

# THE GUIDE: NURTURING OUR FAITH AT HOME AND IN COMMUNITY

Lists of Resources to help you read great books, see movies, have fun together,  
and even create sacred, worshipful space within your very home.

## GREAT BOOKS

### ★ FOR LITTLE KIDS

The following is a whole assortment of books, both religious and secular. Some books will help children understand their inner world's and feelings, other books will help children understand the broader definition of neighbor by introducing them to different cultures. Still others will raise social consciousness, while other books are specifically Christian.

- **Two favorite publishers** for *specifically Christian* books are: 1) Candy Cane Press, a very mainstream publisher that you can even find in places like TJMax, but gentle with middle of the road theology and 2) Skylight Paths Publishing: Walking Together, Finding the Way, [www.skylightaths.com](http://www.skylightaths.com), a progressive, open minded publisher that nurtures children's spirituality.
- **Two favorite places to find great Christian kids books** are, 1) Alternatives for Simple Living ([www.simpleliving.net](http://www.simpleliving.net)) and 2) Buelah enterprises ([www.beulahenterprises.org](http://www.beulahenterprises.org)).
- **#1 RECOMMENDATION: *The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm* by Tim Ladwig.** A contemporary rendering of the famous Psalm in an inner city setting. The illustrations make the Psalm come alive for children.
- **#2 RECOMMENDATION: *The Shoe Maker's Dream* by Masahiro Kasuya and Yoko Watari.** A very poignant story about a simple shoe maker who encounters all sorts of people throughout his day, helping each in a different way. The story makes clear how, in serving others, we meet Jesus in each person. Based on Matthew 25: 40

### ★ BIBLICAL:

***Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden* by Jane Ray.** Beautiful illustrations, tells the complete story as found in Genesis. Best for elementary age children.  
Random House, 2004

***Turn! Turn! Turn!* by Pete Seeger and Wendy Anderson Halperin.** Based on Ecclesiastes, a time to be born, a time to die... Brief, wonderful for smaller children who love picture books, accompanied by a music CD.  
Simon and Schuster, 2003

***The Lord's Prayer* by Tim Ladwig.** A contemporary rendering of the famous prayer Jesus taught his disciples. The illustrations depict a day of a father and daughter who help a neighbor.  
Eerdmans, 2000.

### ★ OTHER GREAT CHOICES TO ENCOURAGE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD:

***On the Day You Were Born*, by Debra Frasier.** "On the eve of your birth, word of your coming passed from animal to animal..." and the opening words of his wonderful statement of the importance of each individual person. Read in conjunction, as the book suggests, with Psalm 139.  
Harcourt Books, 1991.

***Bagels from Benny* by Aubrey Davis.** A touching tale about Benny and his quest to thank God for the famous bagels his grandfather bakes. Ultimately it is a story about serving and thanking God. Also a wonderful introduction into the Jewish tradition.

Kids Can Press, 2003.

***God Gave Us You* by Lisa Tawn Bergren.** A very sweet story about a mother and father waiting for their child to be born and what a blessing that child is to them. Best for smaller children

Waterbooks, 2000.

***In God's Name*, by Phoebe Stone.** This book beautifully explores the many names for God.

Skylight Paths Publishing, 1999.

***What Does God Look Like*, by Lawrence and Karen Kushner.** The answer, God looks like nothing and nothing looks like God. Gentle illustrations accompany the rich questions of this book. (I studied with Rabbi Larry Kushner at his synagogue.)

Also ***Where is God*, by Lawrence and Karen Kushner.** The answer, in the beginning and the end.

Skylight Paths Publishing, 2001

***Grateful: A Song of Giving Thanks* by John Bucchino.** The title tells it all. Better for smaller children.

Harper Collins, 1996.

***Big Momma Makes the World* by Phyllis Root.** The story of creation with some interesting twists. For one, God is a woman, a fleshy big bottomed woman who has to attend to things like laundry. This will certainly help your child have an alternative image of God to the white bearded old guy.

Candlewick Press, 2002.

***The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau.** This story about a quilt maker and her beautiful quilts makes come to life what Jesus meant in the sermon on the mount, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." This story illuminates why our greatest joy comes from giving and giving in abundance rather than having.

Scholastics, 2003.

***Old Turtle and Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* by Douglas Wood.** Two books that offer many rich images of God, but also explore the discord living things cause when they cling to only one image of God and the world.

Scholastic Press.

***The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams Bianco.** Need I say more? This classic book about a child and his beloved toy rabbit is more deeply about love and resurrection.



## **JUST WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?**

***A Ride on Mother's Back*, by Emery Bernhard.** This book celebrates the different ways people carry their babies' around the world.

Gulliver, 1996

***Whoever You Are*, by Mem Fox.** This is a strong statement of the connectedness among children all over the world.

Voyager Books, 1997.

***The Family Book & It's Okay to be Different* by Todd Parr.** Both of these books, although not specifically Christian, deal with issues around important Christian values -- diversity and inclusion.

***Papa, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara Joose.** In this wonderful book, unconditional love is the theme and the setting is Africa. The book offers a good introduction to Massai life. Chronicle Books, 2005.

***If the World Were a Village: A Book about the World's People* by David J. Smith.** An excellent resource to help children understand the inequality between the world's people. Example, if the world were a village of 100 people 76 of the residents would have electricity, 24 would not.

Kids Can Press, 2002.

***Between Earth and Sky*, by Joseph Brucharc.** "Everything is sacred between earth and sky." The author does a wonderful job exploring the concept of "sacred" in Native American tradition.

Harcourt Children's Books, 1996.

***Jonathan and His Mommy*, by Irene Smalls.** Jonathan and his mother walk, run, and hop through their neighborhood in the spirit of absolute joy.

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1992.

***Be My Neighbor* by Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko.** Pictures from around the world of different neighborhoods. Charlesbridge, 2004.

## ★ **JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

\*Most of these books are better for older children

***The Color of Home*, by Mary Hoffman.** Illustrated by Karin Littlewood. This is the story of a Muslim family who fled from Somalia to the United States. The healing powers of art and a wonderful teacher help the child deal with his painful memories. Penguin, 2002.

***Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can! Janitor Strike in L.A.* by Diana Cohn.** Illustrated by Francisco Delgado. "While everyone sleeps, my mama goes to work." This is a powerful bilingual story of the struggle of janitors in Los Angeles to be treated with dignity and justice. It represents a critical insight for young readers today.

Cinco Puntos Press, 2002.

***Martin's Big Words*, by Doreen Rappaport.** A beautifully illustrated and wonderfully told story of the life of Martin Luther King Jr., ending with the assurance that "his big words are alive for us today." Hyperion Books for Children, 2001.

***Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom*, by Tim Tingle.** Set in Mississippi in the days before the Civil War, the author and illustrator create a tale of friendship across cultures. A Choctaw girl befriends a family of slaves on a plantation. The result is heartwarming and magical. Cinco Puntos Press, 2006.

***Friends from the Other Side/ Amigos del Otro Lado*, by Gloria Anzaldúa.** This bilingual story of friendship between a South Texas Chicana girl and a boy from Mexico is very appropriate in today's reality with regard to immigration.

Courage, friendship, and wisdom abound.

Children's Book Press, 1997.

## ★ **HEIFER PROJECT BOOKS**

***Beatrice's Goat* by Page McBrier** is a 2001 children's story based on the true account of Beatrice Biira, an impoverished Ugandan girl whose life is transformed by the gift of a goat from Heifer International. The picture book shows how the arrival of the goat sustains the family, and allows Beatrice to achieve her dream of attending school.

*Faith the Cow* is the captivating story of the first animal sent by Heifer Project. Faith was the special Guernsey heifer given to Dan West, who started what is now Heifer Project International. This is a great book to help children realize the truth of Margaret Mead's wise words, Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Help teach our children that their ideas backed by their convictions do change the world.

*The Goat Lady* by **Jane Bregoli**. Loosely connected to the Heifer Project. Tells the story of a generous woman who loves her goats.  
Tilbury House, 2004.

## ★ FOR TWEENS & TEENAGERS

Please feel free to share great books with me so I can add them to this incomplete list.

*What is My Song?*, by **Dennis Linn, Shiela Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn**. Based on a traditional African tale, this book explores the idea that each child comes into the world with his or her own song to sing. Children know that song, and is up to the adults to help them find it.  
Paulist press, 2005

*The Kids Guide to Social Action* by **Barbara A. Lewis**. The National Audubon Society calls this book “the most thorough handbook for citizen action we’ve seen in a long time.” It is designed to show young people how they can be a force for positive change. Award-winning author and educator Barbara A. Lewis include step-by-step instructions for letter-writing, speechmaking, fundraising and more.  
Free Spirit Publication

*The Road to Paris*, by **Nikki Grimes**. This is a poignant story of faith, family, and resilience based on the love and trust of others. As 8-year-old Paris deals with the pain of the foster care system, she learns how to “keep God in her pocket” and believe in herself and others.  
G.P. Putnam’s Son, 2006.

*Dark Sons*, by **Nikki Grimes**. This remarkable tale of two teenagers, one biblical (Ishmael) and one modern (Sam), and tells a story in free-verse narratives of pain, betrayal, love, and hope in the midst of the struggle to forgive.  
Hyperion Books for Children, 2005.

*A Wreath for Emmett Till* by **Marilyn Nelson**. This book of sonnets is penetrating and at times raw as it creates a memorial to a teenager who was lynched. It offers great food for adult-teen discussion and also conveys a sense of hope, even in the midst of terrible pain: “In my house, there is still something called grace, / which melts ice shards of hate and makes the heart whole.”  
Houghton Mifflin, 2005. *Grades 9 and up*

*The Land*, by **Mildred Taylor**. Taylor continues her wonderful gift of combining history and storytelling. This book explores double standards in the South during the Civil War. Suspense, humor, love, hope and reconciliation fill its pages.  
Penguin, 2001. *Grades 7 and up*.

*The Everything Kids’ Environment Book: Learn How You Can Help the Environment- by Getting Involved at School, at Home or at Play*, by **Sheri Amsel**. This volume is full of concrete ideas for action for young people.  
Adams Media Corporation, 2007. *Grades 4-8*.

*A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968*, by **Diane McWhorter**. McWhorter provides excellent historical coverage of the grand sweep of the civil rights movement, highlighting some of its most important leaders. Archival photos add immensely to its power.  
Scholastic, 2004. *Grades 5-9*

***Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry.** This is a fictional story based on real events around the evacuation of Jews from Denmark around World War II. A 10-year-old Danish girl is the central figure as her family decides to harbor a Jewish family.

Laurel-Leaf, 1998. *Grades 4-7.*

***Let it Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*, by Andrea Davis Pinkney.** “It is my hope that the stories of the women presented here offer a window into their tremendous power. And I hope that their lives reflect something in each of us—the courage to fight for what we believe is right.” So says the author, and she accomplishes her goal beautifully. Stories of Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and others jump off the pages and grab the reader. Scholastic, 2000. *Grades 4-8.*

***Copper Sun*, by Sharon Draper.** A riveting story that describes in detail the realities of the slave trade and life on the plantation. The survivor’s spirit of 15-year-old Amari is an anchor in the fast-moving plot. Atheneum Books, 2006.

## **GREAT MOVIES & DOCUMENTARIES**

- Places of the Heart
- Ken Burn’s Documentary on the Shakers
- Eyes on the Prize PBS series on the Civil Rights Movement
- The Canceled TV Series, The book of Daniel
- Amazing Grace
- The Iron Giant
- The Nativity Story
- The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe
- Bonhoeffer, a documentary
- Sophie Scholl: The Final Days
- Chariots of Fire
- Cry Freedom
- Jesus of Montreal
- In America
- Same Sex America (*two women who attended our church are married and I officiate at their wedding*)
- To Kill a Mockingbird
- Enemy Mine
- Hotel Rwanda
- Chocolat
- The Apostle
- The Mission
- Philadelphia
- The Power of One
- Saved
- Veggie Tales Star of Christmas
- The Muppet’s Christmas Carol

## GREAT OUTINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Want something fun to do on a vacation day or rainy day? Here are a few suggestions for great things to do with kids, teens or even if you're just a plain 'ole adult.

- ★ **Overlook Farm** located in Rutland, MA (62 miles West of Boston), is one of Heifer International's learning centers providing education that promotes sustainable solutions to global hunger, poverty and environmental degradation. It's well worth the drive. They also offer a magical living nativity event during Advent. And don't forget to check out the Heifer books listed earlier in this resource guide.
- ★ **Any of the Mass Audubon Center** found all over Massachusetts from Moosehill just in Sharon to Drumlin Farms in Lincoln. Go for a hike. Take advantage of their educational opportunities. They have incredible programming for children of all ages. And then talk to your kids about creation, why we are stewards of God's earth, and being a good disciple means caring for the earth. [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org)
- ★ **The Freedom Trail.** Sure, you may have walked the trail every time one of your out of town guests wants to visit Boston. But have you ever paid attention to how many churches are on the walk? The UCC church's religious heritage is present throughout Boston History from the Revolutionary War to the Abolitionist movement. Don't do the whole trail, just hit some of the churches. Learn more about UCC heritage at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) before you go or check out [www.bostoncitylinks.com/bBoston\\_freedom\\_trail.html](http://www.bostoncitylinks.com/bBoston_freedom_trail.html). Talk about how churches have been active in many social movements throughout our country's history.
- ★ **Museum of Fine Arts.** An art museum? Yes! Sure, most kids can't handle more than an hour at an art museum. That's fine. There is, of course, a plethora of religious art at the MFA. This art can generate fascinating conversations about how we view God, or Mary of Jesus, and why, up until recently, religious art was what the Christian masses knew of God since they were mostly illiterate.
- ★ **Adams National Historical Park in Quincy.** Why? Because it's great history, it's close by, John, Abigail, and John Quincy are fascinating characters, *and* because John Adams was a deeply faithful man and a member of the Congregational Church. We often forget to teach our children that many of the great leaders in our nation's history were also faithful disciples not only following their passion to serve their nation, but also answering their call as Jesus' disciples. There is an excellent PBS American Experience documentary of John and Abigail Adams as well. For more info: [www.nps.gov/adam](http://www.nps.gov/adam)
- ★ **Habitat for Humanity** Need I say more? There is nothing like helping to build a house for someone. So if you have a teenager with too much time on their hands or a youth who yearns to serve others check out South Shore Habitat for Humanity and see what projects they have going on. [www.sshabitat.org/general/home.php](http://www.sshabitat.org/general/home.php)
- ★ **Christian Science Center in Boston.** The reflecting pool out front, the Mapparium--an inverted stained-glass globe (complete with pre-WWII era colonization of Africa) with incredible, bizarre acoustics, and the Hall of Quotes are all fascinating and inspire a sense of awe.
- ★ **Common Cathedral Worship Service, Boston Common.** You can bring sandwiches for the hungry or just come empty-handed and worship a la first-century Jesus, on the edge of Boston Common in front of the Episcopal Cathedral on Tremont St. every Sunday at 1pm.
- ★ **Crafty?** Do you have too many children's crafts covering every surface in your house. Not to worry---this may seem far to simple, but encourage your child's artistic/crafty inklings by making things for shut-ins in our church.

## RITUAL PRACTICES AND PRAYERS FOR THE HOME

Below you will find a hodge-podge of ideas of how to create moments of worship (and even space) in your home. Try some. It may take a few times before something feels natural instead of contrived. And some things won't work for your family. We all worship God in different ways, so kids and youth will too! Read this list of suggestions and pick one thing you will do in your home; you will be surprised by the difference it will make.



**Singing, yes singing!** Do you love to sing? Do you love to sing hymns? This doesn't have to be complicated. Borrow a hymnal and make copies of your favorite hymns. Sing a verse or two before dinner. Try to memorize a hymn with your child as you drive in the car. Singing is a great way to teach kids theology. Don't worry if you can't carry a tune in a bucket. Check out these other great resources for music.

- "Songs" compiled by Yohann Anderson, put out by Songs and Creations. A great book if you want to get singing with your kids.
- Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook by Peter Blood.



**Great Bible Passages for memorizing**... Challenge yourself and your family to memorize some of these great verses from the Bible. See who can memorize a passage more quickly—you or them. Bet you they can. Here are a few suggestions.

- Lord's Prayer Matt 6:9-13
- Two Great Laws Matt 22:36-40
- The Beatitudes Luke 6: 20-23
- Wonderful Psalms: 46, 100, 103.
- Love, any part of 1 Corinthians 13
- What is faith: Hebrews 11: 11-3
- God is love 1 John 4:7-12



### Praying Hands

This simple ritual is based in the tradition of using the digits of one's hand to prompt mindful prayer.

- The thumb prompts us to pray for ourselves.
- The index finger prompts us to pray for those who point, direct, guide and lead (such as parents, teachers, pastors, youth workers, and so forth).
- The middle finger prompts us to pray for those in positions of authority and strength (such as governing officials, employers, police, etc)
- The ring finger prompts us to pray for those dear to our hearts (family, friends, neighbors)
- The little finger prompts us to pray for those who are small or vulnerable (children, the homeless, the poor, the environment).



### Other Prayers

Some of these prayers may resonate with you, others not. They are just a fraction of the wonderful written prayers that are out there. Go to a bookstore or amazon and see what else you can find. One friend got tired of their prayers before dinner. She felt like they were in a rut, so she purchased, *The Blessing Candles: 58 Simple Mealtime Celebrations*. She adapted and simplified some of the prayers for her children, but felt it made the meal more special. The possibilities are limitless. If you need more help picking out a good prayer book for your family, feel free to talk to me.

- **One of my favorite written prayers:**  
May the God who shakes heaven and earth,  
whom death could not contain,  
who lives to disturb and heal us,  
bless us with power to go forth and proclaim the gospel.

➤ **Prayer of Thanksgiving**  
**By Walter Rauschenbusch**

O God, we thank you for this earth, our home:  
For the wide sky and the blessed sun,  
For the salt sea and the running water,  
For the everlasting hills  
And the never-resting winds,  
For trees and the common grass underfoot.  
We thank you for our senses  
By which we hear the songs of birds,  
And see the splendor of the summer fields,  
And taste of autumn fruits,  
And rejoice in the feel of snow,  
And smell the breath of the spring.  
Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;  
And save our souls from being so blind  
That we pass unseeing  
When even the common thornbush  
Is flame wit your glory.  
O God our creator,  
Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

➤ **St Patrick's Breastplate Prayer.** A great armoring prayer for children who are afraid.

I arise today  
Through God's strength to pilot me:  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me,  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to protect me,  
God's host to save me  
From snares of demons,  
From temptations of vices,  
From everyone who shall wish me ill,  
Afar and anear,  
Alone and in multitude.

☆ **Create Sacred Space in your Home**

I have a good friend who turned a spare bedroom into a prayer room. The little room is empty, with only a few pillows on the floor and a low small table with some books and a candle. She has slowly begun decorating the walls with sacred images. The room is her haven, a wonderful place to pray, and think, and refresh her soul. I know, who has an extra room that isn't taken up by Legos or outgrown clothes. But perhaps you do have some extra space, or even a little nook in your house that you can place some pictures, or crosses, or a finger labyrinth, or a small candle. This sacred space could be a place to take time outs. Not time out when some one needs to be punished, but time-outs when your child is weary, frustrated, sad, or overwhelmed (or when you feel that way). Perhaps in the beginning you could sit there with them, but maybe this place could eventually become their sacred and comforting place. A thought.





**Do Morning Yoga:** Start every day with the Sun Salutation a simple yoga routine that is healthy for you and fun for kids, grounding them in the earth (theologian Paul Tillich called God “the ground of our being”), and the heavens. We shout “hello Sun!” or “hello Heaven!” when we reach up, and “hello Earth!” when we touch the ground.

## OTHER GREAT RESOURCES

### ★ Web Sites:

- [Tolerance.org](http://Tolerance.org)
- [Rootsandshoots.org](http://Rootsandshoots.org)
- [simpleliving.net](http://simpleliving.net)

### ★ Three great books for learning stories to tell your kids about holy days, with ideas for simple crafts, rituals and recipes:

- *To Dance With God: Family Ritual and Community Celebration*, Gertrude Mueller Nelson
- *Festivals, Family and Food: Guide to Seasonal Celebration*, Hawthorn Press
- *All Year Round: Christian Calendar of Celebrations*, Hawthorn Press

### ★ Talking with your kids about big God questions:

- *A fantastic book about those great bedtime conversations we have with our kids about God: Gently Lead: How to Teach Your Children About God While Finding Out for Yourself*, by Polly Berrien Berends. It's out of print but you can get it used on Amazon. It's utterly amazing--not didactic, but really meaty--lets kids have their own take, "leads out" of them their own God-given knowledge of God, Jesus.

### ★ Resource books for kids who are grieving and/or learning about death:

- **Remembering My Grandparent, a Kids Own Grief Workbook in the Christian Tradition**, by Rev. Molly Baskette (A colleague and friend of mine who is a pastor in Somerville) and Nechama Liss-Levinson. With many activities for identifying feelings, locating God in the experience, understanding the mechanics and rituals around death, and processing grief in the year following the loss, good for ages 5-10, and possibly the younger child with support from parents.
- **Remembering My Pet: a Kids Own Spiritual Workbook for When a Pet Dies**, by Rev. Molly Baskette and Nechama Liss-Levinson. An interfaith activity book for kids who have lost a pet, good for ages 5-10, and possibly the younger child with support from parents.