to God* hymnal, “What Does the Lord Require of You?”
 - ✦ Use “O God, You Call for Justice” (bit.ly/CallForJusticeHymn) written by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, a pastor who writes new words to familiar tunes. This hymn is based on Micah 6:6-8 and is sung to the tune AURELIA, which is also the tune for “The Church’s One Foundation.”

Education

- Posters
 - ✦ Share some great quotations about justice as you explore Micah 6:8 together. Write the quotations on newsprint. Form groups, choose a quotation, and discuss what it means to the people in the group. Invite the groups to make posters of the quotations to display in the church or at home.
 - “Justice is what love looks like in public.” —Cornel West
 - “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”—Martin Luther King Jr.
 - “If you want peace work for justice.”—Pope John Paul II
 - “I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.”—Abraham Lincoln
- Kind Kids
 - ✦ With a group of parents or caregivers, read and discuss the article “Stop Trying to Raise Successful Kids,” bit.ly/KindKidsArticle, which includes recent findings about raising kind children.

Connections

- Christmas 1914
 - ✦ Explore the story of the Christmas Truce of 1914, when German and British troops put down their guns on Christmas Eve. Watch the YouTube video “1914 / Sainsbury’s Ad / Christmas 2014,” bit.ly/Christmas1914Ad (3:40). Wonder together if something like this could happen again during a time of war and how it might start. Relate the conversation to Micah’s call for peace.
- Books about Kindness
 - ✦ Read and discuss some children’s picture books about kindness. Find a great list here: bit.ly/BooksAboutKindness.
- *Hamilton*
 - ✦ Fans of the musical *Hamilton* might catch the line from the song “One Last Time” when they hear Micah 4:4. Read about the biblical reference in the musical here at bit.ly/BiblicalReferencesInHamilton and explore Washington’s documented use of Micah’s verse, or sing it! Watch YouTube video “#32 Hamilton—One Last Time [Music Lyrics]” at bit.ly/OneLastTimeVideoLyrics (4:59).

Service

- Poverty Simulation Game
 - ✦ Play an online poverty simulation game, Spent, as a family or intergenerational group to learn about some of the hard choices facing people with few resources. Talk together about what a prophet like Micah might say about some of the situations you face in the game. Find it here: playspent.org. After you play, look for ways to engage in your local community.

You Are Not Alone—Isaiah 43:1-7

Worship

- God’s Presence in Worship
 - ✦ When in worship do we remind ourselves that we are not alone and that God is with us: when being called to worship, while singing a hymn, when confessing or being assured of God’s pardon, during the passing of the peace or prayers of the people, when Scripture is read, or during a baptism or communion? Invite worship participants to mark the places in the bulletin where they especially feel God’s presence.
- Isaiah 43 in Song
 - ✦ There are some beautiful worship arrangements of these verses from Isaiah. A choral rendition was written for the Presbyterian Worship and Music Conference at Montreat in 2009. You can hear the song “When You Pass through the Waters” by Paul Weber and purchase the choral music at bit.ly/ThroughTheWatersChoral. “I Will Come to You (You Are Mine)” is #177 in the *Glory to God* hymnal. You can hear the hymn at bit.ly/IWillComeToYou (3:31).

Education

- Parent/Caregiver Time
 - ✦ How can parents or caregivers help children with their fears? How do you know when normal fear in a child becomes fear that needs intervention? Invite a child psychologist or counselor in to speak, or read and discuss an article such as Rae Jacobson’s “How to Help Children Manage Fears” at bit.ly/ManageChildrensFears.

○ Reading Together

- ✦ *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst (DeVorss & Co., 2000) helps with separation anxiety, grief, or just the feeling of being alone. Children learn that there is an invisible string of love that connects their hearts to their loved ones. Read the book or watch the YouTube video “The Invisible String~Read with Me~Story Time” (bit.ly/InvisibleStringReadAloud, 4:14). Wonder together what this story tells us about God’s love and presence in our lives.
- ✦ *Homemade Love* by bell hooks (Jump at the Sun, 2017) opens up a conversation about all the ways we are loved and cared for, no matter what. Read the book or watch the YouTube video “Story Time with POWER ASC / Homemade Love / Children’s Book Read Aloud” (bit.ly/HomemadeLoveReadAloud, 2:19). Wonder together what this story says about Isaiah 43:1–7.

○ Telling a Story

- ✦ Form groups of five to eight people or work together as one group. Tell the groups that they will be making up a scary story, one sentence at a time. Invite someone to begin with one of the following sentences or with one of their own choosing:
 - The night was dark and stormy . . .
 - We were walking through the woods when . . .
 - Next to the slide, the swings creaked . . .
 - By dinner time, we were all exhausted . . .
- ✦ Then have the participants take turns adding a sentence at a time to the story. Keep in mind the story of Isaiah 43:1–7, and at some point, claim the assurance of God’s presence in the midst of what is scary. Then ask how that changes the story.

Connections

○ Immigrant Experiences

- ✦ Interview someone who emigrated from another country, asking them about what it is like. Ask about their home culture and customs as well as the processes they have had to go through as immigrants to live and work in your local community.

○ Fire and Water Art

- ✦ Create an interactive art project to illustrate Isaiah 43:2. Use two canvases of any size to create water- and fire-inspired pictures. Some suggestions of material to use might be collage images, acrylic paint, tissue paper, unconventional brushes and paint, and so forth. When the project is dry, add the verse and hang up the art together. Ask an artist in the congregation or community to help guide the project.

Service

○ Disaster Response Ministries

- ✦ Learn about the Ministry of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), the refugee and disaster response program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or check out your denomination’s ministry with refugees and with communities affected by disaster. Explore the PDA website at pda.pcusa.org. Check out some of the photos, stories, and videos as you learn where people are in these ministries around the world.
 - See if your state is part of any active disaster responses, and learn how gifts of Presbyterians are making a difference around the nation at pda.pcusa.org/national.
 - Check out international disaster responses at pda.pcusa.org/international. Look especially for recent ones that children may be hearing about.
 - Find out if your church collects the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. This offering helps fund the ministry of PDA. Find out more about your gifts at work at pda.pcusa.org/page/your-gifts-at-work/.
 - See prayers, litanies, hymns, and other worship resources from PDA at pda.pcusa.org/pray/.

Speak Up, Jeremiah—Jeremiah 1:1-10; 31:31-34

Worship

- Intergenerational Worship Planning
 - ✦ When in worship, do young people have a chance to speak and use their voices? Are there opportunities for children to read Scripture, pass the peace, read liturgy, or lead prayers? Form an intergenerational worship planning team to work together to create opportunities for a variety of people—individually, in pairs, and in small groups—to lead various parts of worship.

Education

- Covenants
 - ✦ Jeremiah spoke about a covenant written on people's hearts. Explore other covenants in the Bible. Look at the covenant God made with Noah in Genesis chapters 6–9. Read “When the World Started Over Again” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 24).
 - ✦ Look at the covenant God made with Moses and the people of Israel in Exodus chapter 20. Read “God Gives the Ten Commandments” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 166).
 - ✦ Read Luke 22:19–20 and wonder when these words are spoken and why Jesus is the new covenant.
 - ✦ Make a poster or banner with symbols representing the covenants: the covenants with Noah and Moses and the covenants that Jeremiah and Jesus talk about.

Connections

- Potter and Clay
 - ✦ Read together Jeremiah 18:1–4. You may want to try the version from *The Message*. Visit a potter and learn how to work and rework clay into a vessel, or watch a video of a potter at bit.ly/ThePotterVideo (3:01).
 - ✦ Give people clay, either potter's clay or modeling clay, and invite them to feel it, manipulate it, mold it, and form shapes with it.
- [Called by Name](#)
 - ✦ When a child is brought into your faith community through baptism, have a group make or give something to represent how God calls that child by name.

Service

- Accessible for All
 - ✦ Consider those who have a harder time hearing God's messages. Does your faith community have good options for those who are hard of hearing or who have trouble seeing? What about those who have mobility issues? Are there ways your faith community could make your worship, study, and service opportunities more accessible for all? Find a way to get an intergenerational group involved in assessing and improving conditions as needed.

🌱 **Goal:** To consider what a prophet might see and say today.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Amos, as we learn in this text, was a shepherd and farmer. God called him from his work to be God's prophet and to remind the Israelites who God was and what God expected of these people God loved. Amos took on the religious and political leaders to remind them of what God saw in their actions when they ignored the evil happening around them and when they failed to do what was good and fair. Reading the book of Amos is not easy. In the words of the prophet, we get a glimpse of God's anger, God's lament on what his people have become, and God's words of doom. This is the larger story of the book from which these selected verses tell this story for children. Yet this God who was outraged by the people is also pictured here as a God of hope who believes God's people can change and can begin to love what is good and hate what is evil.

Connecting with the World

Modern-day prophets come in many forms. A familiar sight on our streets are those who see themselves as God's messengers and who carry signs predicting doom and destruction unless one repents and follows Jesus. There are those who believe God has called them to preach messages of hatred against those who are different from them. Our world is also full of children, teenagers, and adults who seek to live their life in response to God's call to treating others fairly and with kindness. These are people whose messages of love for all is witnessed in the ways they live their lives.

- 🌱 Which prophets do you listen to? What is their message?
- 🌱 What prophetic acts of love, welcome, and inclusion have you witnessed this week?

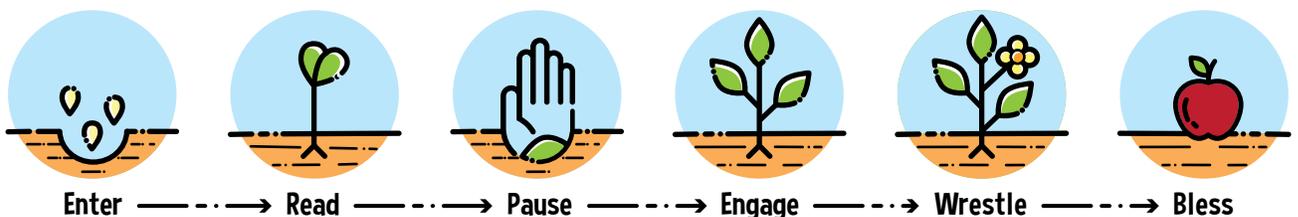
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

"It's not fair!" Children have an innate sense of what's not fair. Just try dividing up the last slice of cake equally among children. All eyes will be watching! God's eyes are always watching us. God's eyes watch the kind things we do for others. God's eyes watch the choices we make. God's eyes watch when we speak up when something is unjust or not fair for others. We support the development of a child's spiritual life when we help them make connections between their sense of fairness and how it relates to living with other people. When we listen to experiences a child has at school or in the neighborhood, we help them see how they can be a prophet with their actions.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Let's just admit it: prophetic work is exhausting. Keeping your ears and eyes open to situations needing God's prophetic work of justice, fairness, and kindness can be overwhelming. There is so much need in our world. But on the other hand, we are not alone. We are part of a family and part of a family of faith. Like the African proverb says, it takes a village to raise a child. Thank God for the villages of support that surround our prophetic work of words and actions. Our spiritual lives are both nurtured and challenged when we wrestle with difficult biblical texts and think about how we respond with our lives. Our prophetic acts may change over the course of our adult lives, but what never changes is God's promise to be with us as we engage in acts of kindness.

God, you love us all equally. Help us see the places that need your words of justice and hope. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Writing and drawing supplies
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Cards cut from Resource Pages 2 and 3
- ✓ Map of your town or area, preferably with local buildings marked
- ✓ Mural paper
- ✓ Sticky notes
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel (Balzer + Bray, 2013) or go to bit.ly/BooksForYoungActivists to find a book with a similar message.

Preparing to Lead

Read the verses from the Bible, Amos 1:1; 4:13; 5:14–15; 7:12. As you read, make notes of any words or phrases that stand out or questions you have. Then read the story “Telling the Truth” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 142). Consider these questions:

- ✓ What does it take for someone to be a prophet, like Amos?
- ✓ Why are the words of prophets hard to hear?

Think about the children you will lead and the community in which you live. Are there issues that connect with Amos's call for justice? Pray for them.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, invite them to gather in the seating area with copies of Resource Page 1 and writing/drawing supplies. Ask them to consider and share a message from God that they think people in your town or area need to hear, using words, pictures, or both.

Invite children to share their message from God with the group. Are there messages that are encouraging? Full of love and grace? Point that out. Are there messages that are more directive? Point that out as well. Tell the children that the story today is about a messenger named Amos who had a message from God that was hard for people to hear. It was hard

to hear not because of how loud or soft it was but because Amos told the truth when people didn't want to hear about it.

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God's presence and pray, inviting children to repeat after you:

O God, /
you make the mountains /
and create the wind. /
You care about each of us. /
Help us care for each other /
and tell your truth. /
Amen. /



Read a story of God's people.

Read aloud the first two sentences of the story, “Telling the Truth” (p. 142). Repeat the questions, and then pause for children to answer with situations of unfairness they may have witnessed at school or elsewhere. Be prepared with an example of your own, if needed.

- ✓ What made the situations unfair?
- ✓ How did it feel at the time? Invite children to name the feelings of those who were not treated fairly, and wonder about those who might be acting unfairly.
- ✓ Did anyone speak up or act in response at the time? Ask them why they did so.

Read the rest of the story about Amos.

If you have older children in your group who are willing readers, invite them to read the story aloud. One child can read the words of Amos. Another can be the narrator. Others can be the “rich people.”



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

Ask the children to think about the story quietly. Invite them to imagine what Amos might have seen to make him angry.

Leading



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Wonder together:

- ✔ What kinds of unfairness do you think Amos might have seen?
- ✔ Why do you think Amos left his farm to share God's message?
- "Fair or Unfair"
 - ✔ Use the scenarios on the cards from Resource Pages 2 and 3 to help children identify fair and unfair situations.
 - ✔ Round One: Invite children to pick a card and read it, and then the group can vote using raised hands or by moving to one side of the room or the other to indicate: fair or unfair. Option: invite children to act out the scenario for the rest of the group, and then vote and discuss.
 - ✔ Round Two: Ask children to pick again. Then they should brainstorm ideas about what a prophet might say or do about the situation, and they can act out those ideas.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Invite children to consider where they see themselves in the story of Amos. Wonder together if prophets are just for Bible times. Ask them if they think they are called to be prophets. Why or why not? Wonder what it might be like to be a prophet today.

- A Message from God, Remixed
 - ✔ Invite children to consider their message from God from the beginning of the session using Resource Page 1. Having learned about Amos and his messages that were hard to hear, what new or additional messages from God would they like to add? Try creating a group message mural together on mural paper. Have someone write "God's Prophets" in the middle, and add the group names around the edges, with their messages from God nearby. Include Amos, and add his message too.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Invite children to share a group blessing in a circle. Start the blessing by turning to the child next to you and saying: "*Name*, do good and not evil." Then invite the next child to turn and do the same, passing the blessing around the circle. Finally try it again, but this time, after you start the blessing in one direction, turn to the child on your other side and say, "*Name*, God is with you." Keep that blessing going around the circle at the same time. End with a group "Amen."

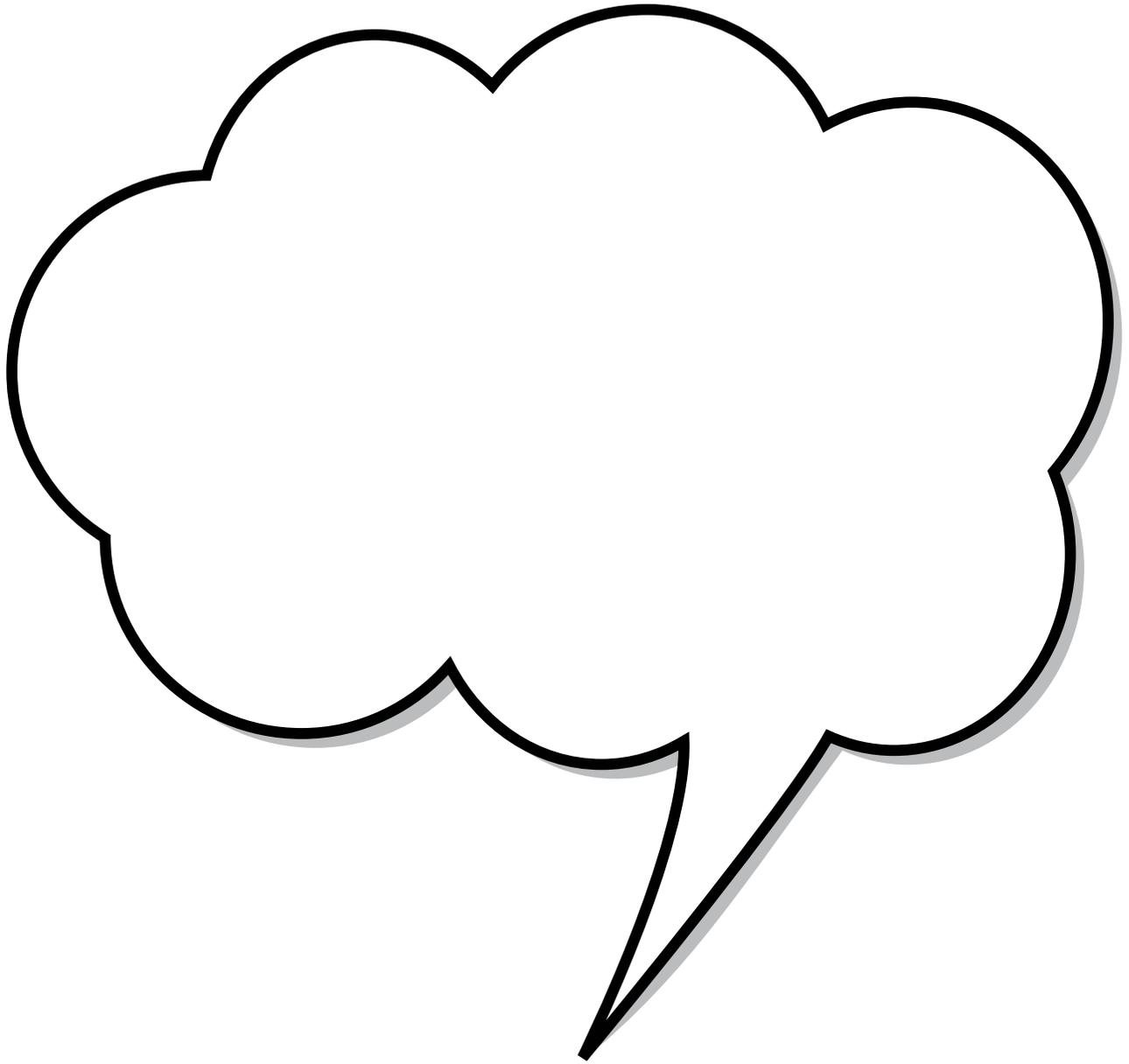


Grow with more.

- Hard to Hear
 - ✔ Play a version of the game Telephone that focuses on the prophets. Gather in a circle and start by whispering a phrase to the child next to you. That child should then whisper to the next child, and so on. Ask the last child to share the phrase out loud. Most phrases will change quite a bit. Try adding an incentive by granting points for every word that remains correct and awarding a prize when a certain number of points is reached. Or, for a large group, form two or more groups and give points to the group that is closest to the original phrase. Talk about how messages from prophets were often hard to hear, whether they were whispered or shouted.
Sample Phrases:
 - Amos was famous for speaking the truth.
 - Great googly moogly, God is so good.
 - Prophets pray for people in power.
 - A noisy noise annoys Amos.
 - Dare to care when life is unfair.
- Justice in the Gate
 - ✔ Talk about Amos's message to "hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate" in Amos 5:15. Describe how, in his time, the space just inside the city gates was the public gathering spot where hearings, court cases, and many decisions of fairness were handled.

Leading

- ✦ Display a map of your town or area (using one with local buildings marked, if possible).
 - Where is the “gate” in your area?
 - Where does your local area need to seek goodness and justice and fairness? The courthouse? Areas where homeless people gather? Schools?
 - ✦ Mark with sticky notes the places the children suggest, and invite them to verbalize why.
 - ✦ Write a group prayer for justice, or form smaller groups and write or draw prayers for each of the areas mentioned.
- A Prophet from History
 - ✦ Share the story of Clara Lemlich, a young woman who led a massive strike of garment workers in 1909 to protest unfair labor practices. Read *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel or watch the YouTube video “Brave Girl” (bit.ly/BraveGirlReadAloud, 8:07).
 - ✦ In what ways was Clara like Amos?



A Message from God

Telling the Truth
Resource Page 2

Your older brother gets to stay up later than you do.

Fair?



Unfair?

The birthday cake slices aren't even, and your friend takes the bigger piece.

Fair?



Unfair?

You save your friend a spot in line for a movie, and then you let her cut in front of you so that you can sit together.

Fair?



Unfair?

You get two birthday presents from your grandmother on your birthday, and your sister gets one.

Fair?



Unfair?

One person in the group always gets extra time to take tests.

Fair?



Unfair?

One person in your group doesn't follow directions, and the whole group has to stay inside for free time.

Fair?



Unfair?

Telling the Truth
Resource Page 3

In your church, people in wheelchairs can't get to the fellowship hour snacks.

Fair?



Unfair?

One side of town has no grocery stores. People without a car have to walk eight blocks to catch a bus to get to the store and then carry all their groceries home.

Fair?



Unfair?

One school in town has a computer for every student to use every day. Another school has computers only in the media room, and students visit once a week.

Fair?



Unfair?

Connecting

What Does God Want? Micah 1:1; 4:1-4; 6:6-8

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible, p. 144

🌱 **Goal:** To follow God's call to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

“What does God Want?” is the title for the story for this session. What a great question for the people of Judah in the eighth century to think about as they heard from the prophet Micah. This prophet saw how people were being oppressed. He witnessed how the wealthy took advantage of people who had very little. He asked the leaders this question: “Isn’t it your job to know justice?” (Mic. 3:1, CEB). His prophetic words pronounced God’s judgment on the leaders because of their evil ways. Micah offered words of hope with the familiar words of peace about a time when there would be no more war (4:1–4).

Then we hear the voice of God speaking to the people of Israel. Read Micah 6:1–5 and notice what God is saying to the people about what God has done for them. In one of the texts for this story, Micah 6:6–8, a representative of the people responds to God with a question that turns into the title for this passage. And God’s people are reminded that what always pleases God and what God really wants is for humans to live faithfully by doing justice, loving and caring for others, and walking with God.

There are some additional resources online to help you explore the text. For a brief commentary on Micah, go to bit.ly/MicahCommentary. For a podcast with professors from Luther Seminary, go to bit.ly/MicahLutherSemPodcast.

Connecting with the World

What does God want from us today? If Micah were speaking to us today, what evils and injustices would he name? What are the places where God’s peace is needed? As you reflect on this prophet, this text, and this story, pause and name those places in your community that call out for justice, kindness, and

walking with God. In what ways is your congregation working with issues of justice and inequality? Become familiar with the ways your church is involved in your community and how children and youth in your congregation can participate in those efforts.

- 🌱 Are there acts of peace needed in helping Muslims, Jews, and Christians learn from one another?
- 🌱 How are inequities of wealth addressed? Are there opportunities for building homes in your community?

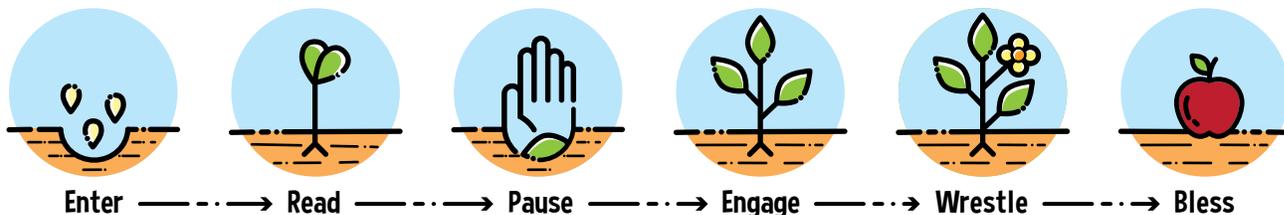
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

Children hear, see, and watch what we do. They know inequity when they see it. They have experiences of people being treated differently. They will be able to connect with Micah’s words to Judah by sharing things they’ve seen. When we live our faith with our children, helping them to make connections with what they see, hear, feel, and experience and with the ways that God wants us to live, then children grow spiritually. A child might ask, “What does God want from me?” The answer is the one we hear in this story: “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.”

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

The larger question of “What does God want?” can be followed with the more personal question of “What does God want of me?” All our lives we live in response to that great question. Each day offers us the opportunities to turn and renounce the sin and evil we see. As important as naming and turning are, equally important are the actions we take and the things we do to act justly, with kindness and love. Children see what we do and how we live our lives.

God of justice and kindness, help us find the paths of walking with you. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Pipe cleaners (several for each child)
- ✓ Three paper lunch bags
- ✓ Name tags
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Card-stock copies of Resource Page 1

Preparing to Lead

Read the verses from the Bible, Micah 1:1; 4:1–4; 6:6–8. Consider the question for yourself: What does God want from me? Spend some quiet time in prayer, asking God to help you clearly hear God's call to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly this week. Which is most difficult for you to do?

Read the story "What Does God Want?" in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 144). When you imagine Micah speaking up, what do you see? Do you have a visual image? If you were to show it on film, how would you arrange the scene? Imagine you were to set the scene in your own hometown. Where would you film it?

As you plan and prepare to lead your group, pray for the children by name.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, invite them to create shapes out of pipe cleaners. Give them the following challenges, with suggestions in parentheses for those who need help:

- ✓ A tree shape (*flat, 3-D*)
- ✓ A symbol of love (*heart, letters L-O-V-E, figures hugging*)
- ✓ A symbol of peace (*dove, peace symbol, figures holding hands*)
- ✓ Something from nature (*flower, butterfly, animals, leaves*)

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God's presence and pray:

Dear God, thank you for all that you give us: trees, flowers, and animals; love and peace. What do you want from us? Help us listen to and learn the words of your messenger Micah. Amen.



Read a story of God's people.

Read the first paragraph of "What Does God Want?" (p. 144). Talk about prophets briefly, using the language in the story. Prophets help us to see what is going on, point out ways we can live as God wants, and understand how God wants us to live together.

Invite children to listen to the rest of the story about Micah the prophet and, as they listen, to create a shape with the pipe cleaners that connects with the story. It might be one small word that they want to illustrate or a bigger idea.



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

Ask the children to spend a few moments in silence, finishing a shape with the pipe cleaners that connects with the story. Encourage them to think about the images Micah used and also the modern-day examples the story mentioned.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Invite the children to share what they made as they were listening. Help the children make connections with the story of Micah. Wonder together:

- ✓ Who was Micah concerned about?
- ✓ What kind of future world did he imagine?
- ✓ What did Micah say God really wants?

○ Swords into Plowshares

- ✓ Read the paragraph from the story on page 144 that starts, "When the world is filled with peace . . ." Now read Micah 4:3b–4 from the NRSV:

Leading

*they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and
under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.*

- What do you think a “plowshare” is? (*the main cutting blade of a plow*)
- What do you think a “pruning hook” is? (*a cutting tool used in gardening, with a hooked blade on a long handle*)
- How would the world be different if weapons were made into farm tools?
- ✎ Invite the children to change their pipe cleaner shapes into something else, like in Micah’s vision (*a sword shape changed into a spade and so forth*). Invite them to share their new creations.



Wrestle with our place in God’s story.

Wonder together how doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly looks in our world today:

- ✎ What does it mean to do justice?
- ✎ What does it look like if someone loves kindness?
- ✎ How does a person walk humbly with God?

○ Person, Place, Problem Skits

- ✎ Label three paper bags: “Person,” “Place,” and “Problem.” Invite the group to generate ideas as a group for the “Problem” box. What problems does God care about today? Try to include issues of justice or peace, such as “war,” “hunger,” “refugees,” and so forth. Write these on index cards and place them in the Problem bag.
- ✎ Then invite children to write an idea on an index card and add it to the Person and Place bags. Person can be someone famous or someone like “mom” or “friend” or “doctor.” Place can be something like “New York City” or something more general like “grocery store.”
- ✎ Make a few name tags that say “Prophet.”
- ✎ Form small groups, and then have each group draw one card from each bag and take one Prophet name tag. Allow a few minutes for the

groups to develop a skit using all three of their cards. At some point in the skit, a prophet must appear.

Have a small group? This exercise can be done with the group working as a whole instead of in groups. Save the boxes to use if you have extra time another week during this unit.



Bless one another with God’s grace.

Invite children to pray, repeating each line after you:

Holy God, /
help us to know what you want. /
Help us to do justice. /
Help us to love kindness. /
Help us to walk humbly with you. /
Amen. /

Invite older children to come up with a simple motion for each phrase: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Invite them to lead the motions as you pray the prayer above or sing the song below.

Try a musical blessing, and sing it in a round. Watch the YouTube video “Hilary Donaldson Leads What Does the Lord Require of You” (bit.ly/WhatDoesTheLordSong, 3:54) to learn the song, and then sing along with the video. This song can also be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #70.



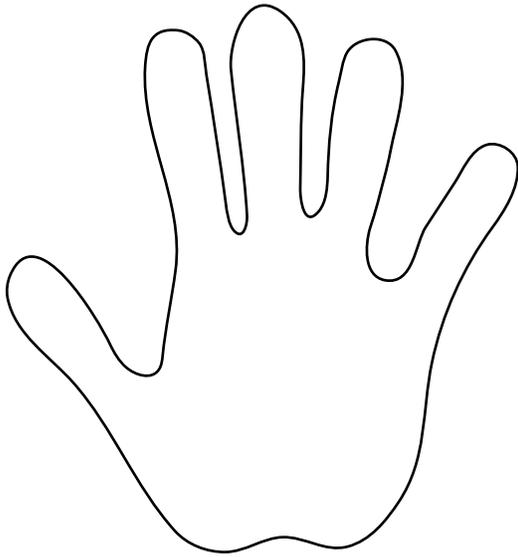
Grow with more.

○ Micah 6:8 Art

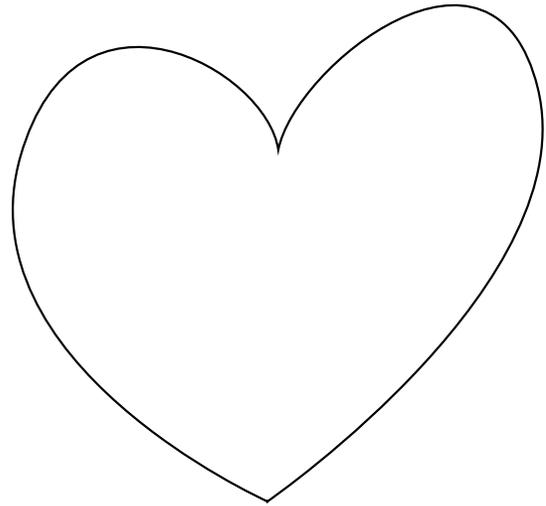
- ✎ Use Resource Page 1 to illustrate Micah 6:8. There are several options.
 - Individual posters: Each child can use the handprint, heart, and footprint to make their own reminder of the verse. They may color them and decorate the page to make a small poster, or they may color and cut out the shapes and then attach them to a piece of construction paper, writing the words by each shape to make a larger poster.

Leading

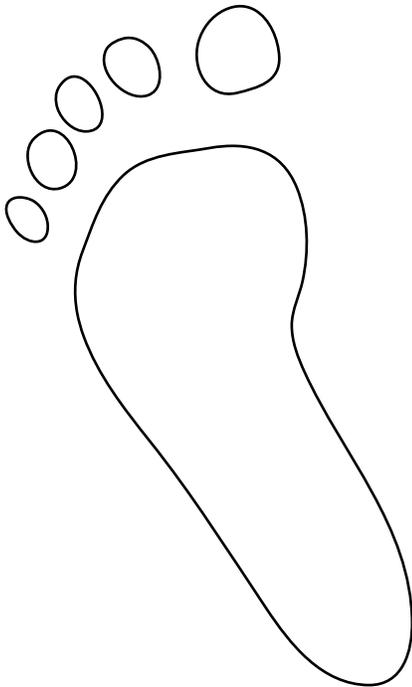
- Group banner: Use paint to make handprints and footprints of each child, paint heart shapes to illustrate the verse, and make a group banner. Use this opportunity to work together as a group when making decisions about the banner. Do they want everyone's handprints, hearts, and footprints to be together, or should they be randomly placed around the banner? Do they want the words by each corresponding shape, or should there be a set of words in the center of the banner with the shapes around them? What other creative ideas do they have for the banner?
- Our Church in Ministry
 - ✦ Engage with a ministry your church is involved in for peace and justice. Do you have a Habitat team or other homeless ministry? Is there a feeding ministry at your church or in your community?
 - ✦ Invite someone to speak to the group about the ministry. What can your group make or do to be a part of the ministry? Some ideas might be to make welcome home cards for new homeowners, make place mats for a feeding ministry meal, or make signs to encourage giving to a special offering for hunger or homelessness.



Do Justice



Love Kindness



Walk Humbly

Goal: To find comfort that we are never alone because God is with us.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

The context for Isaiah's words to Israel is their imprisonment in foreign lands, a place where they think no one remembers them, a place from which they wonder if they will ever escape. But God remembers them, and God's fierce judgment on them has finally ended. Just before Isaiah 43:1-7, we see the context for God's judgment. In Isaiah 42:23-25, the prophet states it so simply: they weren't willing to walk in the ways that God had taught, and they wouldn't listen to God's teaching. So in anger, God exiles them. In Isaiah 43, we see God's forgiveness, God's redemption of the Israelites as God reveals the most intimate side of God's nature. God's words begin so simply: "Don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine" (Isa. 43:1, CEB).

For a commentary on this text, go to bit.ly/Isaiah43Commentary.

those experiencing these forms of imprisonment or challenges is a mark of our faith, and they provide us with opportunities to embody God's words: "I have called you by name; you are mine."

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

In telling the story from Isaiah, "You Are Not Alone," children are invited to think about times when they have been afraid or scared. Reading this story with children offers a great opportunity to hear their stories about times when they felt alone or scared and the ways someone helped them or comforted them. To help them connect with this story, make the abstract concept of God comforting us more concrete by sharing examples. God comforts us and surrounds us with love when a family member holds us close and says I love you, and everything will be OK. Children learn about God's love and care by experiencing the love and care of others.

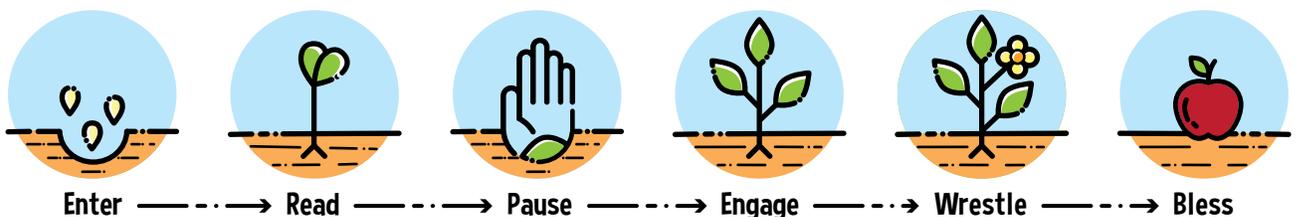
Connecting with the World

When you read a text like this and consider the context in which God is speaking, it just takes your breath away to realize how timely it is for our lives today. Children are separated from families and imprisoned on our borders. Young girls and women are sold in the market of human sex trafficking. Many LGBTQ persons give up on the church because they have experienced it as a place of God's judgment on their humanity, not a place that welcomes them with God's love. Refugees flee violence and political retribution and are placed in refugee camps for many years. Our prisons have many persons who have been wrongly convicted and live out a sentence in a land that is foreign to them. Some churches don't know how to include and welcome children with mental or physical challenges. How we respond in love to

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

The title of this story, "You Are Not Alone," is certainly one of the most comforting phrases we can say to another or hear for ourselves. When you lose a friend or loved one; when a job, a promotion, or a marriage fails; when you struggle with anxiety or depression; or when your child is having a difficult time, the comforting words of God in Isaiah sustain us. We, too, experience times when waters and fires of life threaten to overwhelm us. As Christians, we have faith that God, who calls us each by name, the God who claims us as God's own, this God of love says to us then and now, "I will be with you" (Isa. 43:2, CEB). Pause and think about those times in your life when rivers threatened to overwhelm you. How has your life of faith been strengthened by knowing that you are not alone?

God who calls us each by name, we are comforted in knowing we are never alone. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 2
- ✓ Paper plates
- ✓ Prepared list of items for “We Are with You” kits
- ✓ Poster board

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible in Isaiah 43:1–7. Then read the story, “You Are Not Alone” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 146). Take a few minutes to consider those people you know who might feel alone or afraid. Consider these questions:

- ✓ What are the situations today that leave those involved feeling overwhelmed and in need of comfort? They might be part of a large national or international news story, or they might be much closer to home.
- ✓ Consider, too, the children in your group and others in your faith community.
- ✓ Pray for the people who have come to mind.
- ✓ Is there a person or group of people you feel called to hold in prayer throughout the week?

If you will be making posters to gather items for “We Are with You” kits in “Grow with More,” check with local organizations (police or fire stations, shelters, or schools) to see what items are most needed for children who have been through traumatic or catastrophic events, such as a fire, flood, car accident, or serious personal or family illness. Items may include school supplies, clothing, personal hygiene items, or comfort items, such as stuffed animals, soft blankets, or toys. Prepare a list that children can use when making their posters.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, give them a copy of Resource Page 1, “When I Feel Alone.” Ask them to fill in just the middle box: “A time I felt alone . . .” using words or pictures. Fill one out for yourself to share if they need help getting started. Children may share with the group if they wish.

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God’s presence and pray, inviting the children to repeat after you:

God of love, /
help us hear and know /
that you are always with us /
when we feel alone. /
Amen. /

Ask children to turn their paper over to the other side and use it as drawing paper to illustrate anything related to the story as they listen. You will return to the boxes later in the session.

Be mindful of situations in your group that might be triggered by the mention of floods and fires or times of isolation and aloneness. If you need to talk in advance with a family or dig deeper into particular local experiences of God being with us during trying times, take the time to do so.



Read a story of God's people.

Tell the children that they will hear messages today from the prophet Isaiah. Some Bible scholars believe that the book of Isaiah is a collection of stories and writings about three different prophets covering many years of history. The people who collected the stories and put the books of the Bible together have called them all Isaiah, because they are connected. Here’s a brief time line to share. Keep it quick and simple, and see an active option below:

- ✓ The people of God were living in the promised land.
- ✓ They tried to follow God and keep the commandments, but often they forgot.
- ✓ The nation had divided into two kingdoms: Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah).
- ✓ Both kingdoms were invaded, and many people were taken away from their homes to live in foreign lands. We call this “exile.”
- ✓ The prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of Judah who were in exile in Babylon.

Leading

Ask older children to help set the story in history with a statue exhibit. For each of the bullet points above, ask a small group to pose as statues illustrating the point.

Read the story “You Are Not Alone” from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (p. 146).

Invite an older child to read the words of the prophet Isaiah in the third paragraph of the story, or let multiple children take turns reading the sentences in order.



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

Invite the children to think quietly about what it must have felt like for the people of God to be living in exile, unable to go home. Invite them to consider if any people they know may be in that situation now.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God’s story.

Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✦ Why did Isaiah need to give people hope and encouragement?
- ✦ What were his comforting words?
- ✦ How do you think the people felt when they heard Isaiah’s words?
- ✦ When you are afraid or facing difficulties, how might it change your feelings if you heard Isaiah’s words?

Have the children fill out the bottom, left square on their “When I Feel Alone” paper.

○ Origami Messages

- ✦ Hand out copies of Resource Page 2, paper, and drawing supplies to create origami messages from God. Walk the children through the steps to make the pull-tab origami envelope. The children may want to practice folding an envelope and then open it up, write their message, and fold the paper again. Encourage the children to include Isaiah’s words, suggested on

the Resource Page, as part of the message. The paper could hold a message for the child who makes it, or they could make one or more to give to someone else who might feel alone or afraid.

You may want to show the YouTube video “‘Pull Tab’ Letter Folding (Origami)” (bit.ly/PullTabOrigamiVideo, 3:45) to watch how the envelope is made.



Wrestle with our place in God’s story.

Using Resource Page 2, have children fill in the remaining boxes:

- ✦ Something I’m afraid of . . .
- ✦ What helps me when I’m afraid . . .
- ✦ Who else might feel alone or afraid . . .

Invite the children to talk about what they have written or drawn. Wonder who or what has helped them in times of fear or loneliness. Ask the children if there were specific people doing or saying specific things that helped them during these times. Suggest that one of the ways we experience God’s love and care is by experiencing the love and care of others. Help the children connect the love and care they receive with what they have put in their boxes.

○ “Floods and Fires and Fears, Oh My!” Game

- ✦ Give each child a paper plate. Have them write their name in the center. Around it have them write or draw things they fear. Generate some ideas as a group if you need to (spiders, the dark, robbers, fire, etc.) Spend a few minutes sharing these together. Talk about how our family of faith can help us remember that we are not alone when we face our fears.
- ✦ Line the group up at one end of an open space. Tell them that they are on the edge of a flooded river, with a raging fire behind them. They must work together to get everyone across. All they have are the rocks they have just made (their name papers.) How can they use the rocks and one another to get across? Afterward, discuss how the family of faith can help one another in scary times.

For a larger group, form smaller groups to cross the river. Younger students may need an extra rock and some suggestions to work together. Older students may need additional challenges: Consider removing one rock or adding a rule that the rocks must be touched at all times, or else they will sink with the current. This game is sometimes called “Lava River,” and variations can be found online.



Bless one another with God’s grace.

Close by teaching breath prayers. Show children how to breathe in slowly while praying the first phrase of a prayer, silently or aloud, and then breathe out slowly while praying the second phrase of a prayer. Tell them that this kind of meditative deep breathing and praying is also a wonderful way to focus when they may be afraid. Provide these sample breath prayers, or encourage them to think up one of their own:

- ✦ Do not fear. . . . I am with you.
- ✦ I have called you by name. . . . You are mine.
- ✦ I am the Lord your God. . . . I love you.



Grow with more.

○ Concordance Search

- ✦ Use an online concordance with the children to find out how many times the phrases “Don’t be afraid” (bit.ly/DontBeAfraidCEB) and “Do not fear” (bit.ly/DoNotFearNRSV) are found in the Bible. Choose and explore one or more of the references you have found that remind the people of God not to be afraid.

If you’d like to show the children how to use an online concordance, go to www.biblegateway.com. In the search bar on the left at the top of the page, type in the word or phrase you’d like to search for. Put quotation marks around a phrase to find that exact wording. In the search bar on the right, choose a Bible version, such as New Revised Standard Version or Common English Bible.

Younger children can look through *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* to find pictures of people who might be afraid or stories with fire or water in the pictures. Confident readers can check out the following stories: “When Things Get Really Scary” (p. 34), “Walking on Dry Land” (p. 94), “How Close Is God?” (p. 174), “Calming the Storm” (p. 266), and others.

○ We Are with You

- ✦ Talk with the children about inviting the congregation to donate items for “We Are with You” kits for children who have been through traumatic or catastrophic events, such as a fire, flood, car accident, or serious personal or family illness.
- ✦ Show them the list that you have prepared. Determine what needs to go on the posters, such as when and where the items should be gathered, what is needed, and where the items will go.
- ✦ Form groups of two or three children to make a poster to display around the church to invite people to donate necessary items. Have the children make cards as well, to include with each kit.
- ✦ Comment to the children that a small bag with a card and item(s) might help a child who feels alone or afraid know that God is with them during this difficult time.
- ✦ Follow up on this activity, gathering the donated items, placing them in bags with the cards that were made, and delivering the kits.

Origami Messages

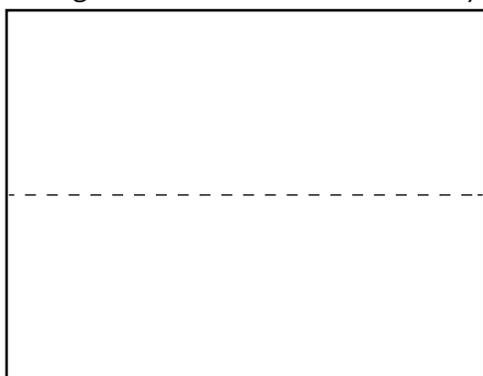
What message from God do you want to share with someone else? Write and illustrate a message from God. You could choose some words from Isaiah such as these:

Do not fear! I have called you by name. I will be with you!

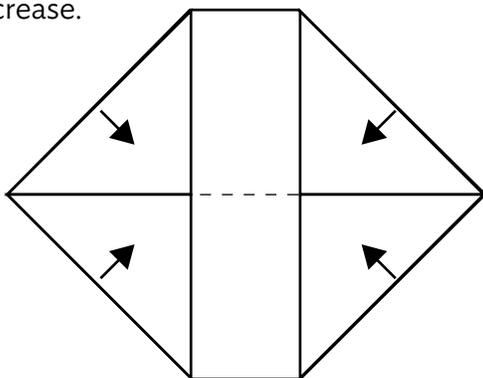
Follow the instructions below to fold the note.

Pull-Tab Origami Message Instructions

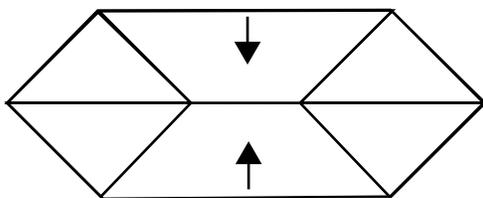
1. Using 8 ½" x 11" inch paper, write your message then fold in half horizontally.



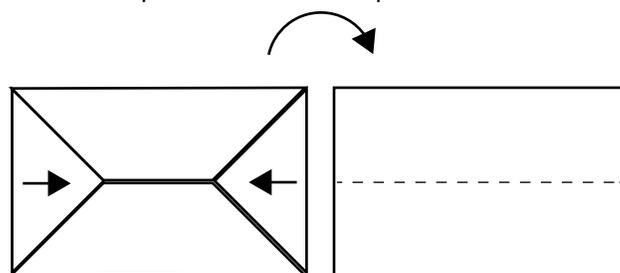
2. Fold all four corners to the center fold and crease.



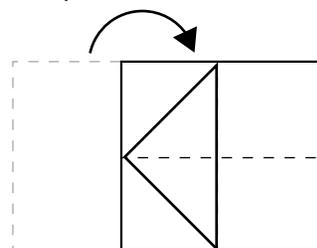
3. Fold the top and bottom edges to the center fold and crease.



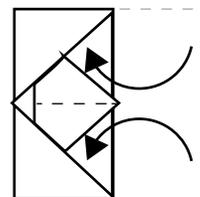
4. Fold the right and left points in to meet the other flaps then crease. Flip over.



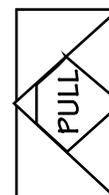
5. Fold the left side in about halfway so that the triangle point points out. Crease edge.



6. Fold the right side in, tucking the corners into the pockets fold. Crease.



7. Label where to pull, and then decorate the outside of your note. Pass on your message to someone else!



Something I'm afraid of ...

What helps me when I'm afraid ...

A time I felt alone ...

What God says ...

Who else might feel alone or afraid ...

✦ **Goal:** To practice speaking up for others.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

The first text, Jeremiah 1:1–10, provides a brief summary of the book and introduces us to Jeremiah and his call from God to be a prophet. Like other prophets, Jeremiah resisted, claiming he was too young. With God’s promise to give him words and to always be with him, God sends him out “to dig up and pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant” (Jer. 1:10, CEB).

The second text provides us with prophecies of God’s intention for Israel and Judah. God promises to make a new covenant with God’s people. This is a reference to the previous covenants. The first covenant was the one God made with Noah, in the sign of the rainbow, promising to never again destroy the earth. Then God made a covenant with the Israelites after they followed God’s path out of Egypt. The covenant, written as the Ten Commandments, ended when the Israelites broke their relationship with God. Here we read how God forgave Israel and Judah and made a new covenant with them. This covenant would not be written on clay tablets but would be written on their hearts so that they would remember it.

For a commentary on this text, go to bit.ly/JeremiahCovenantCommentary.

Connecting with the World

- ✦ What places in your world need to hear your voice speak out?
- ✦ Where are the places where your church is involved in building, planting, and sharing God’s love?
- ✦ What evidence is there in your community that people of faith know God?
- ✦ Visit an elementary school for a day. What do you notice about how kindness and love are

shown by administrators, teachers, and children? What prophetic words do you hear from children?

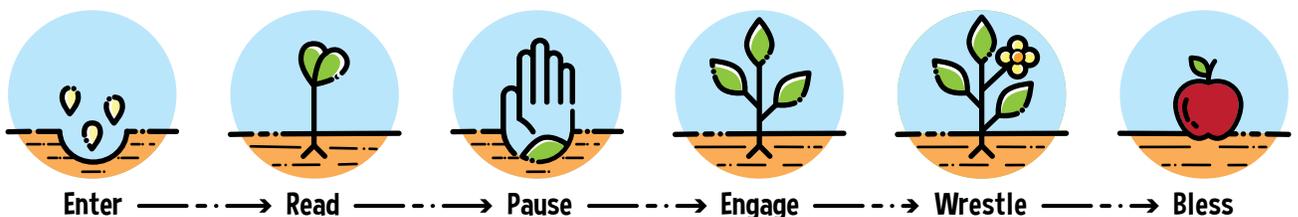
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

“Speak Up, Jeremiah” is a great story to help children remember that their voice counts and their actions matter. Jeremiah thought he was too young to be God’s prophet and to bring God’s words to the Israelites, but God promised Jeremiah that he could speak and people would listen to him. God gave Jeremiah both some hard words to say and some comforting words. Hearing the story of Jeremiah, children can be reminded that God needs them to step up when they see someone being treated badly. God needs their voice to offer kind words when mean words are being used. God needs them to show love to someone who is alone or afraid. By acting in these ways, children’s spiritual loves are strengthened as God’s words of love and forgiveness are written on their hearts.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

This story invites us to consider two aspects of our own lives of faith. Look again at Jeremiah 1:10 and the prophetic work God assigned Jeremiah. As you think about your own spiritual life, what needs digging up? Is there a spiritual practice that needs to be rethought or refreshed? What is your practice of prayer, or listening for God’s voice in the created world? When do you have the time to sit with the Bible and a text like this, listening for God’s call to you? What new practices may need to be planted? Is there a spiritual practice that you can try with a child? Blessings on your life of faith, and remember Jeremiah’s promise!

God, open my ears and eyes and give me voice to speak up for the places in your world that need your love. Amen.



Leading

Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Newsprint
- ✓ Smartphone or tablet with video recording
- ✓ Card-stock copies of Resource Page 2
- ✓ Prepared river rocks, painted with a base coat
- ✓ Paint pens or permanent markers

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, Jeremiah 1:1–10 and Jeremiah 31:31–34. Then read the story, “Speak Up, Jeremiah” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 148). Consider these questions:

- ✓ What does it mean to you that God knows you and has called you by name? Consider that God has called you to be teaching children this lesson for a reason. You have something important to say!
- ✓ Who taught you that God knows and loves you and has given you gifts to share? Say a prayer of thanksgiving for them.
- ✓ Pray for the children in your group, trusting that God will give you the words to say as you teach them.

If you choose to paint “prophet rocks” in “Grow for More,” paint river rocks with a base coat with light-colored acrylic paint or spray paint prior to the session.



Enter into sacred space together.

As children arrive, invite them to use paper and drawing supplies to draw something that they couldn't do when they were younger but now can. Some suggestions may be tying shoes, reading, playing soccer, playing an instrument, writing their name, and so forth. Have the children share their pictures with one another.

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God's presence and pray, inviting the children to repeat after you:

God of all people, /
give us ears to hear /
and eyes to see /

and words to say /
to share your love, /
no matter our age. /
Amen. /



Read a story of God's people.

Read the first paragraph of “Speak Up, Jeremiah” (p. 148). As you read questions in this paragraph, allow children to respond. Have an example ready to share from your life. Use the following prompts for conversation:

- ✓ When or where have you heard, “Children should be seen and not heard?” Do you think it is true? Why or why not?
- ✓ Do you ever get nervous speaking in public? Public speaking is always high on the list of people's fears. Why do you think that is?

Read the rest of the story.



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

Ask children to think quietly for a few moments about places and times where children might need to speak up about something God cares about. Invite them to imagine where God would send Jeremiah today. Suggest that they may turn over their papers from “Enter” and write or draw their thoughts.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Wonder together:

- ✓ When have you felt like Jeremiah did when he thought he was too young to do what God was asking?
- ✓ Why do you think some people were mean to Jeremiah?
- ✓ What helped Jeremiah keep going?
- ✓ What other stories—in the Bible, in history, or about people today—do you know where God gave people the right words to say?

○ Prophet Ad-Libs

- ✓ Hand out sheets of paper and pencils. Have the children write the numbers 1–20 down the side of the paper. Read the following list, and tell them to write their answers by each

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corresponding number on the paper. Have children help one another with writing as necessary.

1. your name
2. your birthdate
3. your favorite color
4. food you like
5. candy you like
6. a vacation spot
7. a beautiful place
8. people who need help
9. somewhere there could be war
10. a problem in the world
11. your name again
12. adjective
13. a greeting
14. a silly word
15. something Jesus would say
16. something God wants people to do
17. someone in your group
18. someone in your family
19. someone famous
20. something scary

- Give each child a copy of Resource Page 1 and form pairs of older and younger children to work together, filling in their answers in the appropriate places to write messages from God based on God's call to Jeremiah. Invite them to read their papers to one another or to the whole group, if you have time.

If you have a small group, or a group with mostly nonreaders or nonwriters, fill in the "Prophet Ad-Libs" as a whole group. Invite the children to take turns giving an answer to the numbered items. Instead of filling in one name, put all group names in that blank, and leave out the birthdate.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Ask the children where they see themselves in the story of Jeremiah. Wonder together how God might be calling them to speak up about the things God cares about.

- Speaking Up
 - Brainstorm some current problems that God cares about and write them on a sheet of

newsprint. Some ideas might be hungry people, poor people, sad or lonely people, people who are refugees, people who are fighting, and people who are bullied. Invite children to use their voices in different ways to share God's messages. You may want to set up several stations and let the children choose which one or more of the following activities they would like to do:

- #60secondchallenge: Using a smartphone or tablet, record children speaking for sixty seconds on a topic that is important to God. Have a countdown timer visible. Have children work together and practice. One child could speak while another films, two or more children could speak, or one child could interview another.
- Cue card video: Have children write a message from God on a series of cue cards. Use poster board or card stock. Video them sharing their message on the cue cards without talking.
- Doorknob hangers: Provide drawing supplies, such as markers, crayons, and colored pencils. Hand out card-stock copies of Resource Page 2 to create doorknob hangers for the children to take home or place around your church.
- Prophet hashtags/bumper stickers: Provide drawing supplies. Invite the children to create a hashtag message or a bumper sticker with a message from God.
- Prophet raps: Create a rap about one of the issues that was brainstormed. Work with the children to write a first line together. For example: God wants us to **love**/There is just too much **hate**/All children need to **eat**. Next, develop a list of words that rhyme with the bold word: (**love**: of, dove, above, shove/**hate**: eight, fate, great, straight/**eat**: cheat, heat, meat, complete). Finally, invite children to write more lines using the rhyming words. Help them keep the rap connected with what God wants. Find or create a rap beat, and let them share their message!



Bless one another with God's grace.

Close using the following litany. Invite the children to respond, "We will" to each prompt. Invite volunteers to read the "One" parts.

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One: God says, “Go and speak my truth.”

All: We will.

One: Tell the truth to God’s people.

All: We will.

One: Tell them: change your ways!

All: We will.

One: Tell them: listen to God!

All: We will.

One: Tell them: God is love!

All: We will.

One: Amen.



Grow with more.

○ Prophet Rocks

- ✎ Read, or ask for a volunteer to read, Jeremiah 31:31–34 aloud. The Scripture is about God’s new covenant being written on the hearts of God’s people. Invite the children to paint rocks with hearts and a message from God and to leave them somewhere around the church or your community for others to find. Brainstorm messages together, and write them on a sheet of newsprint for children to copy. Some suggestions might be:
 - God is with you.
 - Love one another.
 - Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.
 - Love your neighbor.
 - God is love.
- ✎ Using paint pens or permanent markers, write a message and decorate the rocks.

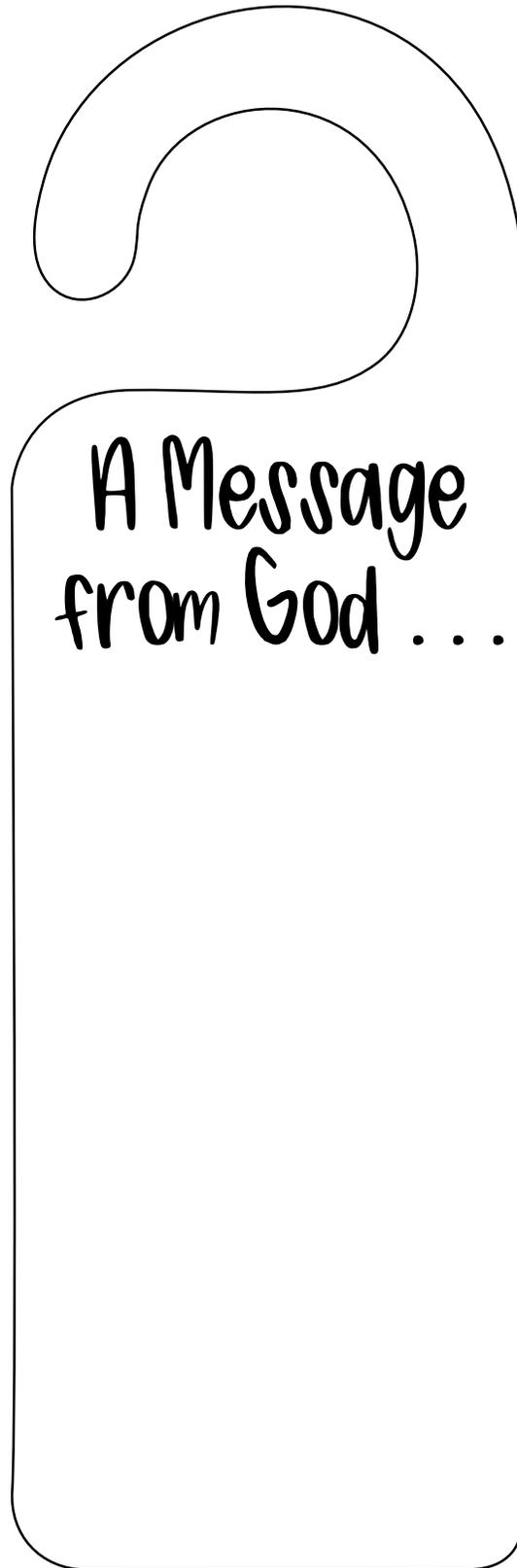
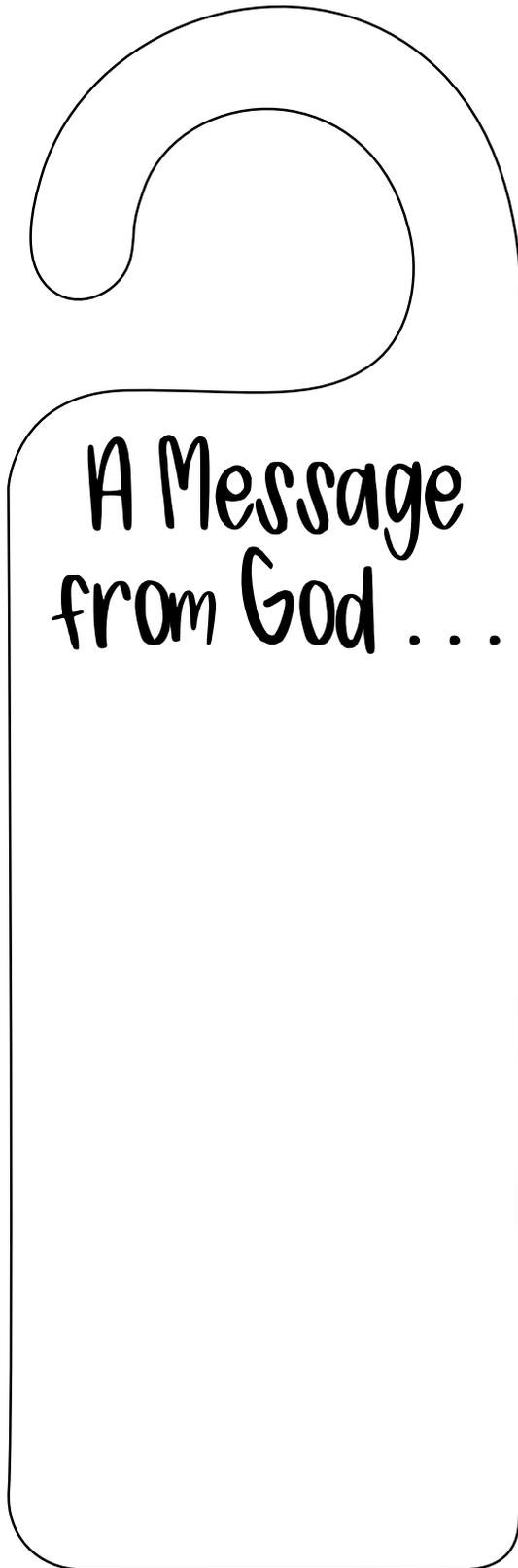
○ Biblical and Modern Prophets

- ✎ On a sheet of newsprint, draw a vertical line. On one side at the top, write: biblical Prophets. On the other side, write: Modern Prophets. Ask the group to name some biblical prophets, and add their names to the list. Include the ones from this unit (Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah).
- ✎ Wonder together who might be some prophets from history or modern-day prophets. Wonder who has spoken up and used their voice to share an important message. Add these names to the list.
- ✎ Then ask specifically about young people, making the connection to Jeremiah’s youth. There are young activists like Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, students from Parkland High School, and others.
- ✎ Comment that just like in biblical times, prophetic voices are not without their critics, as well as their fans. Wonder together:
 - How do prophets in every age face difficulty sharing their message?
 - How are these young activists like biblical prophets? How are they different?
 - Can someone who speaks about climate change or gun control be a prophet if they don’t mention God? Why or why not?

Speak Up, Jeremiah
Resource Page 1

Fill in the blanks with your answers to the corresponding numbers. Read the result out loud!

Now the word of the Lord came to _____ (1. your name) saying: "I knew you before you were born on _____ (2. your birthdate). I know your favorite color is _____ (3. favorite color) and I know you love to eat _____ (4. food you like) and _____ (5. candy you like). I know you care about the world and places like _____ (6. a vacation spot) and _____ (7. a beautiful place). I know you care about people like _____ (8. people who need help) and places like _____ (9. somewhere there could be war). I know you care about _____ (10. a problem in the world) see your heart, _____ (11. your name). You can be a messenger and a prophet! Don't think 'I am too young and too _____ (12. adjective) to be a prophet.' I will be with you! I will give you the words to say. Not just words like _____ (13. a greeting) or _____ (14. a silly word). I will give you messages from me like _____ (15. something Jesus would say) and _____ (16. something God wants people to do). You can speak my words to people like _____ (17. someone in your group), _____ (18. someone in your family), and even _____ (19. someone famous). Don't be afraid of _____ (20. something scary) or of speaking like a prophet. I am with you," says the Lord.



A Story Bible Curriculum features

- sessions based on 148 stories from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- 35 units in 3, 4, or 5 sessions that cover large biblical stories, key people in the Bible, or biblical themes
- intergenerational activities for use at church or home
- unit overview that explains how these stories connect with one another and our faith
- helps for leaders to connect the biblical story with our world and the spiritual lives of children and adults
- a free downloadable at-home kit guide with instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation

multiage
stillness seeking
wonder filled
curiosity driven

relational
exploratory
imaginative

fun
intergenerational
growth encouraging

collaborative
compassionate
community oriented

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum