



God Cares for All

Goal: To trust in God’s abounding care for us.

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 6:25–33

The Greek word for “worry” (vv. 25, 27, 31) means “to be preoccupied with,” such as with food and appearance. Birds are an example of a proper attitude toward food (v. 26): they work hard to find it, but they do not store it for future shortages. If God cares for such birds, how much more will God provide for, feed, and clothe those who are faithful to him? So do not be preoccupied with your physical needs (v. 31).

Not worrying about life does not mean that we don’t work or that we can’t own property. It certainly doesn’t mean that we should not plan for the future, but that planning takes place while being aware of God’s providence—and God’s kingdom. Seeking God’s kingdom “first” (v. 33) is a matter of remembering that, every day, in every action, God’s kingdom is our priority.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Many children seem to live in the present, without an ounce of concern about the future. They know that, if Mom and Dad have the means, they will take care of the necessary stuff (like food and clothes and a place to live), so they don’t have to worry about physical needs. However, children worry about being liked and/or accepted. They worry about being laughed at, about being different, and about a variety of day-to-day concerns. The good news is that eventually they will outgrow most of these worries. The bad news is that, for the present and foreseeable future, these worries are at the heart of their world.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Be aware of children and families in your church who don’t have the means to meet basic necessities. In such circumstances, telling the children not to worry because God understands their needs seems unhelpful. It might be better to say, for example, “Jesus’ words inspire me to show my gratitude to God by taking care of people who need food and clothes.” Then, offer the example of generosity in Christ’s name as one way to put the kingdom of God first in our lives.

*Gracious God, thank you for caring for us even when we worry.
Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 11, 20, 23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

candle

green cloth

mountain mural from
Winter 9

copies of **Grace Notes (GN) 1, GN 2**

small scraps (1" or so)
of colorful papers such
as scrapbook paper,
wrapping paper, tissue
paper, greeting cards,
and so forth

Responding

Claiming

two sturdy bags with
handles; large rock,
brick, or heavy book for
each child; pictures of
birds; pictures of flowers

Praying

copies of **GN 3**

Offering

18-inch lengths of florist
wire, pipe cleaners,
grapes, blueberries,
dried cranberries,
o-shaped cereal

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Claiming God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG A C

Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.” Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a candle, a Bible, and a green cloth. Invite the children to draw on scraps of paper things that children their age worry about, one worry per piece of paper. Tell them that these may be things they worry about or that their friends or children in general worry about. Encourage them to scatter the pieces of paper on the worship table. Hang the mountain mural in the worship space.

As children prepare the space, engage in discussion over what they are identifying as worries for children their age. Notice what they draw; ask questions that provide space for open conversation. Listen.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Singing

D M

Sing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**SCM 23**. Encourage the children to sing with you. Add simple movements as they sing.

M *Sitting quietly for a prayer may be difficult for some children. Consider having them hold something, such as the Bible, that may be needed soon. This provides a focus as well as an important role.*

Praying

L M

Have the children sit in a circle. Turn on the candle as a reminder of the light in the world that Jesus brings. Lead them in this body prayer, inviting them to follow the actions you suggest.

Gracious God, sometimes I worry.

My heart feels heavy. (*sigh and slouch*)

My teeth clench. (*tighten jaw and clench teeth*)

My hands ball up (*make tight fists*)

and my shoulders tense. (*tighten shoulders*)

Lead me, God, in your peace.

Release my tense muscles. (*loosen shoulders and jaw*)



Open my hands in peaceful praise (*loosen fists*)
and let worry leave my heart. (*take a deep breath in, hold, and exhale*)
Right now, I will just sit and be still in your presence. (*allow a few moments of peaceful silence*)
Amen.

Preparing to Hear the Story

M C L T

Show the children the YouTube video “Okaidi & Playing for Change 2014: “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”” (bit.ly/22h7eyz). Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▼ What is the main message of the song?
- ▼ What is *worry*? How would you describe it? What are some of people’s worries?
- ▼ How do you think someone cannot worry and just be happy?

Hearing the Story

L

Have a child find Matthew 6 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 11** or use the story audio. Conclude by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Allow children to choose a copy of **GN 1** or **GN 2**. Provide glue sticks and colorful bits of scrap papers. As you read the story again, invite them to fill in the flowers or birds with the scrap papers as they listen. They may choose to use multiple colors, one color, or different shades of a color—there is no wrong way to be creative! Add the birds and flowers to the mountain mural.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

Invite children to share their flower and bird pictures with the group. As they display what they have made, praise their creativity by commenting on color choices, the way the flowers and birds turned out, and how they show God’s colorful “clothing” of flowers and birds.

Reflect on what they heard Jesus say in the story about the flowers in the fields, using the following questions:

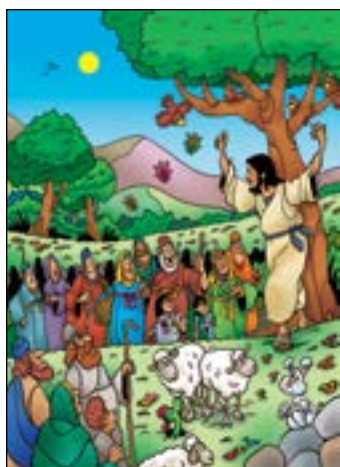
- ▼ What was surprising in this story?
- ▼ What did it leave you wondering about?
- ▼ What does this story tell us about God?
- ▼ What does Jesus want us to do?

Singing

L

Play and listen to “Why Should I Feel Discouraged.” Show **SCM 20** and help the children learn the lyrics. Sing the song together.
Turn off the candle.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.



If there are more than 10 children, consider forming three teams and adjust supplies and obstacle course accordingly.

Claiming God's Grace

B MS C L

Before the session, set up a simple obstacle course for two teams, such as crawl under a table, climb over a chair, go around an object, and so forth. Place a picture of birds and/or flowers at each obstacle.

Tell the children they will play a game to consider things that we worry about, and how worry can weigh us down and be a burden. Give each child a large rock, brick, or heavy book. Tell them that this item represents a worry they carry with them. Elicit suggestions as to what their worries may be. Suggest that having a worry, or many worries, is like carrying a burden around throughout their day.

Form two groups. Line the teams up and show them the obstacle course you have set up. Tell them that they must take turns carrying their “worry” in a bag through the course and back again. When they arrive back at their team, they take their “worry” out of the bag and say loudly, “God, I know you will take care of me. I’m giving my worry to you!” Then they hand the bag to the next person in line, who repeats the action. Have the children place their “worry” at the base of the mountain mural.

After the game, engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▮ What does *worry* mean?
- ▮ What can we learn from looking at the birds of the sky?
- ▮ How does God take care of the flowers of the field?
- ▮ Can we add time to our lives by worrying?
- ▮ What can we do instead of worrying?
- ▮ When we seek God’s kingdom, what are we really doing?

M *Some children need to move more than others, which makes sitting still a difficult task. Consider selecting an active option after a quiet activity. Set clear expectations with boundaries for appropriate movement to meet the needs of the child while not disrupting the rest of the group.*

Praying God's Grace

M

Ask the children if there are any worries that they can pray about. Explain that, when we are worried, we can pray and tell God all our problems. We can trust that God hears us when we tell God what we need.

Give the children a copy of **GN 3** and explain that a labyrinth is a path in to the center and back out again. Tell them that this is a slow exercise, and they should take their time moving through the

Labyrinths are often used as tools for prayer. They are not mazes, and are not meant to trick or lead astray.



labyrinth. Ask them to be silent when they have finished so that others may not be distracted.

Begin with a centering breath. Invite the children to take a deep breath in, count to three, and exhale. Do this breathing exercise three times.

Invite them to use a finger or crayon to follow the path in toward the center of the labyrinth. Point out that the beginning of the labyrinth says, "Let go." Encourage them to offer silent prayers as they follow the path in toward the center, telling God their worries and letting go of them. Suggest that they hold their finger or crayon in the center for a few moments and focus on the words, "Let God." Assure them that God hears their prayers. Suggest that, on the path out, they thank God for loving and caring for them.

As you notice the children have completed the labyrinth, invite them to do the breathing exercise one more time and then say, "Amen."



Offering God's Grace



Invite children to recall what they heard in the story about what Jesus tells us to do. Read, "Here's what you should spend your time and energy on: seek God's kingdom, God's way of living and caring for one another. When we all do this, we will all have what we need to live." Suggest that we can join God in caring for the birds of the air, particularly at this time of year, when birds may not find enough to eat, and trees stop producing fruit and berries. Explain that we can help the birds in our neighborhoods by making simple feeders and hanging them on branches.

Provide florist wire pieces and/or pipe cleaners and bowls with fruits, berries, and o-shaped cereal. Show the children how to string the items on the wire, arranging them in a pattern or randomly. Place the grapes on lengthwise for more stability. Younger children may find the pipe cleaners easier to use. When the children have finished filling their wires or pipe cleaners, bend the wires to form a circle and twist the ends together to secure everything in place. Make as many bird feeder circles as there are supplies. Place the circles in gallon-size ziplock plastic bags to take home and hang on branches or set out for the birds to eat.

Say the following prayer:

Dear God, just as the birds are fed and cared for by you, and by us as your helpers, may we know we are loved and cared for by you, and by others as your helpers too! Amen.



Extra Activity



Play a follow-the-leader game. Have a volunteer be the first leader, doing an action or moving in a direction while you play and sing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**SCM 23**. Play the song several times, selecting new leaders to choose and change the motion at random times during the song. You may want to offer suggestions such as: marching, doing jumping jacks, reaching for the sky, giving yourself a hug, or pointing in different directions.

Keep the mountain mural for use in the next two sessions.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Lead children in cleaning up the worship space.

Ask the children to consider ways they can worry less and live in the trust of God’s care.

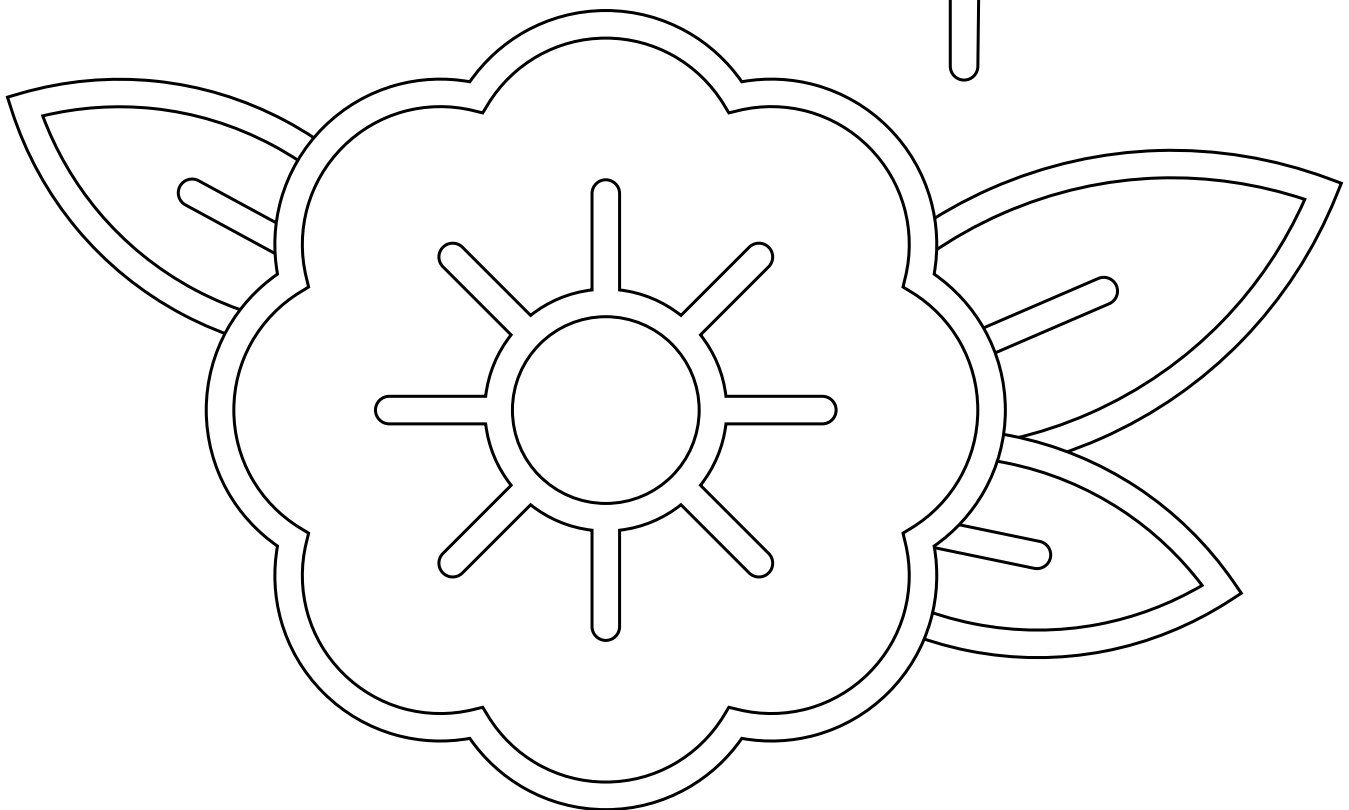
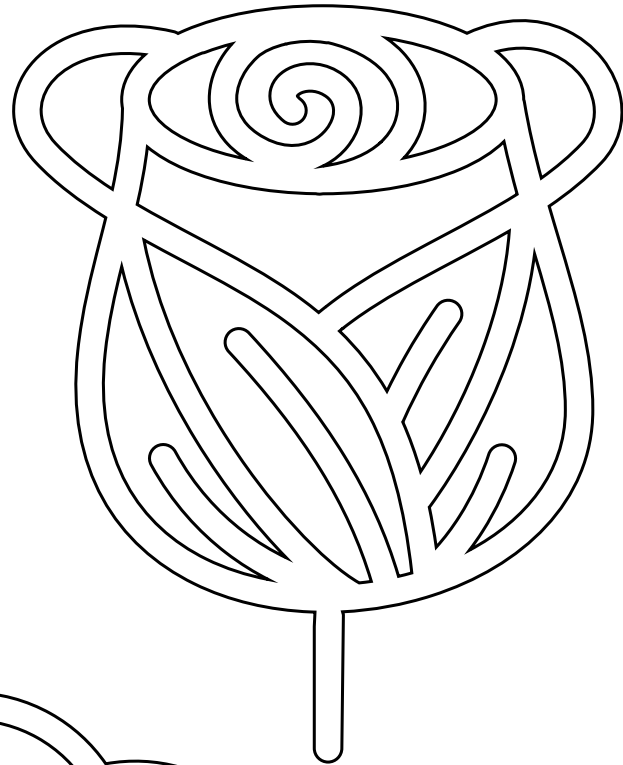
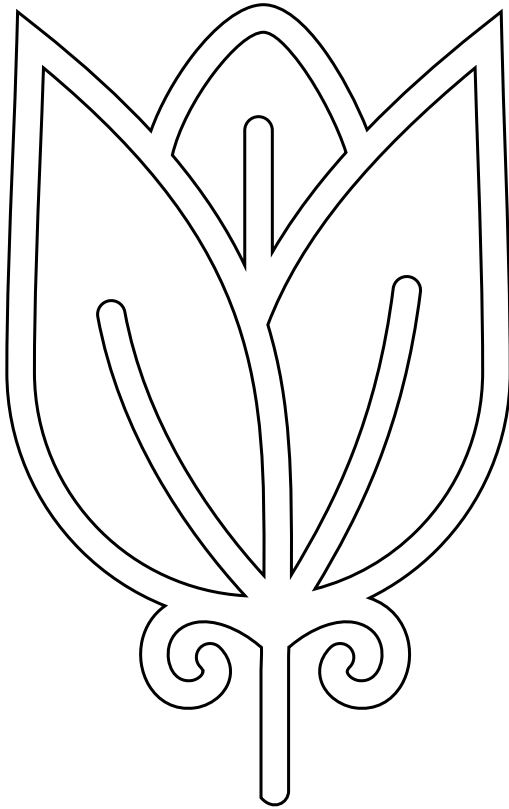
Lead the children in the following litany, inviting them to respond to each line with “And you care for us.”

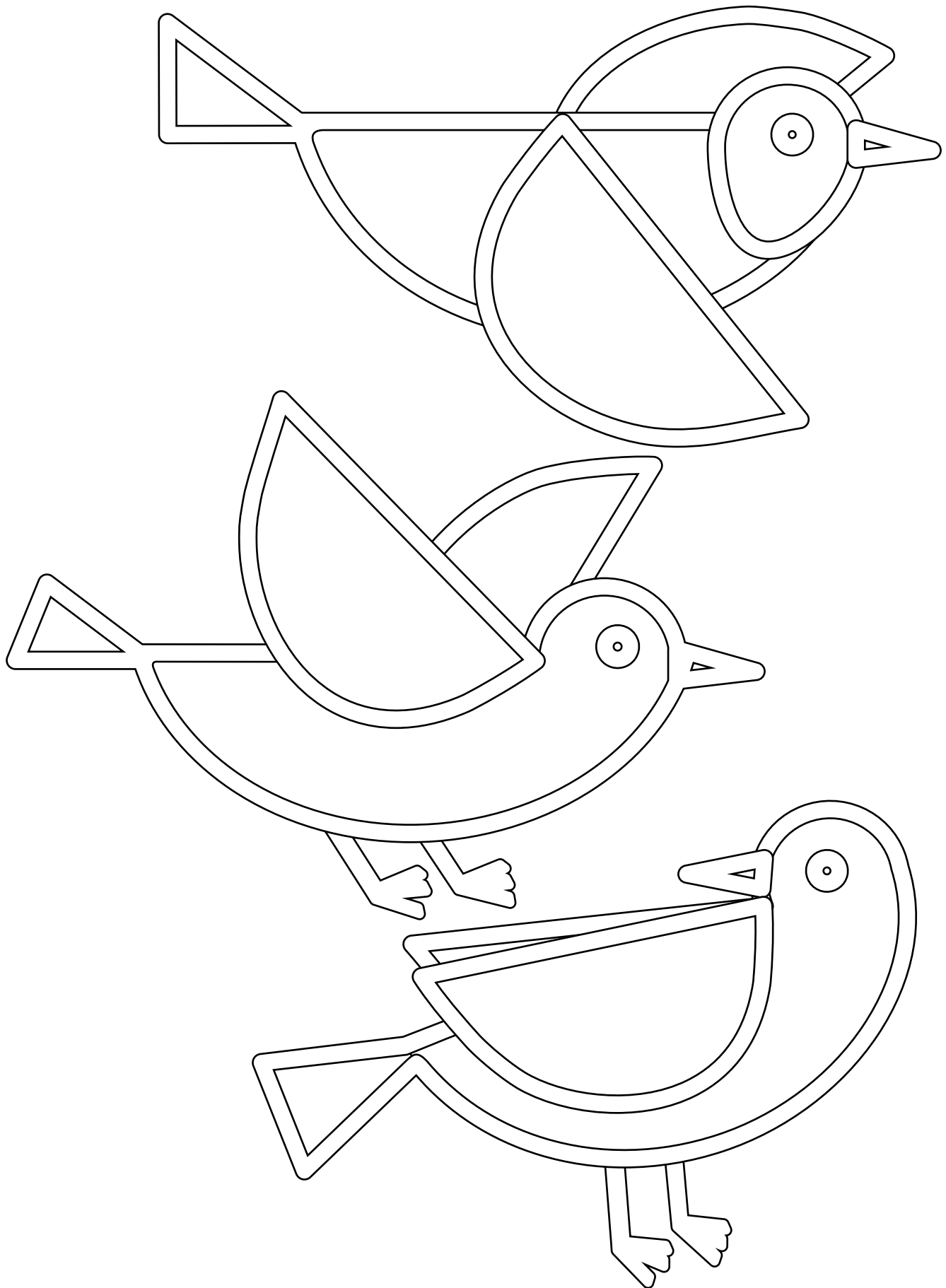
God, you care for the birds of the air,
and you care for us.

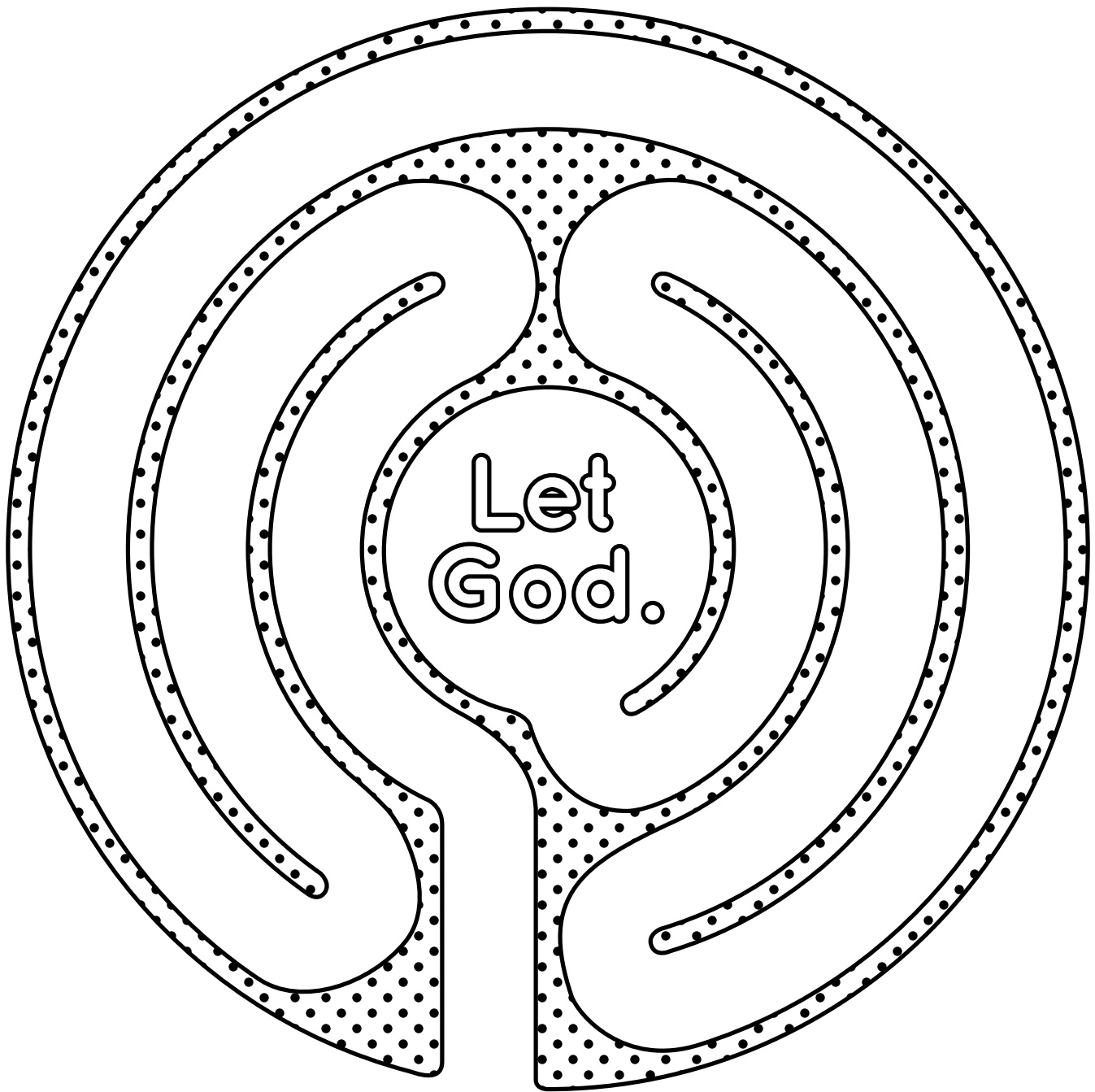
God, you care for the flowers of the field,
and you care for us.

You ask us not to worry,
and you care for us.
Amen.

As the children leave, bless the children, saying, “Remember that God watches over the sparrow and watches over us. Go in God’s grace.”







Let
go.

