



God Loves Me™

The Bible in 52 Storybooks

Telling the Story to Twos and Threes

PROGRAM GUIDE



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Any questions or comments about *God Loves Me*?
We'd love to hear from you.

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We are grateful to the following team of early childhood educators for their contributions to *God Loves Me*, a Bible story program for young children. This program guide was written by Yvonne Van Ee; the series of fifty-two Bible storybooks that form the heart of the program were written by Patricia Nederveld; and suggestions for using the books in a learning setting were developed by Jesslyn DeBoer and Sherry Ten Clay.

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Contents

Introduction	5
Understanding Twos and Threes	7
Learning About God with Twos and Threes	15
Storybook Series Titles	20

Introduction

The *God Loves Me* program is designed for use in church nursery, church school, and children’s worship settings. It is especially intended for congregations who wish to develop a program for two-year-olds or who are interested in a fresh new approach to programs for three-year-olds. *God Loves Me* can also be used in preschools or day care settings and by families with young children. In fact, we encourage churches to consider encouraging parents of young children to buy a set of these books and use them daily. (Or churches might consider giving them as baptismal gifts. It’s a wonderful way of developing the habit of daily devotions together.

The goals for *God Loves Me* are simple, yet significant:

- to foster in young children an eagerness to learn about God.
- to acquaint twos and threes with the stories of Scripture, especially those that focus on Jesus.
- to provide little ones with a warm and nurturing place to learn about God’s love from people who model it for them.

At the heart of *God Loves Me* is a series of fifty-two Bible storybooks written and illustrated for twos and threes. Each little book contains suggestions at the end for follow-up activities that can be used in a group setting or at home. A set of fifty-two take-home

cards, a CD of songs for twos and threes, this online program guide, and an online set of patterns accompany the books. (Note that you can also purchase the storybooks individually; see the complete list, along with ordering information, at the end of this guide.)

We hope this guide will give you insight into the healthy development of young children and help you prepare to use the material with your own group of little ones (or your own child). It will be helpful to remind yourself that your primary task is to help the children know and experience God’s love! That’s an incredible challenge—one that we pray will bring you much joy.

The section that follows (“Understanding Twos and Threes”) will invite you to reflect on your little ones as imagebearers of God. You’ll find three general principles of children’s development described, followed by a closer look at specific achievements you might expect to see in your twos and threes in the following areas:

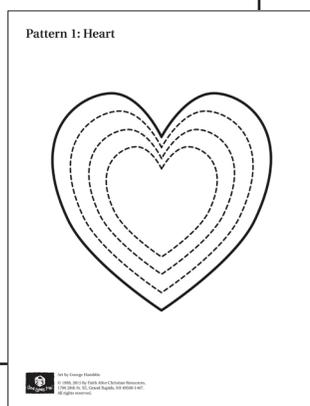
- physical development
- cognitive development
- emotional and social development
- spiritual development

After looking at how young children grow in these areas, we’ll address the question that’s probably uppermost in your mind: How do I organize my program, create a nurturing

environment, and get ready to learn about God with the little ones who come? We've provided ideas and suggestions for you in the section titled "Learning About God with Twos and Threes."

You'll find a complete list of the storybook titles at the end of this guide (as well as at the back of each storybook). We pray you'll find great joy (and grow in your own faith!) as you use these resources to tell—and show!—the story of God's love to your twos and threes.

Note: We've also made available online the patterns you'll need for some of the follow-up activities suggested in the storybooks. You'll find them at FaithAliveResources.org/GodLovesMe.



Understanding Twos and Threes

Watching a newborn grow and develop into a toddler is like watching a butterfly emerge from its cocoon, flutter in the sun, and then fly away in the breeze. One can only marvel that God calls us to be a small part of that developmental process in the children he's entrusted to our care.

Imagebearers of God

Twos and threes—created by God, imagebearers of their Creator! Every DeShawn, Emma, Luke, Samantha, Erik, and Jasmine has been born with that likeness of our loving God. Psalm 8 tells us that God loved us so much that we were made just a little lower than our very Creator. We're a representation of God in our world today.

How do we understand this truth when working with little ones? By seeing each precious child as a whole being—a unity of body, soul, and spirit. By inviting each small, but whole, being into relationship with God, God's family, and the world God has created. Children, as imagebearers of God, need to learn responsibility for these important relationships and to grow up reflecting Christ's love in the way they speak and act. And that's what defines our challenge as leaders and parents; that's what guides our teaching and our modeling of God's love for twos and threes.

Principles of Development

Understanding a few basic principles that are at work in the development of young children, along with a list of achievements you might typically expect of your twos and threes, will give you insights into your group and confidence as you spend time with them. When we talk about *development*, we simply mean the changes that result as children's biological growth intersects with and is influenced by their experiences.

Having said that, development is an intricate process—child development experts don't even agree on exactly how it occurs! But these three principles, which are foundational to human development, can help us think about the little ones we lead:

- Development happens at *different rates* in different people.
- Development occurs in an *orderly*, fairly sequential way in everyone.
- Development happens *gradually* over time.

Though we can anticipate that we'll see particular aspects of development occurring in the twos and threes we spend time with, it's helpful to remind ourselves that each little one is a unique person, loved and created by God to be an interesting *individual*.

Developmental Achievements of Twos and Threes

As young children grow and mature, they're involved in a variety of life experiences that shape them in significant ways. Let's look at four areas—physical, cognitive, social/emotional, spiritual—highlighting key developmental achievements in each area. We'll also share a few observations about the significance of each list for you as you work with two- and three-year-olds.

Physical Development

Key areas of physical development in young children include the brain, motor development, and perception. Watch for specific signs of large and small motor development in your children (see sidebars). You'll want to offer the twos and threes in your group activities based on realistic expectations for these emerging skills and abilities.

You'll find that twos and threes are *very* busy little people. They've found a whole new world to explore and experience—so many new and amazing things to see, listen to, touch, and smell! But often this new sense of freedom and discovery they're enjoying requires new restrictions and helpful structure—a good opportunity for you to reflect God's love and care to your group.

During the second and third year of a child's life, the areas of the brain in which motor and visual activity are focused continue to develop rapidly. This is not simply a biological unfolding—it's influenced by the stimulations little ones receive through sensory-motor experiences. This reciprocal process stirs more brain cells into action and connects them for more complex use. Closely associated with this process is the development of a young child's perception, marked by increased body awareness, better balance, a sense of rhythm, and heightened

spatial understanding. It's helpful to know that for twos and threes, sensory-motor and perceptual experiences lay the foundation for later cognitive and language development. In other words, you're *not* a babysitter for your twos and threes—you're providing helpful, essential experiences that are helping them develop!

As you watch your busy little ones explore your room and discover new activities, you'll notice a range in motor skills, or motor achievements. But over the course of the year you should see in all of the children increasing refinement of movements and

Gross Motor Achievements

- walks securely
- runs, jumps, and kicks with increasing ability and smoothness
- begins to hop and gallop
- throws with both hands
- catches with both hands in a trapping manner
- walks up and down stairs one step at a time
- bends over to pick up objects
- imitates movements, especially animal movements and dancing motions

Fine Motor Achievements

- strings large beads
- stacks blocks
- rolls and pinches play dough
- loves action rhymes
- turns pages of a book
- pieces together large puzzles
- begins to dress self
- feeds self
- begins to snip with a scissors
- begins to use glue, but lacks control
- loves glitter
- holds a crayon or marker with limited control
- learns to use the toilet

greater coordination. Eye-hand coordination will improve; right-hand/left-hand preferences will become more apparent; and manipulative skills (like puzzle working) will increase. Some children may show no interest in activities you've set out in your art area, and most will probably be more interested in experimenting with colors than in making a product that resembles something.

Running, dancing, hopping, skipping, balancing, and throwing bring great delight to twos and threes. They'll also be able to trap a ball with both hands, pitch it to someone else, and kick it without much aim. Move a lot with your little ones!

Another big developmental task—and an important step in gaining independence—for your twos and threes is learning to use the toilet. You'll need to accept a wide range of achievement in this area too. You'll probably have some children in your group who are still in diapers, while others have already made this big transition. Be sure to make appropriate bathroom facilities available and encourage each little one still in the process of taking this step.

Cognitive Development

Twos and threes have short attention spans, as we well know! But their ability to focus is increasing as cognitive development takes place. Along with increased ability to focus come intellectual, thinking, language, and literacy achievements (see sidebars), all of which fit well with the storybook focus of the *God Loves Me* program.

Twos and threes have minds that are as busy as their bodies. They've begun the exciting quest to understand the world around them—and they're engaging their emerging use of language and their sharp memories

Intellectual Achievements

- continues to develop knowledge of the world through the senses of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing
- engages in make-believe
- develops basic understanding of how the world works
- begins to understand the routines of his/her life
- begins to use objects to pretend play

Thinking Achievements

- has own thoughts and perspective
- usually remains fixed, inflexible in his/her thinking
- has great difficulty with reverse thinking
- attributes human characteristics to inanimate objects
- makes judgments about things based exclusively on their appearance
- is able to focus on only one aspect of an object or event at a time, missing out on other details or dimensions
- thinks out loud
- begins to develop tools that assist in memory and understanding the world around him/her
- uses thinking processes in a very limited way

as tools along the way. Joining them on their journey is a delightful opportunity.

Yet the thinking of twos and threes doesn't nearly resemble your own, that of a mature adult. It's helpful to remember that young children see the world around them exclusively from their own perspective, missing details and often focusing on just one dimension of it. Although they understand the physical reality of things in a broad way, much of their activity focuses on learning the more specific properties of physical objects and events they experience. For example, a two-year-old learns that he can bounce a ball, throw it, roll it, and so forth.

Balls are fun! But he won't yet grasp that some balls are soft, some are hard, and they might hurt someone. To a little one, a ball is a ball is a ball.

Acquiring and using language to communicate is another monumental task for young children. By age two, a child usually has a fifty-word vocabulary and understands about 25 percent of the language spoken to him or her. But by age three that usually increases to 75 percent. That's pretty rapid development—and a joy to watch!

Those numbers suggest that young children often understand many more words than they are able to speak. It's helpful to know

Language Achievements

- knows that language communicates ideas
- knows that language has meaning
- absorbs and begins to use speech sounds heard in the home/community
- carries on simple conversations
- speaks 50 – 200 words
- comprehends many more words than speaks
- uses two-word sentences
- often uses the same word for a variety of things
- frequently uses known words in a creative way
- uses words with familiar sounds; avoids those with difficult consonants
- learns object and action words most quickly
- understands 25 to 75 percent of language heard

Literacy Achievements

- realizes that print exists
- realizes that print communicates
- knows about books; can turn pages
- understands the idea of "story"
- begins to pay attention to the content of a page

that children who seem especially quiet and less assertive than their peers may only be using the sounds and words they know well or are able to speak well. A shy child may simply be hesitant to try new sounds, while a more assertive child will forge ahead and need no encouragement. Both kinds of kids need good listeners in their quest to master language—another great opportunity for you to model God's love.

You'll also find opportunities in the *God Loves Me* program to enjoy using language in a playful way with your group. They'll love action rhymes, poems with lots of repetition, and prayers with phrases they can echo. Listen to children's spontaneous language during play time too. You'll probably hear them making up new words and giggling at their inventiveness. Join the fun!

You may have children in your group who come from homes where English is not the primary language spoken. These little ones will be acquiring two languages at the same time, so you might notice lags in development or mixing of words from one language to the other. Help your bilingual twos and threes by pronouncing words clearly (and several times) and by repeating the names of objects they're using or playing with. It generally takes a few years, but by age four kids understand that they're using two separate languages.

Above all, talk to your children, read to them, engage in lots of play together, and enjoy using familiar words and introducing new ones. Encourage language learning through songs, poems, dramatic play, print on grocery items, store signs, books, magazines, pictures, and more. All of these stimulate a child's developing thought and language ability.

Emotional and Social Development

Emotional development and social development in young children are closely tied (see sidebars for evidence of young children's growing awareness of their own emotions and their developing sense of self). It's in this area of their development that modeling God's love for your little ones is so critical to their happiness and their trust. Your twos and threes are sure to grow in positive ways, socially and emotionally, as they receive your support and encouragement—and as you picture God's love for them.

Young children have a full range of emotions—they've been smiling and laughing since infancy and have shown anger since they were tiny. Surprise and curiosity have been a delightful part of their emotional repertoire. Now they're beginning to understand their own feelings and can name some of the most basic emotions as seen in pictures, on their own faces, and on the faces of others. They're also beginning to understand situations in which their emotions surface—and how to use their emotions intentionally.

Children at this early age are also beginning to understand themselves. Twos and threes are able to leave a parent or caregiver with less anxiety because they can define themselves as separate people. Their growing awareness of their own feelings contributes to their developing sense of self, as does an increasing sense of how others respond to them. Your accepting smiles and positive comments will offer encouragement in the right direction.

Another big developmental hurdle involves understanding that we are able to *control* our emotions and our social behavior. Don't underestimate your influence as you encourage and assist your twos and threes to

Emotional Achievements

- experiences and shows happiness
- experiences and shows sadness
- laughs with joy
- feels fear
- feels anger
- shows insatiable curiosity
- expresses affection
- experiences guilt and feels shame
- shows surprise
- displays emotional outbursts
- needs adult controls to learn self-regulation

Social Achievements

- begins to understand cause and effect
- begins to develop a sense of self, a healthy self-esteem
- begins to recognize his/her own successes and failures
- begins to show empathy
- exerts his/her own independence
- can be aggressive in social situations
- begins to regulate his/her own behavior
- begins to understand social rules
- shows ability to understand and comply with appropriate behavior expectations
- begins to engage in interactive play
- exhibits/expresses fears
- enjoys rituals
- begins to understand gender differences
- begins to solve social problems using strategies

handle their strong emotions in appropriate ways. Set guidelines for managing emotions and for fostering appropriate social interactions with others. Show and tell what it means to be kind, to share, and to take turns. Use teachable moments to talk about helping, caring, being a friend. And be realistic—twos and threes are just beginning to experience and understand these things.

Watch for and build on positive examples, for you'll surely find them. Little ones are al-

ready becoming aware that others have feelings too. If one child cries, another might too. If a child is distressed, another may put a comforting arm around her. Young children will often attempt to help, even though their gestures might be rejected or misinterpreted. Taking time to verbalize what's happening in such situations will help everyone understand feelings—their own and others'.

Kids of all ages, but especially little ones, need a safe, secure, and predictable environment within which to grow emotionally and socially. They like to know when it's time to play or when it's snack time. They depend on hearing the story in a certain place and at a certain time in your session. They even like to sit and listen in the same spot each week. It may seem like a small thing, but developing a consistent routine with your group enhances their comfort level and helps them develop in an emotionally healthy direction.

Twos and threes can be notoriously strong willed, which makes rituals and routines even more valuable. Change is difficult for little ones to handle—they need the structure of clearly defined expectations for their behavior and consistent reinforcement of limits and consequences. Knowing the consequences for their behavior contributes to their sense of security. Your affection and encouragement—and limit-setting and enforcement—are a gift of love to your little ones!

Moral and Spiritual Development

Moral and spiritual development deal with the young child's relationship with God and others. These development areas cut to the core of who we are as God's children and why we've developed *God Loves Me* for two- and three-year-olds.

God created our little ones to be moral and spiritual beings from birth. How they develop depends on three factors:

- the environment within which a child is nurtured and which shapes that child's values and provides spiritual direction
- the child's cognitive abilities and understanding
- the relationships the child has with significant adults and their responsiveness to the child's need for security and love

Young children develop their notions of good and bad very early, most often based on the way they're treated by the adults in their lives. They refine their understanding, defining good and bad by what adults say about them and about their behavior, learning quickly that good children eat their dinner, play nicely with their toys, and resist temper tantrums.

Twos and threes are also learning that what they do affects others in ways both good and bad. And they're beginning to realize (though they don't like it!) that just because they want something they can't necessarily have it. And then there are rules—the little ones in your group are just getting used to the idea that rules exist and are meant to be followed. All of these new "learnings" make for occasional tears of disappointment and anger, something you'll surely encounter with your twos and threes. Sometimes an inviting lap and warm hug will do more than words; at other times a gentle and caring conversation will help deepen a child's understanding of right and wrong or her acceptance of a rule or expectation.

You'll find your twos and threes to be a spiritual delight, a blessing in your own faith development. They love to listen to simple Bible stories—told again and again. They may

even enjoy repeating simple phrases from Scripture. And they'll demonstrate a simple, trusting faith that we'd all do well to emulate. Enjoy sharing experiences of amazement and beauty with them—and give thanks for evidences you'll surely see that they know God's love for them!

Children with Special Needs

Each little one in your group is unique, with developing gifts and abilities that will bring you pleasure as you watch them grow. You may also discover that one or more of your twos and threes will need particular adjustments in their surroundings and special attention from you to meet their needs. Together with each one's parents, you can become part of the early intervention that will be crucial to later development.

You might have a child in your group who has specific physical challenges and needs a safe, supportive, and perhaps even adapted physical environment. Areas in your room that invite children to play should be large enough to accommodate wheelchairs or children using crutches. Parents and professionals in your community will be more than happy to give you guidance in opening up your room and welcoming children with physical challenges.

Little ones with other developmental delays need a safe and nurturing social and emotional environment. While true for all twos and threes, these children need a warm, caring adult who will support them in developing positive social interaction and help them function as independently as possible.

You'll want to select and plan learning activities (including appropriate materials) that involve *all* of the children and encourage each one to succeed. For example, if you have a three-year-old who is visually im-

paired, you might want to add sounds along with pictures to help that child understand the things God created. Or, you may have a little one in your group who is hearing impaired, and you'll want to make good use of visuals and simple sign language when you sing or say action rhymes together. To include a child who is in a wheelchair in physical activities, look for ways you can all move while staying seated—or move that child's wheelchair in sync with the activity.

Twos and threes—and you—each person is an imagebearer and an amazing part of God's creation. We hope you'll all become more certain of this wonderful truth: *God Loves Me!*

Learning About God with Twos and Threes

So how do you organize your program, create a nurturing environment, and get ready to learn about God with the little ones who come? Whether you've committed to leading a group of little ones or you're the parent of one, we hope the following guidelines will be helpful as you think about good ways to help little ones experience God's love. Let's look at three areas: creating a nurturing setting, arranging and equipping space, and getting ready to lead.

Creating a Nurturing Setting

God Loves Me is the title around which you'll organize everything you do and say when you're with your small community of twos and threes. Whether you're using this program in a nursery or children's worship setting or a more formal program for preschoolers, this could well be the first experience some of the little ones in your group are having outside the family circle. It's your task to help each one experience the joy of knowing and feeling God's love in the wider covenant community.

Developing and nurturing this sense of community will be a considerable challenge, since two- and three-year-olds tend to view everything exclusively from their own perspective. What's more, they're certain that others think and perceive things that way too! That means that learning to share, to wait, to stop, to think about someone else,

and to know the difference between right and wrong are huge developmental challenges for your little ones. It's your privilege to help them on their way, to teach them in the light of God's love as they come to know and experience the meaning of limits, expectations, respect, and responsibility.

Providing a warm, yet structured environment that's physically and emotionally safe will help the young children in your group learn self-discipline. Here are some suggestions:

Show Love

- Greet your little ones with a warm smile and a gentle touch.
- Talk directly to them, looking at them as you speak. Get down on their level (which means spending lots of time on your knees!).
- When problems arise, encourage using words to solve them. (Since some children have limited language, you'll need to model words like "I'm sorry" and "Please" or "Thank you.")
- Respond sensitively to children's needs (something to drink, time alone, bathroom time, and so forth).

Set Limits

- Provide for the children's physical and emotional safety. (You'll want to check

out the abuse policy of your church or organization for further guidance.)

- Be fair, consistent, reasonable, and encouraging in your expectations.
- Never allow behaviors that cause physical harm to another child, such as hitting or biting. Gently restrain a child who engages in these behaviors and explain why it's wrong; then redirect the child to a new activity.

Encourage Sharing

- Use words and actions to describe what sharing is.
- Affirm it when you see it happening! Twos and threes are not natural sharers, so you'll want to communicate its importance and appreciate it with the group when you notice it happening in the context of the children's play.

Resolve Conflict

When conflict happens, describe it simply in words the children can understand, for example, "You both want this truck."

Then state (simply) how the children feel: "You both look upset!"

Provide a solution—for example: "Let's give Caleb a turn first; then we'll let Sammy have time to play with it." (And be sure to follow through.)

Often when conflict arises or young children are upset, it helps to reason with them or relocate them to a new activity. Make sure they're settled and busy exploring the new setting before you leave them.

Dealing with tantrums is a bit more challenging! Your first concern is to make sure the child is breathing and safe. Then gently but firmly explain that you will leave until he or she stops screaming. Walk out of sight but remain nearby until the child regains

control; then encourage the child in a quiet voice, acknowledging the distress and reminding him or her of God's love. You may find it helpful to hold the child for a short time before moving on to another activity. You'll find that twos and threes are generally very loving and gentle—and respond to gentleness and love from you.

Arranging and Equipping Your Room

A warm and cheerful place, designed with color and comfort in mind, will appeal to your little ones and stimulate their development in all of the areas we've mentioned. The following suggestions are geared toward a group setting, but if you're a parent, you might also find something helpful to you as you think about the spaces in your home that are most inviting to your child.

Space Needs

Having enough space for busy twos and threes to move and learn in is always a challenge. How much room will you need? How many children can your assigned room adequately accommodate? Will you have enough space to display and to store your materials? How much play space is optimal? Will you be permitted to put posters or pictures on the wall?

Ideally, programs for twos and threes should meet two basic guidelines developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Your room should offer 35 square feet of usable floor space for each child in your group. And if you have mostly two-year-olds, the NAEYC recommends having one leader or caregiver for every four children. If you have a mix of twos and threes, you can stretch that to one leader per five children. Total group size should be limited to eight to ten little ones.

But don't despair. Although you may not be in a situation that fulfills the *space* guideline, it will be important to follow the *adult-to-child ratio* suggested. That's something you *can* do! If your group exceeds ten, you might want to use two leaders who share the same space, but use separate smaller spaces to be with children for group activities like story time and snack time. (Story time is a great time for connecting in a loving manner with your small group of children. Be sure to arrange for a place in which you can sit close enough that you can touch each child and everyone has a clear view of the storybook illustrations.)

Play Areas

Organize your space, if possible, to include separate activity areas. Design a quiet area where a child may choose to be alone to read or work a puzzle. You may want to define this area with a rug, a few pillows and stuffed animals, and perhaps a rocker. Store books, pictures, and puzzles in the area.

Situate your noisier toys and activities across the room where children can feel free to be more active (and loud!). Stock this space with blocks, trucks, cars, fill and pour toys, stacking toys, and so forth. Depending on your space and location, you might even be able to include indoor/outdoor toys like wagons, trikes, large balls, or climbing equipment. Look for ways to invite your little ones to move and explore in this area.

Encourage dramatic play by designating a corner of your room as a housekeeping area. Add a child-size table and chairs, doll beds, dolls, puppets, and stuffed animals. You can easily make a sink and stove from sturdy cardboard boxes—or ask a volunteer woodworker to build you a small kitchen setting. Dress-up clothes will complete your fur-

nishings. (We suggest you wash the clothes regularly.)

Place a low table in another corner of the room, making sure there's room for standing or sitting on all sides of it. Cover your activity table with a plastic tablecloth or shower-curtain liner and keep it stocked with materials for art projects and other group activities. Keep plenty of paper towels and wipes handy too—especially if your activity table also serves as your snack table.

Be sure to keep toys clean by washing them frequently with soap, water, and bleach. Using laundry baskets or sturdy plastic tubs in which to store toys will help keep them organized and in good repair.

Little ones do pay attention to their surroundings and appreciate things that are scaled to their size. You'll want to keep your room well lighted too. A clean and attractive room creates a welcoming feeling, and having materials and activities set out and ready for the children will make it easier for them to say goodbye to parents who drop them off. Invite each little one in to explore a whole new world—and enjoy the adventure with them!

Materials and Supplies

Here's a checklist of basic materials you'll want to have available from week to week. (The follow-up suggestions in the back of each storybook may occasionally suggest additional supplies related to particular activities.)

Paper Supplies

- Cardstock (Available in several colors at office supply stores. Works well for photocopying because it's heavier than construction paper.)
- Construction paper

- White paper
- Mural paper or shelf paper
- Glossy paper or waxed paper
- Small lunch bags
- Newspaper

Art Supplies

- Glue or glue sticks
- Large crayons
- Tempera paints
- Washable markers
- Small scissors (including a “lefty”)
- Sidewalk chalk
- Trims (bits and pieces of lace, ribbon, etc.)
- Old greeting cards
- Stickers
- Cotton-tipped swabs
- Paint shirts

Tactile Materials

- Play dough
- Fingerpaints
- Dried beans, aquarium gravel, large styro-foam packing peanuts, etc.
- Sand
- Water

Pictures

- Bible story pictures from discarded church school materials
- Magazine and store flyer pictures of food, people, pets, etc.
- Pictures of your little ones (You might want to request one of each child or take one yourself so you can make photocopies for art activities. Or you might find it helpful to photograph each child with the person authorized to drop off and pick him/her up.)

Other Materials and Supplies

- Large plastic dishpans or similar tubs (for holding water, sand, etc.)
- Bins for holding toys and other supplies

- Big boxes (for hiding places, making boats, cars, etc.)
- Plastic tablecloths or shower-curtain liners
- Velcro strips and masking tape (for outlining your story area, making paths, etc.)

Preparing to Lead

Spending time getting ready to lead is as vital as the time you actually spend with your little ones. Try to prepare day by day, over the course of the week. Here are a few suggestions to make this a time for growing spiritually yourself as you pray, study, and plan.

Prayer Time

Set aside time each day to pray for your little ones—and for yourself. Pray that

- God will help you grow in your understanding of the Bible story.
- you will be able to communicate the story’s main idea to your little ones.
- you will model God’s love to the children.
- each little one (as you pray for them by name) will feel God’s presence and experience God’s love.
- grow in the knowledge of God.
- grow in love for God and others.

Study Time

Although your little ones don’t have a sense of time and chronology yet, we suggest you use the storybooks in sequence, beginning with Genesis (see list at the end of this guide or at the back of the storybooks). Depending on your schedule, you may need to condense the list by eliminating an occasional story; you may also choose to tell the Christmas and Easter stories when they coincide with the church year.

Begin your study time by reading from Scripture the passage on which the storybook is based. Read it through again to set the char-

acters and action firmly in your mind. (A good study Bible, a Bible dictionary, and a Bible commentary are helpful tools for expanding your understanding of the passage and giving you additional knowledge of the culture, customs, and setting.)

Then practice reading the storybook through a few times so you know it well. When you read it to the children, you'll want to make sure to hold it so they can see the illustrations as you read the story. Think about what you might want to point out to them as you go—and what simple questions you might ask them. Think about ways you can share the main idea with them too (check out the wondering question on page 21 of each book).

Planning Time

We suggest you make your plan for a thirty to forty-five minute session. See the sidebar for a schedule you might use, adapting it to fit the actual time frame you're working with. (If your schedule is longer than forty-five minutes, extend each part of the schedule with free play rather than with structured activities. You could also add a rest time and a more extended snack time if you wish.)

Decide what materials you'll have setting out when the children arrive. Have everything you'll need for each activity prepared and ready to use so you're free to greet the children and welcome them into the room (makes for less "goodbye anxiety").

Consider enlisting the help of a volunteer (a senior? a teen?) to help you with the collection and preparation of materials. You'll find all of the patterns you (or your volunteer) will need to implement the activities in the storybooks online at *FaithAliveResources.org/GodLovesMe*. Enjoy your prep time as you anticipate the delightful surprises in

store for your twos and threes. You can be sure you'll receive more than you give as your share God's love with them!

Opening Time (5 minutes)

Plan simple welcoming activities to begin your time together. We've included one or two ideas in the follow-up suggestions in the back of the storybooks.

Story Time (5-10 minutes)

You'll want to designate a particular place in your room, perhaps your quiet corner, to tell the story each time. Introducing it with a similar routine each week works well for little ones. The children will soon recognize the song, action rhyme, or simple activity as the signal to join your story circle. Once they've gathered, look at the picture on pages 4-5 as a way to focus their attention; read the words too!

Learning Through Play (15-20 minutes)

At the back of each book you'll find a number of activities that will help you invite your little ones to play their way into the story. Choose activities that seem most appropriate to the developmental level and interests of your twos and threes. Be sure to check out *Sing with Me Preschool Songs* and plan for music time with the children too. Most importantly, provide ample time for the children to choose their own activities and to play individually—that's the way twos and threes learn best!

Closing (5-10 minutes)

As you prepare to say goodbye to the children, take one more opportunity to review the story focus by praying a short, simple prayer with them. Send everyone home with their very own take-home card that pictures and tells the story.

Storybook Series Titles

The heart of the *God Loves Me* program for twos and threes is the series of fifty-two Bible storybooks. Here's a list of the titles to assist you if you wish to order individual books rather than the entire set. A recording of *Sing With Me Preschool Songs* and take-home card sets for the 52 stories are also available. (We recommend that you purchase a set for each child in your group and that you strongly encourage parents to purchase their own set of *God Loves Me*.) To order, visit our online store at www.FaithAliveResources.org or contact Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1700 28th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407; 1-800-333-8300, fax: 616-224-0834.

Old Testament Stories

- 1 **Blue and Green and Purple Too!** *The Story of God's Colorful World*
- 2 **It's a Noisy Place!** *The Story of the First Creatures*
- 3 **Adam and Eve** *The Story of the First Man and Woman*
- 4 **Take Good Care of My World!** *The Story of Adam and Eve in the Garden*
- 5 **A Very Sad Day** *The Story of Adam and Eve's Disobedience*
- 6 **A Rainy, Rainy Day** *The Story of Noah*
- 7 **Count the Stars!** *The Story of God's Promise to Abraham and Sarah*
- 8 **A Girl Named Rebekah** *The Story of God's Answer to Abraham*
- 9 **Two Coats for Joseph** *The Story of Young Joseph*
- 10 **Plenty to Eat** *The Story of Joseph and His Brothers*
- 11 **Safe in a Basket** *The Story of Baby Moses*
- 12 **I'll Do It!** *The Story of Moses and the Burning Bush*
- 13 **Safe at Last!** *The Story of Moses and the Red Sea*
- 14 **What Is It?** *The Story of Manna in the Desert*
- 15 **A Tall Wall** *The Story of Jericho*
- 16 **A Baby for Hannah** *The Story of an Answered Prayer*
- 17 **Samuel, Samuel!** *The Story of God's Call to Samuel*
- 18 **Lions and Bears!** *The Story of David the Shepherd Boy*
- 19 **David and the Giant** *The Story of David and Goliath*
- 20 **A Little Jar of Oil** *The Story of Elisha and the Widow*
- 21 **One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven!** *The Story of Elisha and Naaman*
- 22 **A Big Fish Story** *The Story of Jonah*
- 23 **Lions, Lions!** *The Story of Daniel*

New Testament Stories

- 24 **Jesus Is Born!** *The Story of Christmas*
- 25 **Good News!** *The Story of the Shepherds*
- 26 **An Amazing Star!** *The Story of the Wise Men*
- 27 **Waiting, Waiting, Waiting!** *The Story of Simeon and Anna*
- 28 **Who Is This Child?** *The Story of Jesus in the Temple*
- 29 **Follow Me!** *The Story of Jesus and His Twelve Helpers*
- 30 **The Greatest Gift** *The Story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well*

- 31 **A Father's Wish** *The Story of Jesus and a Little Boy*
- 32 **Just Believe!** *The Story of Jesus and a Little Girl*
- 33 **Get Up and Walk!** *The Story of Jesus and a Man Who Couldn't Walk*
- 34 **A Little Lunch** *The Story of Jesus and a Hungry Crowd*
- 35 **A Scary Storm** *The Story of Jesus and a Stormy Sea*
- 36 **Thank You, Jesus!** *The Story of Jesus and One Thankful Man*
- 37 **A Wonderful Sight!** *The Story of Jesus and a Man Who Couldn't See*
- 38 **A Better Thing to Do** *The Story of Jesus and Mary and Martha*
- 39 **A Lost Lamb** *The Story of the Good Shepherd*
- 40 **Come to Me!** *The Story of Jesus and the Children*
- 41 **Have a Great Day!** *The Story of Jesus and Zacchaeus*
- 42 **I Love You, Jesus!** *The Story of Mary's Gift to Jesus*
- 43 **Hosanna!** *The Story of Palm Sunday*
- 44 **The Best Day Ever!** *The Story of Easter*
- 45 **Goodbye—for Now** *The Story of Jesus' Return to Heaven*
- 46 **A Prayer for Peter** *The Story of Peter in Prison*
- 47 **Sad Day, Happy Day!** *The Story of Peter and Dorcas*
- 48 **A New Friend** *The Story of Paul's Conversion*
- 49 **Over the Wall** *The Story of Paul's Escape in a Basket*
- 50 **A Song in the Night** *The Story of Paul and Silas in Prison*
- 51 **A Ride in the Night** *The Story of Paul's Escape on Horseback*
- 52 **The Shipwreck** *The Story of Paul's Rescue at Sea*

Holiday Stories

Selected stories from the New Testament to help you celebrate the Christian year

- 24 **Jesus Is Born!** *The Story of Christmas*
- 25 **Good News!** *The Story of the Shepherds*
- 26 **An Amazing Star!** *The Story of the Wise Men*
- 43 **Hosanna!** *The Story of Palm Sunday*
- 44 **The Best Day Ever!** *The Story of Easter*
- 45 **Goodbye—for Now** *The Story of Jesus' Return to Heaven*

God Loves Me story cards

Sing with Me Preschool Songs