Growing in God's Love

A Family Devotional

Jessica Miller Kelley, Editor

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"This is the kind of devotional families can grow with—not recover from. *Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional* is expansive, inclusive, and deeply rooted in a faith that makes space for curiosity, justice, and wonder. The stories center on voices often left out—women who resist, chosen families, people wrestling with what's fair. Each devotion invites children (and their grown-ups) to reflect on what it means to live as God's people today. With language that honors all kinds of families and questions that invite action, this devotional is a gift for anyone raising children with a faith that liberates rather than confines."

—Daneen Akers, author of *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* and *Dear Mama God*

"*Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional* is exactly the kind of resource families have been asking me about for years. It is grounded, imaginative, and wonderfully easy to use. With accessible reflections and thoughtful invitations to engage, this devotional draws families into Scripture and faith practice in a way that is both meaningful and sustainable. It is a resource families will return to again and again on their journey of faith. What a treasure!"

—Traci Smith, author of *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home* and director of Family Faith Every Day

"I love this book! As a parent whose faith has deconstructed and evolved, I believe *Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional* is a godsend. It is hopeful, reflective, and truly safe for the whole family to enjoy together. Each reading offers parents an easy way to start important conversations, inspire hope and kindness, and add a little 'good news' to everyday life."

—Matthew Paul Turner, *New York Times* best-selling author of *What Is God Like?* and *When God Made You*

"At last! An inclusive, thought-provoking, well-written devotional that will be welcomed by progressive pastors and parents alike. *Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional* invites readers on a journey through the Bible, offering fresh, thoughtful, relatable perspectives on its complex perennial tales."
—Glenys Nellist, award-winning author of *I Wonder: Exploring God's Grand Story* and the Love Letters from God series

"Talking to our children about faith, specifically Scripture, can be challenging. Many of the stories found in the Bible are not designed for children, and many of the ways we've been taught to interpret them only makes the process more difficult. That's why I am thrilled to recommend *Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional.* While many devotionals are a dime a dozen, not this one. *Growing in God's Love* takes a careful, thoughtful approach to Scripture and does so while interpreting the Bible in better, more just, and generous ways. You won't regret making this resource part of your family's practice!"
—Josh Scott, pastor and author of *Cross-Examined: Reading the Bible in Times of Division* and *Parables: Putting Jesus's Stories in Their Place*

"Finally, a family devotion book that speaks to the *whole* family. Whether you're five, fifteen, or fifty-five, *Growing in God's Love* serves as a simple but gentle companion and guide on a lifelong journey. This is a book that will grow with families, setting the foundation for faithful conversation, active discipleship, and thoughtful engagement with God's Word active both in Scripture and in the world."
—Amy Lindeman Allen, Associate Professor of New Testament, Christian Theological Seminary, and author of *The Gifts They Bring: How Children in the Gospels Can Shape Inclusive Ministry*

"As a progressive pastor and parent, I'm constantly looking for resources that help families grow together in faith, deepen

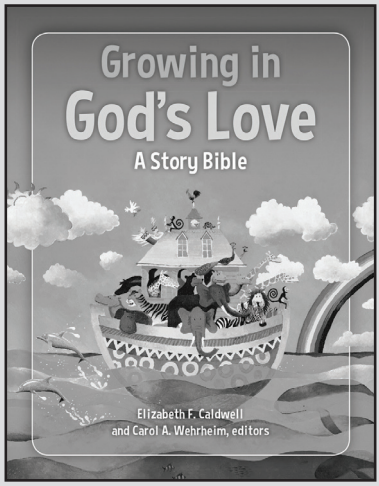
their understanding of God's love, and spark meaningful conversations across generations. *Growing in God's Love* is exactly that kind of resource. This beautifully crafted devotional offers accessible, thoughtful, and theologically grounded reflections that engage both children and adults. Its inclusive language, attention to diversity, and imaginative storytelling make it a breath of fresh air in the world of family devotionals. Each entry invites families into prayer, reflection, and action, fostering not only spiritual growth but also deeper connection with one another. I highly recommend *Growing in God's Love* to anyone seeking to nurture a household rooted in compassion, curiosity, and the transformative love of God."

—Caleb J. Lines, co-executive director of the Center for Progressive Christianity and author of *Awakened: A 52-Week Progressive Christian Devotional*

"I have recommended *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* to families and seminary students who will minister with families since it came out in 2019. *Growing in God's Love: A Family Devotional* is the perfect companion to the *Story Bible*. Like the *Story Bible*, it is accessible yet manages also to share the unfathomable depth of God's love and humans' relationship with God using Scripture as the road map. As families seek to incorporate their faith into practices at home, the accessibility, simplicity, and poignancy of *Growing in God's Love*: *A Family Devotional* will be a valuable asset. The devotions help young and old(er) alike to think deeply and welcome the Spirit into shaping our faith as we grow. The questions and activities help us connect in new and creative ways. There is no guilt, only the empowerment to practice faith across the generations at home. This devotional is a beautiful gift for Christian families."

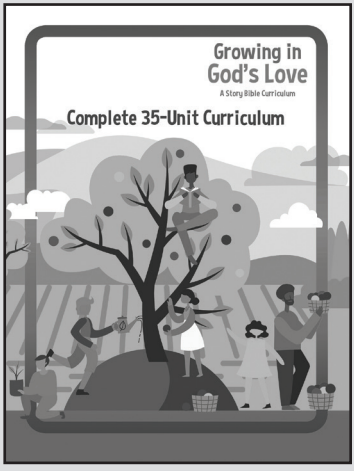
—Emily A. Peck, Visiting Professor of Christian Formation and Young Adult Ministry, Wesley Theological Seminary, and author of *Arm in Arm with Adolescent Girls: Educating into the New Creation*

Every Story, Every Lesson–
All in One Powerful Collection



Help nurture the faith of the children in your life with *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*. This engaging resource features 150 popular Bible stories that are organized by thirteen themes, including "Strong Women and Men," "Listening for God," "Parables," "Healings and Miracles," and more. *Growing in God's Love* features diverse artwork from more than twenty artists to appeal to a variety of ages and learning styles. Three reflection questions—Hear, See, Act—are included at the end of each story to help children further ponder the message of the story.

Designed to spark curiosity and deepen faith, *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible Curriculum* brings the stories of the Bible to life for children ages 5–10. This engaging, multiage curriculum is a companion to the best-selling *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* and offers 148 lesson plans organized into thirty-five thoughtfully crafted units.



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Making the Most of This Book

For busy parents, the list of things we want to do with and for our families is generally infinitely longer than the amount of time and energy we have to accomplish such things. Investing in the faith development of our kids—and ourselves—often falls by the wayside in the midst of so many other priorities. Getting everybody out the door for an hour of church on Sundays is overwhelming enough—and might even be something you've chosen to set aside in favor of more peaceful family time.

This devotional book is designed to make meaningful conversations about faith a simple addition to your family's schedule. The devotions are short and have flexible components so that you can determine what works for your family. Use these devotions over dinner or before bedtime, daily or once a week, to guide your family in exploring how God has been at work in our world since the time of creation and how we can be a part of God's work today. You don't need to be an expert on the Bible or a perfect example of Christian faith. This book is an

opportunity for adults and kids alike to discover more about God, one another, and faithful living in God's world. Each devotion involves three components:

SCRIPTURE

Bible stories are the starting point for each devotion—not because the Bible answers all our questions but because it invites us to wrestle with ideas, choices, and challenges just as God's people living thousands of years ago did. These are the stories that our faith was built on, and while times are very different, God's relationship with humanity is a story that goes on and on. Engaging our imagination while reading Scripture allows us to consider what these stories have meant to people across time and space and discover their meaning for our lives today. Some stories may be familiar to you, learned in Sunday school or from a preacher's sermon, while others may seem brand new.

Begin by reading the focus Scripture aloud, either from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (page numbers are provided) or from the Bible translation of your choice. You may want to refer to both versions of the story, letting younger children look at the illustrations in the story Bible while an adult or older child reads the Scripture passage. Practice together how to locate Scriptures by book, chapter, and verse.

G*rowing in God's Love: A Story Bible* and *The Westminster Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*, referenced in the development of these devotions, both reflect the recent thinking and writing of contemporary biblical scholars, so you may see some new interpretations of familiar stories. The devotions are ordered to give readers a sense of the Bible's overall narrative, how one story leads to another in a journey of faith that is both part of history and outside of it. Some devotions featuring Jesus' parables are interspersed among devotions featuring

Old Testament stories, both for variety and to emphasize connections between Jesus' storytelling and his Jewish tradition.

You'll notice that more devotions are drawn from the Bible's first two books, Genesis and Exodus, than other books in the Old Testament. This is because these stories are foundational for Jewish people's sense of identity and thus the religious formation of Jesus and the Scripture that our two traditions share. Plus, it's hard to find any section of the Bible that features more on family dynamics than Genesis 12–50! Themes that emerge in the epic story of Abraham and Sarah and the generations that follow make excellent conversation starters for modern families.

REFLECTION

Following the Scripture, read the reflection out loud. One person can read, or you can pass the book around and take turns reading. Each reflection aims to provide context for understanding the Scripture's meaning and connect the age-old story to our lives today. Such connections may be very practical, concerning how we relate to other people, or more spiritual, concerning our identity as God's children and how God works in the world.

Each devotion is around three hundred words and should take no more than a minute or two to read. They are written to engage with adults and kids alike, though you might need to explain some words to younger elementary children. Some devotions highlight a key word that is important for conversations about faith.

RESPONSE

You will also find in each devotion three opportunities to respond to what you've read together: Discuss, Discover, and Do.

- "Discuss" is a question or prompt that each person can answer. Invite each person to share their thoughts—there are no wrong answers! Let conversation flow from there for as long as your schedule allows.
- "Discover" is a challenge to investigate something further—maybe in a book or on a map, maybe somewhere else in your Bible, maybe by phoning a friend or searching the internet.
- "Do" is a suggested action you can take to make the devotion's lesson tangible. It might be something creative and crafty you can do at home, or it could be a way of serving people out in the world. You might be able to do it right away, or you may need to make a plan to do it another time.

You may want to try all three—Discuss, Discover, and Do—or you can read the options and pick one together. Figure out what works for you based on the ages, attention spans, and interests of your family members!

Close your special time together by reading the prayer provided or letting someone offer their own prayer. Enjoy this time of listening together for the ways that God continues to speak, through the Bible and through our lives.

The Devotions

Part of God's Story

Read Psalm 19
or "Listening for God" (*Story Bible*, p. 163)

Did you know that we have something in common with people who lived thousands of years ago? Farmers who hoped for rain, parents celebrating a new baby, children wondering where the sun goes at night . . . we are all part of God's story! Everyone who talks to God, wonders about God, asks what God wants—everyone who God created—is part of God's story.

People have been talking about God since before there were things to write with. Some parts of God's story have been written down for us to read, and other parts we discover as we go, following God just as people have been doing since the beginning.

The Bible is a collection of writings about God and God's people. Some people say it's like a library, with books of history, books of poetry, books of wise teachings, and more. Some people say the Bible is like a quilt made up of many colors and kinds of fabrics, with threads that run throughout and tie the stories together. The Bible is the work of many different people, all sharing their ideas about God and stories of how God and people relate to each other.

The part of the Bible that Christians call the Old Testament is also Jewish Scripture, full of wisdom about how God's people were to live together and how they were to treat other people. These were the stories and lessons Jesus learned growing up as a Jewish child. The New Testament includes stories of Jesus' life

and teachings, plus letters and other things written by Jesus' first followers.

The Bible contains a lot of stories about God, but it alone cannot contain God's story—there's too much to say, too much to learn. As your family reads and prays together, remember that you are part of something big—a God-sized story that goes on and on.

Discuss: What do you wonder about God?

Discover: How many Bibles are in your house? How are they different from one another?

Do: Use pictures and words from an old magazine to make a collage about God. We don't have a picture of God, but all our ideas and images together show us parts of God's story.

God, thank you for making us part of your story. Help us look for you and think of you everywhere we go. Amen.

The Most Important Thing

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9
or "The Most Important Thing to Remember"
(*Story Bible*, p. 168)

Do you have a list of house rules? If so, some might be very general, like "be kind" or "tell the truth." Others might be very specific to your house, like "Keep the back door locked so that Fluffy can't escape."

The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Torah, because in addition to stories, this section includes many "teaching" instructions for how God's people should live. Some are very specific for certain people in a certain time and place—things like how to prevent skin diseases and the right way to slaughter livestock. Today, we have specific rules for things like driving cars responsibly and being safe online.

There are also laws about treating one another fairly and taking care of people in need—things that are always important for everyone. The most important commandment is something some Jewish people still say twice a day, when they wake up and when they go to bed. It's called the Shema, which means "hear," because that is the first word of this passage of Scripture in Hebrew:

> "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (vv. 4–5)

The verses following these say to hold these words close, reading and discussing them often and teaching them to the next generation. Verse 8 says to put these words on your hand,

on your forehead, and by the door of your house. Jews throughout the centuries have written the Shema on tiny scrolls and placed them in little boxes to use while praying and to hang by the door. The Shema is also the commandment Jesus quotes when he is asked what the most important commandment is.

This commandment to know God and love God with everything we have must be pretty important! That's why God's people today, young and old, of every generation, keep reading and studying the Bible, gathering together to worship, and talking together about how to love God and other people the best we can. We can't do it alone! We need to help one another remember what is most important.

Discuss: How can we love God with every part of ourselves?

Discover: Read Matthew 22:37–40. What did Jesus say was the second most important commandment? Can you find where in the Old Testament that commandment comes from?

Do: Have each family member write the Shema on a sheet of paper and decorate it. Younger kids can just write "Love God" or color a heart. Hang these signs around your house where you will see them every day.

Dear God, help us know and trust that you alone are God. Help us love you in everything we do and keep learning from one another how to love more. Amen.

It Was Good

Read Genesis 1:1–2:4a
Or "How God Made Everything" (*Story Bible*, pp. 20–21)

Every culture has at least one story about how the world began. In the Bible, there are two, written by two very different storytellers. In Genesis 1, the storyteller imagines the whole, huge universe and how God spoke everything into being.

This creation story tells how the world was created in seven days, with God bringing order to a world that was previously a formless, chaotic, watery void. God completes certain tasks each day, making distinctions and separations between light and dark, earth and sky, water and land, sea animals and flying animals. On the sixth day, God creates land animals and humans but makes a very special distinction for humans: humans are made in God's image and given the responsibility of caring for the animals.

Notice the repetitions and refrains, the rhythms the storyteller used to describe God's process of creating the world and resting on the seventh day. Each act of creation begins with God saying, "Let there be . . ." or "Let the . . ." and later, God seeing that the creation was good. This storyteller might have been a priest who related to God through the patterns and prayers of daily worship and weekly rest. We can see their attention to detail and awe at creation. Clearly, they love God and the world God made. One of the words that is repeated is the Hebrew word *tov*, which means "good or beautiful."

This story doesn't give a scientific explanation for how things happened. (As Genesis 1:6 suggests, many ancient

people thought the earth was flat and covered by a dome that sometimes let water through in the form of rain!) Rather, the purpose of the story is to show how God is connected with creation—from the smallest insect to the largest animal, from the tiniest mushroom to the largest redwood tree—and how humans were made good, in God's image, and charged with caring for the beautiful world God created.

Discuss: What do you think it means to be created "in the image of God"?

Discover: Research some new ways your family can help take better care of the planet.

Do: Go on a walk, pointing out to one another the things you see that God created and saying *"ki-tov"*—it's good.

Dear God, what a beautiful world you made. Help us see your image and goodness in all people and care for your good creation. Amen.

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