

Dios Te Acompaña Gathering the Voices of Children

One gift that many children possess is the ability to pay attention. They constantly take in information and find meaning in all they experience. For this reason, the children in your community may already know about the children from Central and South America who are streaming to The United States. They may have heard adults in their community share their opinions, and they might have begun to form their own thoughts, as well.

These instructions are intended to help you create a space that allows your children to wonder, discover, and share freely about God, scripture, and the current immigration crisis. Our hope is that by inviting the children in your community into a safe space to reflect and respond to scripture, God will speak through them. We want your children to share their experiences, thoughts, and wonderings in ways that might inspire, comfort, and help other children, even those who might be very far away.

Prepare: Set aside intentional space and time to engage in this process with your children. 15-30 minutes is an ideal amount. Ask other adults to be available to write down the children's responses.

When the time comes, gather the children in a space where they can see each other and the leader. A circle is best. Make sure all children are included in the group and ensure that everyone has a voice in the discussion.

(To the children): Today we have a very special project. God is calling us to share our stories with others. The other adults in this room will be writing down your thoughts so that we can remember what was said. At the end we will share with you what we wrote. If you do not want us to share your story that is okay. We will make sure it is kept private. If you want to change something, you can do that too. These are your stories and prayers.

I wonder how you have experienced God's love in your life? (Give time for silence, allowing the children to respond in the space provided.) God is always with us no matter where we go.

You might have heard stories about people coming from another country to live in the United States of America. Many of these people are children, just like you. They are making a long and dangerous journey. They are walking most of the way. Some are coming to find their parents, families, and other loved ones already in The United States. God is with these children just like God is with us.

Today we are going to hear stories from the Bible that tell us how others have experienced God's love and have felt God with them during happy and sad times. As you listen to each story, I invite you to think about what the stories tell us about God and one another.

Listen carefully for a word from God: *(Depending on the time at hand and the age of your children you might choose one, several, or all of the included passages to read to your group. Or, you might choose to divide the scriptures up and have different groups/classes listen and respond to different passages.)*

Read the scripture or have a child read the scripture. Then wonder together:

- 1.) I wonder what you heard in this story?**
- 2.) I wonder what this story tells us about God?**
- 3.) I wonder what this story says about you? About us?**

Note: Follow each wonder question with two to three minutes of reflection time. There might be a lot of silence in the beginning as children ponder the task given to them. This is okay. Many of the children will be thinking. If the silence continues, feel free to ask the children if they would like to share. You might also have paper and writing/drawing utensils handy if there are children who would like to write or draw their responses instead. Please document all responses in the words the children use.

When you feel the children have each had a chance to respond and all are ready to move to a different activity, continue with the following:

We are now going to pray and thank God for being with us. We will also pray for the children making the journey. As you think about the children journeying to The United States, I wonder what you want to pray for? *With older children, you might choose to do this as a chain prayer where the prayer moves from person to person, giving each child an opportunity to share what is on their hearts. You can begin the prayer saying, “God, thank you for being with us. We know you hear us whenever we talk to you. Today we want to share our prayers for other children..... Today we ask that.....” The leader can begin with his/her prayer in order to model the process to the children. Children should be invited to gently squeeze the hand of the person next to them to indicate they are finished, or you can pass around a prayer stick, or invite the children to say amen when they are finished. If a child does not want to talk out loud, they should be encouraged to pray silently and then to let their neighbor know when they are finished by squeezing the hand, passing the stick, or saying amen.*

Close the prayer, saying: Thank you, God, for listening to us and for being with us. We pray that all children around the world will know and feel your presence and love. Amen.

Close the activity, saying: Thank you for all your work today. It was BIG work, and I know that your stories and prayers will bring hope to others. We have written your stories and prayers down. If you would like to see/hear what we recorded you can ask us after we finish with this time together. Again, you can change or add your comments, or you can ask us to keep them private. There is a letter we are asking you and your parents to sign. It says that you would like to share your thoughts and prayers with others. Again, if you do not want to share, that is okay. Talk to your parents so you can decide together as a family.

Dios Te Acompaña Scripture Guide

Genesis 1:27 (CEB)

God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.

Genesis 28:10-15 (CEB)

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and set out for Haran. **11** He reached a certain place and spent the night there. When the sun had set, he took one of the stones at that place and put it near his head. Then he lay down there. **12** He dreamed and saw a raised staircase, its foundation on earth and its top touching the sky, and God's messengers were ascending and descending on it. **13** Suddenly the Lord was standing on it[b] and saying, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. **14** Your descendants will become like the dust of the earth; you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. Every family of earth will be blessed because of you and your descendants. **15** I am with you now, I will protect you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done everything that I have promised you."

Exodus 33:12-14 (CEB)

12 Moses said to the Lord, "Look, you've been telling me, 'Lead these people forward.' But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. Yet you've assured me, 'I know you by name and think highly of you.' **13** Now if you do think highly of me, show me your ways so that I may know you and so that you may really approve of me. Remember too that this nation is your people."

14 The Lord replied, "I'll go myself, and I'll help you."

Leviticus 19:33-34 (CEB)

33 When immigrants live in your land with you, you must not cheat them. **34** Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 31:8 (CEB)

7 Then Moses called Joshua and, with all Israel watching, said to him: "Be strong and fearless because you are the one who will lead[b] this people to the land the Lord swore to their ancestors to give to them; you are the one who will divide up the land for them. **8** But the Lord is the one who is marching before you! He is the one who will be with you! He won't let you down. He won't abandon you. So don't be afraid or scared!"

Isaiah 41:10 (CEB)

Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.

Psalm 23 (CEB)

1 The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.

2 He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters;

3 he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff—they protect me.

5 You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

6 Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live.

Psalm 56:3-4 (CEB)

Exalted one, 3 whenever I'm afraid, I put my trust in you—4 in God, whose word I praise. I trust in God; I won't be afraid.

Psalm 139:1-18 (CEB)

Lord, you have examined me. You know me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans. 3 You study my traveling and resting. You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways. 4 There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord, that you don't already know completely. 5 You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me. 6 That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it's so high above me that I can't fathom it.

7 Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? 8 If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave,[a] you would be there too! 9 If I could fly on the wings of dawn, stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean— 10 even there your hand would guide me; even there your strong hand would hold me tight! 11 If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me," 12 even then the darkness isn't too dark for you! Nighttime would shine bright as day, because darkness is the same as light to you!

13 You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb. 14 I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well. 15 My bones weren't hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my embryo, and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me,[b] before any one of them had yet happened.[c] 17 God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless! 18 If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you.[d]

Matthew 11:28-29 (CEB)

28 "Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. 29 Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. 30 My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light."

Matthew 28:16-20 (CEB)

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. **18** Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. **19** Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Luke 18:15-16 (CEB)

15 People were bringing babies to Jesus so that he would bless them. When the disciples saw this, they scolded them. **16** Then Jesus called them to him and said, “Allow the children to come to me. Don’t forbid them, because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children.

John 14:18-21 (CEB)

“I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. **19** Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. **20** On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. **21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Romans 8:38-39 (CEB)

I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers ³⁹ or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

Philippians 4:6-7 (CEB)

6 Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. **7** Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

1 John 4:11-16 (CEB)

11 Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. **12** No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. **13** This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. **14** We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. **15** If any of us confess that Jesus is God’s Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. **16** We have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them.

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Example Responses

“God made us.” - Elijah, 5, responding to Genesis 1:27

“Nothing can take God away from us.” – Ali, 7, responding to Romans 8:38-39

“Dear God, please watch over the children who are coming here. Please help them find their family and friends. Keep them safe.” – Luke, 9