

Children Worry Too

Walking into God's Peace Together

by Ruth Goring

We all hoped the covid-19 pandemic would be controlled and diminished by now. We didn't know new waves would come, masks and vaccines would be scorned by many, ICUs would overflow again.

We didn't know. Our hopes were dashed. Waves of anxiety, acute or under the surface, are part of our life's rhythm now.

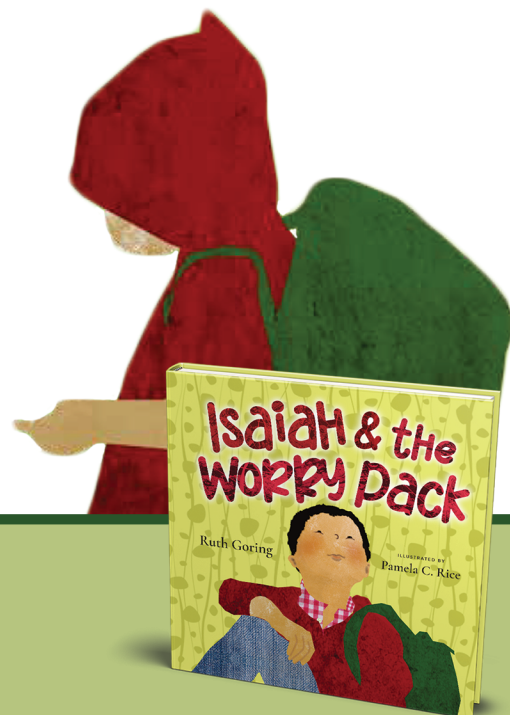
Our children—daughters and sons, grandkids, nephews and nieces, students, neighbors, friends—experience pandemic worry too. It's layered on top of more ordinary worries about school, belonging, darkness, missing the bus, and sometimes acute worries about family stability, the health of loved ones, finances.

Yes, children absorb our anxiety about money. Too many of us must live paycheck to paycheck, and too many children go hungry.

Jesus tells us not to worry (Matthew 6:25–34), and so do the apostles (Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7). Does that mean we must rebuke our children's anxiety (and our own) as sinful?

No. Anxiety is instead an invitation to your child to begin learning to listen to herself. And then to listen to Jesus.

The following questions can help your child—and you—bring worries to God.



Isaiah and the Worry Pack
By Ruth Goring, Illustrated by Pamela C. Rice
Learn more at ivpkids.com.

What is worrying me?

Even small worries can be instructive. For a school-aged child, a worry about clothes or shoe styles may reflect experiences of being made fun of or even bullied. The dark makes many children feel out of control, which can be especially hard in times of big changes—a move, a death—that leave them feeling powerless.

As you help your child identify worries, aim to validate his feelings and express understanding without submerging yourself in the anxiety. Your calm presence is a gift to him.

Instead of “I understand,” say something that shows you understand:

- It hurts when friends make fun of us.
- You’re right—we hope Nana can leave the hospital soon, but we don’t know when she’ll be better.
- When I was about your age, there was a big earthquake and our whole house shook. I was so shocked and scared.

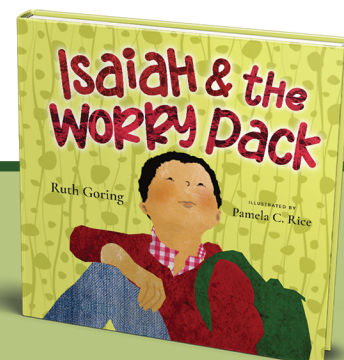


How can we pray?

Model honest, trusting prayer with your child. Don’t be afraid of silence.

Ask God for help with both the problem itself and your child’s feelings about the problem.

You may want to pray imaginatively through one of the gospel healing stories, inviting your child to imagine herself as Jairus’s daughter (Luke 8:40–42, 49–55) or one of the children Jesus blessed (Mark 10:13–16).



Or you can enter a very personal guided meditation like the one in *Isaiah and the Worry Pack* (IVP Kids, 2021). Language of releasing worries to Jesus and seeing Jesus hold them lovingly is especially helpful.

Where is Jesus?

Your child's experience of Jesus in prayer can't be predicted. But the more you know Jesus as good, wise, and loving, the easier it will be for your child to know him in those ways too. Ask her "Where is Jesus?" as you pray—her answer may surprise you.

- You or your child may be given a creative idea for solving a worrisome problem.
- Your child may simply feel loved and held.
- She may be given an experience of beauty that she can return to in moments of stress.
- Especially recalcitrant anxiety may call for psychiatric and therapeutic help, and there's no shame in this. Anxiety is a bodily experience, and sometimes our bodies cannot dial down fully without therapy.

Your child may not be able to release his worries right now—and you may not either. Return to these prayers often. Over time you and your child will learn that God is present and God's arms are strong and loving enough to hold everything that worries us—even global pandemics.



Ruth Goring is a poet, an author, and an artist. Ruth has a passion for spiritual formation for children, using age-appropriate images and language to illustrate the love of God and practices that form their hearts to follow him and trust him more. She is also the author of *Adriana's Angels* and *Picturing God*.

