



+ Cross-generational Session

Bible Stories for Life

Here is an intergenerational session for all members of the congregation exploring stories from the Bible that help us get along with one another at home and navigate our lives in the world. This session is designed to be conducted in about 90 minutes, and can be adapted for a shorter or longer timeframe.

Introduction

Each Bible Story station in this session will expose you to a different Bible story that teaches something different about how live as a family, and how to navigate your life. Some Bible Story stations are more appropriate for younger families, while others are better for teen families and/or adults. Visit as many of them as you can!

Needed

Copies of the following activities:

- Everything We Need (Young Family)
- Toast to Diversity (Young Family)
- Worry Knot (Young Family)
- Family Bonds (Teen Family)
- Dealing with Disappointment (Teen Family)
- Homecoming Horror Stories (Young Adult, Adult)
- How Does Your Garden Grow (Young Adult, Adult)
- Just Name It (Couple)
- A Scary Marriage Story (Couple)

Read through each activity. If you do not plan to offer a station for each activity, decide which ones you will use. Collect the items needed for each activity, and gather enough of each for numerous families/small groups to engage in the activity simultaneously.

Prepare in Advance

- Find the appropriate space(s) for the Bible Story stations you have chosen. There should be enough space separating each station so that they don't disturb one another.
- Create a sign for each learning station.
- Place all the necessary items in each learning station.
- Arrange to have one or two helpers at each station. These persons will assist families and small groups as they come through to do the station activity. The helpers should carefully read their assigned activity and make any necessary adaptations since the activity will not be done in a home setting for which it was originally intended.

I. Gather

Activity Plan

1. Invite all participants to gather as one large group. Welcome them all and provide this introduction:

The Bible is filled with great stories. And these stories can teach us a lot about how to be faithful to one another as well as how to be faithful to God. We want you to become more familiar with the Bible and with the stories that it contains. This session is just a start, but hopefully a good start. After this session, we encourage you to go to your Bible and find stories that pertain to what's going on in your life.

II. Stations

1. Ask participants to form family groups or small groups of no more than 5-6 persons.
2. Explain that each family/group will be invited to visit the Bible Story stations that you have set up, and engage in a particular Bible story activity at each station. They will receive a printed copy of the Bible Story activity that they can take home with them. Tell them that each activity will take about 10-15 minutes to complete, and that there are helpers at each station. Encourage participants to respect the other groups as they engage in each activity by remaining relatively quiet throughout the process.
3. Before sending people off to stations, have a helper from each station give a brief teaser/introduction to each activity, especially indicating the preferred audience group for the activity:
 - Everything We Need (Young Family): By exploring Psalm 23, children learn that God cares for them like a shepherd and gives them everything they need. A stack of cards with simple words and pictures helps connect the promises in the Psalm with the child's daily life. Together, family members plan ways they can be generous to others just as God, their shepherd, has been generous to them.
 - Toast to Diversity (Young Family): God's Word through the prophet Isaiah is good news—the Lord loves and calls people of all races and cultures to live together as God's children. Jesus preached the same Word. Illustrate this Bible truth with a fun, edible art project.
 - Worry Knot (Young Family): What does your family worry about most? By exploring Matthew 6:25-34 your family will explore what God has to say about worry. Make a knotted rope to replace worry with prayer.
 - Family Bonds (Teen Family): Being a part of any community changes a person. Families are special communities that come with their own blessings. There is also a cost to being part of a family. What does it mean to be part of your family?
 - Dealing with Disappointment (Teen Family): When teenagers try out for clubs, sports, drama, music, and leadership positions, they can be crushed if they don't get what they had hoped for. Help young people learn to deal with disappointment and encourage effective ways to cope.
 - Homecoming Horror Stories (Young Adult, Adult): This activity offers a chance to explore your own experiences of homecoming, good and bad, and what it means to "go home." Read about Jesus' troublesome homecoming to gain some perspective.
 - How Does Your Garden Grow (Young Adult, Adult): Fall is harvest time and there are many biblical stories about harvesting crops. But harvest stories are not just for farmers. The Parable of the Sower is a story about weeds and thorns in our heart. Do you understand how to get rid of them?

- Just Name It (Couple): Naming things is so important that the writers of the creation poem in Genesis connect the practice to human companionship. As we name those things around us, we can find new depth in relationships also.
- A Scary Marriage Story (Couple): Marriage is a daunting commitment in which we give our lives into the service of the beloved. What risks are you willing to take, and what work are you willing to do, to bless your marriage? Learn how Tobias and Sarah did it.

4. Allow 45-60 minutes for families/groups to visit the stations they wish.

III. Go Forth

Conclude the session by following the adapted steps of the Vibrant Faith @ Home activity Prodigal Journey as follows.

Needed

- YouTube video “The Prodigal” by The Skit Guys online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyVIF24u5dY>.

Activity Plan

1. Show “The Prodigal” by The Skit Guys online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyVIF24u5dY>. Consider the following questions:
 - When have you wished you could do something about your “boring, everyday life”?
 - What do you think would happen if you dropped everything and did exactly what you wanted right now?
 - Why do you think it’s hard for parents to let go of their kids?
 - When have you been tempted to blame your parents for something you did? When have you done the same with God?
 - How have your parents been there when you needed them? What about God?
2. Think of a living parent, guardian, or mentor of yours. Find a way to get in touch with him or her via phone, email, Facebook, or another way. Share this prayer together:

*Holy creating, loving, parent God,
 You have given each of us earthly parents to love us and raise us.
 You have given each of us your unconditional more-than-parental love.
 When we are tired, weary and unsure, we can help each other, and we can pray to you.
 When we are excited, happy and joyous, we can share with each other and we can praise you.
 Help us remember in the hard times and in the wonderful times that we are on this earth to share
 with each other and love each other, and that you are with us each and every moment of each and
 every day. Amen.*

Everything We Need

By Paige Evers

By exploring Psalm 23, children learn that God cares for them like a shepherd and gives them everything they need. A stack of cards with simple words and pictures helps connect the promises in the Psalm with the child's daily life. Together, family members plan ways they can be generous to others just as God, their shepherd, has been generous to them.

For

Young Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible or children's Bible (or see Psalm 23 below),
"Everything in My World" Cards, Crayons or Markers

Prepare in Advance

Print and cut out the "Everything in My World" Cards.



Activity Plan

1. Say this prayer aloud to begin.

Dear God, thank you for guiding us as a shepherd. As we read your holy Word, help us to hear how much you love us. Thank you for giving us everything we need. Amen.

2. Introduce Psalm 23. Tell your child that you'll be hearing how God is our shepherd. God takes care of us. Listen for all of the ways our shepherd takes care of us.
3. Read aloud Psalm 23.
4. Show your child the stack of cards. Tell him that each card shows one way that God takes care of him. Flip over one card at a time and have your child describe what he sees on the card. For each card, ask questions to help your child connect the picture with specific gifts from God in his life. For example, ask:
 - What is your favorite (*food, toy, stuffed animal*), out of all the (*food, toys, stuffed animals*) God has given you?
 - How has your doctor helped you? How is Dr. _____ a gift from God? (*Possible answers: your doctor gives you regular checkups to make sure your body is growing as it should. Your doctor finds out what's wrong when you are sick and helps you get better.*)
 - What is your favorite kind of weather? How do different kinds of weather help us? (*Possible answers: God gives sunshine to grow plants and food. Rain helps flowers grow.*)
5. Show your child the two blank "Talent" cards. Ask what skills or talents God has given her. Talk about the skills and talents you have as a family that come from God. Draw a picture to show these.
6. If there is something else that is important to your child that isn't shown on the cards, use the blank card that says, "Something I want to thank God for," to write or draw that item.

7. Connect the cards with the Psalm. Look at the cards again and talk about the following:
 - The Psalm starts out with “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” That means that God will give you everything you need. You won’t be missing anything. What is one thing God has given you that you want to thank God for today? *(If the answer has a card to go with it, find that card and set it aside.)*
 - The Psalm says that the Lord leads you beside still waters and restores your soul. That means that God helps you feel peaceful. What are some ways that God helps you rest and feel refreshed? *(Possible answers and cards: the love of family and friends, a home to rest in, stuffed animals to snuggle.)*
 - The Psalm talks about walking through a dark place and how God is always with us. What are some scary things? How does God protect you from scary things? *(Possible answers and cards: family and friends, the support of a church family, a doctor to help.)*
 - The Psalm ends with “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” That means that God loves you forever and ever, no matter what!
8. Now put all the cards back in one pile. Choose 2-3 cards from the stack and talk about how you can share God’s great love. How can you give to others? For example:
 - Show your child the money card and talk about bringing an offering to church. Go get the money and put it in an envelope or set it aside so it’s ready for worship.
 - Look at the food card. Think about how you could donate food in the community. Is there a food pantry, or a homeless shelter, or another way to share food with the hungry? Put a bag of food together and decide what day you’ll deliver it.
 - Check out the toy card. For the next birthday in your family, invite that person to choose an organization where gifts could be donated. Party guests could bring something for that organization. The birthday boy or girl could help deliver all the presents that are gathered in his or her honor.
 - Clothes card: go through your closets and drawers and decide what you can give away to a younger friend or neighbor or a clothes closet in the community.
 - Talent cards: How can you share what you’re good at with people in your neighborhood, church, and community?
 - What other ways can your family come up with to share God’s overflowing gifts and love with others?
9. Finish with a prayer:

Dear God, thank you for giving us your love. Thank you for giving us all the things we’ve talked about today. You are our shepherd and we love you. Help us to be generous and share with others. Amen.





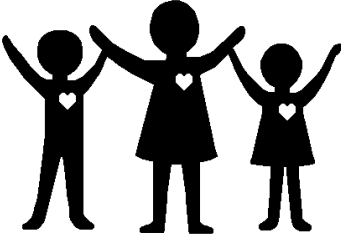



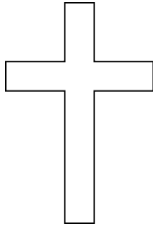



Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Everything in My World Cards

<p>Home</p> 	<p>Food</p> 	<p>Clothes</p> 
<p>Money</p> 	<p>Family</p> 	<p>Friends</p> 
<p>Teachers</p> 	<p>Stuffed Animals</p> 	<p>Church Family</p> 
<p>Toys</p> 	<p>Weather</p> 	<p>Doctor</p> 
<p>My Talent from God:</p>	<p>My Family's Talent from God:</p>	<p>Something I want to thank God for:</p>

Toast to Diversity

By Julie Filby



God's Word through the prophet Isaiah is good news—the Lord loves and calls people of all races and cultures to live together as God's children. Jesus preached the same Word. Illustrate this Bible truth with a fun, edible art project.

For

Young Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, white bread, milk, three or four colors of food coloring, cotton swabs, small cups, toaster.
Optional: butter, cinnamon sugar

Prepare in Advance

Add food coloring to three or four small cups of milk to make three or four different colors of milk.

Activity Plan

1. Gather the family and read aloud Isaiah 56:6-8 from your Bible or from the text following this Activity Plan. Explain that in the day of prophet Isaiah, certain groups of people (basically those who were not Jewish) were excluded from worshipping God. In this passage, however, God speaks through Isaiah to declare that everyone who loves God, no matter where they're from, belongs in the Lord's house. Discuss: *Who is welcome to worship and praise God? In what ways is our church a "house of prayer for all peoples"?*
2. Give each family member a slice of bread. Have each person paint a design or scene on the bread that is a reminder of Isaiah's words, using different colors of milk as paint. Use cotton swabs as paintbrushes. If needed, suggest designs such as: rainbows, stained glass windows, a globe, faces of different colors, or multi-colored crosses. Remember to use a different swab for each color of milk "paint."
3. When drawings are complete, lightly toast bread in a toaster. Optional: While still hot, butter and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar.
4. Before enjoying your snack, pray together:

Dear Lord, make us loving, open, and understanding. Remind us that all people are created in your image. Help us recognize the diversity of your people as a blessing and unity as a strength. Amen.

Bon appétit!

Isaiah 56:6-8

⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant—

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.”

⁸ The Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
“I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered.”

Worry Knot!

By Christy Olson



What does your family worry about most? By exploring Matthew 6:25-34 your family will explore what God has to say about worry. Make a knotted rope to replace worry with prayer.

For

Young Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, one yard of rope, one sheet of paper, highlighter pen

Activity Plan

1. Begin in prayer.

Worry can make us sick, God. Help us to read your Word and learn how to handle our worries better. Keep us praying as we face the scary feeling of worry. Amen.

2. Talk about what it means to worry. Write each person's name down the side of the paper. Use these questions to fill in each person's worst worry.
 - Why do we worry?
 - How do you know when you are worried?
 - Who do you tell when you are worried?
 - What is your worst worry?
3. Read Matthew 6:25-34 from your Bible. Underline things you sometimes worry about. Highlight words or phrases that explain why we should not worry. Read the highlighted parts a second time through.
4. In ancient Greece, small stones were rubbed to produce good feelings and get rid of stress. We will adapt that practice for family. Tie one knot in your worry rope for each worry listed on your piece of paper.
5. Stand in a circle and hold onto the rope. Say together,

*"We will not worry about tomorrow. And so we pray that we can stop worrying about _____." End with a big **AMEN!***

6. Put the rope on your meal table to help everyone remember not to worry. In a week or so, revisit your list of worries and the rope. Try untying a knot together when a worry ends.

Do Not Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Family Bonds

By Lee Yates

Being a part of any community changes a person. Families are special communities that come with their own blessings. There is also a cost to being part of a family. What does it mean to be part of your family?

For

Teen Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, paper, pens

Prepare in Advance

Mark your Bible at Genesis 22:1-14.



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Activity Plan

1. Open in prayer:

Loving God, help us claim the beauty of our family and speak honestly about the sacrifices we make to be part of each other's lives. Give us patient hearts and open ears. Amen.

2. Give each family member a piece of paper and a pen. Ask each person to write down the ups and the downs of belonging to your family—the benefits and challenges that come from being in your specific family. (For example: If a parent is a teacher, he or she can help with homework, but also knows everything going on at school because teachers talk to each other.) Reassure family members that there are no right or wrong answers.
3. Ask each family member to tell the benefits of being in your family. (Save the downside for later.)
4. Read aloud Genesis 22:1-14 from your Bible (or see the text below). Discuss the Bible story:
 - How would you describe Abraham's relationship with Isaac?
 - How do you feel about God's instructions to Abraham? Why do you think Abraham was willing to go along with the plan?
 - Do you think God or Abraham would have let anything happen to Isaac? Why or why not?
 - How do you think this event changed Abraham's relationship with Isaac? How do you think this event changed Isaac's relationship with God?
 - How might the story change if a different person were telling it? (For example, how does it change if Isaac or Sarah is the storyteller?)
5. Comment that it would take something really bad to out-do what Isaac went through. Ask each family member to tell about the downsides or challenges of being in your family. Be patient and listen respectfully to each other. Give everyone a chance to speak their thoughts before any discussion.
6. Talk about the similarities and differences among the lists of family members. Remember, that just because something is difficult, it doesn't have to be bad and it doesn't have to be changed.
7. Read aloud Genesis 22:14 and say a prayer of thanks for the family God has provided you:
God, thank you for the people you have placed in our family. It is unique, and it is ours. While we may wish some things were different, there is something special about our family and we give thanks for the blessing that we are when we are together. Amen.

Genesis 22:1-14

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Dealing with Disappointment

By Jolene Roehlkepartain



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When teenagers try out for clubs, sports, drama, music, and leadership positions, they can be crushed if they don't get what they had hoped for. Help young people learn to deal with disappointment and encourage effective ways to cope.

For

Teen Family

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible

Prepare in Advance

Mark your Bible to Psalm 77:1-12.

Activity Plan

1. Say this prayer aloud to begin:

God, sometimes life doesn't go the way we want, and we don't know what to do. Be with us as we deal with disappointment. Amen.

2. Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 77:1-3 from your Bible (or see the text below). Discuss: When have you felt discouraged? When has your discouragement lasted longer than you thought it should?

Psalm 77:1-12

¹ I cry aloud to God,

aloud to God, and he will hear me.

² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;

in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;

my soul refuses to be comforted.

³ When I remember God, I moan;

when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah

3. Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 77:4-10. Discuss: What doubts have you struggled with during hard times? When have you felt far from God? How do difficulties affect your faith?

Psalm 77:4-10

⁴ You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
⁵ I consider the days of old,
the years long ago.
⁶ I said, "Let me remember my song in the night;
let me meditate in my heart."
Then my spirit made a diligent search:
⁷ "Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah
¹⁰ Then I said, "I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High."

Note: Teenagers often have a hard time talking with their parents about difficult situations. Sometimes they're more apt to admit to hardships they endured in the past and have figured out. Be sensitive to what your teenager is experiencing. Don't pressure your teenager to talk—and don't rush him or her. If you're concerned that a difficulty is weighing heavily on your teenager and your teenager won't talk to you, see if there's a caring, trusted adult who can talk with him or her. If the problem is serious, don't hesitate to seek referrals to professional help through a pastor or school counselor.

4. Invite family members to talk about times when they have been discouraged and how they got through them. What have you learned about yourselves because of these experiences? What have you learned about your faith? What have you learned about working through disappointments?
5. Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 77:11-12. Discuss: What is the psalmist's strategy for keeping faith in discouraging circumstances? How might a similar strategy work for God's people today?

Psalm 77:11-12

¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
¹² I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Homecoming Horror Stories

By Susan Vogt



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Fall is the season of homecomings—think high school and college homecoming weekends, Thanksgiving, travel to visit relatives in another city, or welcoming your own young adults back into your home. Many such reunions are pleasant, but some are unsettling. This activity offers a chance to explore your own experiences of homecoming, good and bad, and what it means to “go home.” Read about Jesus’ troublesome homecoming to gain some perspective.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, memories of home

Activity Plan

1. Begin by quieting your body and mind, and opening yourself in prayer:

God of history and the future, we believe our final dwelling place will be with you. Till then we may have many homes. Help us to be “at home” wherever we are and to seek your presence among our relatives, friends, and strangers. Amen.

2. Call to mind memories of the home and town where you grew up. Perhaps there have been many different places you have called home. Perhaps you still live in the same area where you were born and raised. If you are doing this activity with another person, spend some time describing to each other the home(s) and town(s) of your childhood. Discuss:
 - What is the happiest memory you have from your family of origin?
 - What is the saddest or most troubling memory you have of your hometown?
 - Were you known for anything special in your hometown? (For example, being athletic, getting an academic award, getting into trouble at school, being a clown, etc.)
3. Reputations for good or ill follow us through life. Read the story of Jesus’ homecoming in Luke 4:16-30 from your Bible, or use the text at the end of this Activity Plan. Sit with this story for a while and consider the various elements that make it perplexing. Discuss: *Why do you think it was difficult for some of the people who knew Jesus as a child to accept a challenging message from him? How do you understand Jesus’ departure?*

4. Take a moment to reflect on your feelings about visiting your childhood home, hometown, or family of origin:
 - In what ways have your attitudes, religious beliefs, or politics changed since childhood? Have these changes drawn you closer to your parents and childhood friends or set you at a distance from them?
 - When have you experienced a sense of awkwardness while spending time with your family of origin or childhood friends? What intensifies this uneasiness? What lessens it?
 - Have you ever been criticized for your devotion to God's Word or the ways you express your faith? Why or why not?
5. If you have adult children who visit you, think about the questions in Step 4 from their point of view. How might you discuss these things with them?
6. Close your reflection with prayer:

Dear God, you accept me unconditionally as your child. Help me to accept who I am and who my family members are. Even when our relationships feel strained, help me to love unconditionally. Give me wisdom to know when it's time to put some distance between my childhood and my life today, and strength to move into my mission as a follower of Christ. Until the day I return home to you, deliver me from fear. Amen.

7. Variation: If you visit the neighborhood or city of your youth, talk with strangers at a café or park about what life was like twenty or thirty years ago.

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." ²⁴ And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

By Susan Vogt



Fall is harvest time and there are many biblical stories about harvesting crops. But harvest stories are not just for farmers. The Parable of the Sower is a story about weeds and thorns in our heart. Do you understand how to get rid of them?

For

Adult / Couple

Season

Fall

Needed

A Bible, a pen and paper, and some time to think

Prepare in Advance

Just bring an open mind and heart.

Activity Plan

1. Quiet your mind and offer a prayer, something like this:

God of growth and the harvest, I come to you today to try to learn what gets in the way of me hearing, understanding, and acting on your Word. Amen.

2. Slowly read the Parable of the Sower, Mark 4:1-20. If you are doing this activity with your spouse, perhaps you'd like to read it out loud, alternating paragraphs.
3. Sit quietly with this story for a few minutes to let it sink in and then respond in writing to as many of the following questions that speak to you.
 - Do you have a regular time that you read or listen to the Word of God? Of course this happens at Church if you're not daydreaming, and it's happening now because you've chosen this activity, but what about other times? Would you like to read scripture more regularly? What's stopping you?
 - God also speaks to us through inspirational books, the news, our family members, and nature. When do you most easily recognize God speaking to you? What would help you be more attentive?
 - Think about what is the rocky ground in your life. Often believers get real excited about following Jesus after a retreat, a spiritual talk, or a crisis, but then get busy, lazy, or angry at the Church

and let their devotion and prayer time slide. What structure might help you plant your faith roots more deeply and consistently?

- What “thorns” choke or crowd God’s presence out of your life? What “cares of the world” distract you from spending time in prayer? (Note: some “cares” are legitimate responsibilities, but there might be a too consuming job, over concern about making and keeping money, or time-consuming recreation that is over the top.
- What part of your spiritual life is working well? It’s good to take stock of our weaknesses, but this is not just a time to “rag on yourself” and feel inadequate. Be grateful for the times you’ve been able to recognize God’s presence and listen and act on God’s Word – even if it was risky or difficult. What are your successes? Give thanks.
- Do you like to read parables and try to understand what’s behind the literal words, or do you prefer for God to speak in plain, factual language? You can have your preferences, but we can’t control how God will come and visit with us. Keep alert.

Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:1-20

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Just Name It

By Chip Borgstadt



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Naming things is so important that the writers of the creation poem in Genesis connect the practice to human companionship. As we name those things around us, we can find new depth in relationships also.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, Name It Chart worksheet, pen, openness to reflecting on your life

Prepare in Advance

Make a copy of the Name It Chart worksheet for each person.

Activity Plan

1. Start by praying aloud:

God of our every moment, give us wisdom and awareness of the blessings around us every day. Amen.

2. Read aloud the account of creation in Genesis 2:4-23 from your Bible, or use the text at the end of this Activity Plan. Discuss: *What was Adam looking for as he named all the animals? What change happened in him when woman was created?* Reflect on this creation poem as you work on naming things in your life this week.
3. Starting on Monday morning at about 9:00, take a few notes on who you are with, what happens, and how you feel. Do this for a fifteen-minute time period. Write your notes on the Just Name It Chart worksheet. When you have time to reflect on your day, name the most significant thing that happened in that time period and why it was a blessing to you. In other words, how did what occurred help you to grow in relationship with another person or with God, or to help you better understand yourself?
4. Each day during the week, take notes for a fifteen-minute time period. You may change the time periods suggested. They are randomized to give a cross section of your day.
5. At the end of the week, review your notes and the significant events and blessings you identified. What patterns do you notice? Are there any events you might think of differently as you consider those patterns? What are some different ways you could understand the significant events in your day? What blessings do you want to share with others?

Genesis 2:4-23

⁴These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— ⁷then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ¹⁹Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

Just Name It Chart

Day/ Suggested Time	Notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Who were you with?</i> <i>What happened?</i> <i>How did you feel?</i> 	Significant Event (Name It)	Blessing
Monday 9:00 a.m.– 9:15 a.m.			
Tuesday 11:00 a.m.– 11:15 a.m.			
Wednesday 12:00 p.m.– 12:15 p.m.			
Thursday 2:00 p.m.– 2:15 p.m.			
Friday 5:00 p.m.– 5:15 p.m.			
Saturday 7:00 p.m.– 7:15 p.m.			
Sunday 10:00 p.m.– 10:15 p.m.			

A Scary Marriage Story

By Susan Vogt



Marriage is a daunting commitment in which we give our lives into the service of the beloved. What risks are you willing to take, and what work are you willing to do, to bless your marriage? Learn how Tobias and Sarah did it.

For

Couples

Season

Fall

Needed

A Bible and a little time to read

Prepare in Advance

Although this activity can be done individually, it makes most sense to do it with your spouse. Consult your beloved about whether you want to do it together and decide on a time.

Activity Plan

1. Quiet your minds and bodies while one of you prays for God to be with you, or say following prayer together.

God of Love, _____ years ago we made vows to each other in Your presence to be true to each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health; and to love and honor each other, all the days of our lives. Today we want to delve even more deeply into this commitment. Be with us. Amen.

2. Read part of all of the Book of Tobit. (It's 14 chapters which would take about an hour to read the whole book, so if you prefer you can read these passages: Tobit 2:1-10, 3:7-8, 4:5-20, 6:7-9, 7:10-12, 8:1-15, and 11:7-13.

In short, here are the guts of the story:

Tobit was a wise, generous, and God fearing man. He became blind in his old age and sent his son, Tobias, to claim part of his inheritance from Gabael who lived in Media. Tobias made the journey accompanied by the angel, Raphael. On the way Raphael shows Tobias how to use parts of a fish to drive out demons and cure blindness.

Meanwhile, one of Tobit's clan, Raguel lived in the same area of Media and had a daughter, Sarah. Sarah had been betrothed to seven men, each of whom died on their wedding night before they could have sexual relations. Tobias first went to visit Raguel and asked to marry Sarah. Raguel granted this request but warned him of how the previous seven grooms died.

On the night of their wedding Tobias took the part of the fish that drives out demons and dispelled the curse that had plagued Sarah. They then prayed together for God's protection and Tobias survived the night.

The newly wedded couple then journeyed back to Tobias' father's house and Tobias applied the gall of the fish to his father's eyes and his blindness was cured.

3. Sit quietly with this story for a few minutes to let it sink in and then choose one or several of the following questions to discuss:
 - Which of the six pieces of advice that Tobit gave Tobias (in chapter 4) do you think is most important in your own marriage.
 - Have you ever prayed together as a couple (other than memorized prayers or at a church service)? If not, what's holding you back? See [Who Me, Pray?... With Her?](#) as a starter.
 - How do you feel about the family relationships and customs in this story? Do you think men should ask parents for permission before marrying their daughter? Do you think parents owe their children an inheritance?
 - Do you believe in angels?
 - Do you believe in natural medicines?
 - Do you take Bible stories like this literally or do you interpret them metaphorically. For example, do you understand "angels" as humans who you recognize in time of need and medicines as including the science that God has given us the capability of knowing?
4. Variation: If you are married but doing this activity by yourself, ponder the questions yourself and then consider whether any of them would make interesting conversation with your spouse.

Prodigal Journey

By Erin Davis Gibbons

Consider your own prodigal journey as you read the story of The Prodigal Son and watch a video interpretation of the story.

For

Young Adult

Season

Fall

Needed

Bible, computer with Internet access



Activity Plan

1. Grab a Bible and read the story of The Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32.
 - What surprised you about this story?
 - When have you felt lost? Who found you?
 - How do you think your parents would react if you took your inheritance and then lost it all?
 - Why do you think Jesus told this story?
2. Watch The Prodigal by The Skit Guys online at <http://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-prodigal>. Consider the following questions:
 - When have you wished you could do something about your “boring, everyday life”?
 - What do you think would happen if you dropped everything and did exactly what you wanted right now?
 - Why do you think it’s hard for parents to let go of their kids?
 - When have you been tempted to blame your parents for something you did? When have you done the same with God?
 - How have your parents been there when you needed them? What about God?
3. Think of a living parent, guardian, or mentor of yours. Find a way to get in touch with him or her via phone, email, Facebook, or another way. Share this prayer together:

*Holy creating, loving, parent God,
You have given each of us earthly parents to love us and raise us.
You have given each of us your unconditional more-than-parental love.
When we are tired, weary and unsure, we can help each other, and we can pray to you.
When we are excited, happy and joyous, we can share with each other and we can praise you.
Help us remember in the hard times and in the wonderful times that we are on this earth to share
with each other and love each other, and that you are with us each and every moment of each and
every day. Amen.*