

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

From the smallest bug to the largest tree, younger learners absorb the beauty of creation and naturally accept its mystery. The vulnerability of young children can be treasured and shared with others, as the learner and leader honor individual experiences while sharing with one another places of common understanding. The beauty of the young exploring with others becomes a point of possible awakening for the learner and leader alike.

About this Exploration

Experiencing beauty connects us with God in ways beyond our understanding. It grounds us and startles us awake with the reality of the Divine all around and within us. Beauty is not perfection or flawlessness but reality and vulnerability, brokenness and transformation. When we open ourselves to the Holy, we discover beauty everywhere, from the endless reaches of the universe to the intricacy of the atom. We find awe and wonder in all of life—the “Ah!” that takes our breath away and moves us toward connection with the whole of creation—and we grow in our understanding of the ways in which God loves and treasures us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Genesis 28:10–19a
Matthew: 6:24–34

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Read aloud each Bible Focus Passages to yourself, preparing to stop two to three times along the way. Linger on the words. After reading a passage, stop and close your eyes. Explore images that may arise from your reading. Continue to read, and then stop. Now explore feelings that may arise from your reading. Finish the reading and stop. Ask yourself, “What message from God is in this reading for me today?”

Realize that your young learners are more likely to receive the words of scripture as beautiful if you have spent intentional time discovering the beauty for yourself. Even though most of your young learners cannot yet read themselves, your attitude of reverence and joy will be contagious.

Prayer: God, your Holy Spirit makes all things new. Renew my mind. Visit upon me your comfort and reassurance just as you visited Jacob. Show me the wonder and beauty in each child in this group. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category



1 Jacob’s Dream (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Telling a story that requires a physical response from learners helps active children engage and remember the story more fully. Read the story of climbing Jacob’s ladder from Genesis 28:10–19a. Practice telling the story below.

Supplies: None

Retell the story from Genesis 28:10–19a using the motions suggested below or others that you prefer. Encourage the learners to imitate the motions after each part.

- Jacob is running away because he cheated his brother and lied to his father (run in place).
- Jacob, afraid and tired, stops when it is dark to think about what he has done (hold hands on side of face with an expression of fear).
- Jacob is cold, hungry, and tired. He goes to sleep on the hard ground with a rock under his head (lie down and pretend to sleep).
- Jacob dreams that he sees a bright light and stairs where angels are going up and down (hold up fingers and wiggle them like stars).
- Jacob hears God say, “I will take care of you” (use a BIG voice for God, asking learners to repeat “I will take care of you”).
- Jacob wakes up and is feeling better, because he knows God is with him. He keeps going, moving forward with the memory of God’s protection (stand up, stretch, and begin walking in place).

After dramatizing the story, ask the children if they have ever been outside to observe the night sky. Encourage them to describe what they saw, heard, felt, smelled, or touched. Ask your learners to share their own dreams or imaginings about the beauty they see in the night sky.

Remind your young group that God creates a beautiful time of night for rest and opportunity to remember God. Like Jacob, we are all protected by God, even in the darkness.

is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

2 Don't Worry: Be Happy!

Leader preparation: Matthew 6:25 tells us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or about what we will wear on our bodies. With this message in mind, gather the supplies. If the flower and bulb are not available, you can substitute website pictures, flower seed packets, and cut-out photos from advertisements and magazines. You can also search in calendars and magazines for pictures of flowers and bulbs. For several days prior to working with your learners, try to pay attention to when your mind goes to thoughts of worry. Direct yourself to look for examples in the natural world of God's design, and ponder the words of Matthew 6:25.

Supplies:

- flower bulb or picture of a bulb (lily if available)
- flower that is blooming or a picture of a blooming flower
- <http://www.biblelandhistory.com/israel/index.html> (pictures of lily in Jerusalem)
- (optional) egg
- (optional) <http://www.mypetchicken.com/about-chickens/chicken-pictures/>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Show your learners the bulb of the lily and then the plant as a flower. (Use photos if the bulb and plant are not available.) Ask: *Do you think this plant worries about growing into a flower?* Encourage all kinds of answers, including the most whimsical. Elaborate on the worries of a flower. Some examples may include: I am worried that I will die here under the dirt. I am worried no one will ever notice me. I am worried that I'm growing green things on my head. What will I do with the green things on my head?

Now show the children an egg and a photo of a chicken. Ask: *Do you think the egg worries about when it will hatch and become a chicken?* Again encourage whimsical answers, elaborating on possible worries. Some examples may include: I am worried that my shell won't crack. I am worried that I will make a big mess. I am worried about where I will live when I am out of this shell. I am worried that I won't have anyone to play with.

Invite your learners to share worries of their own. Receive their comments with calm love and the nod of a head. Explain that knowing about God's care can help bring us a sense of confidence to overcome our worries. Ask the children to point to places in their bodies where they feel worry. Some answers may include their stomachs, heads, and shoulders. Then ask them how these parts of their bodies feel when they experience confidence.

Now ask your learners what they notice when the worries go away. Some examples may include: the stomach relaxes, the mind clears, they feel happier, there is a bounce to each step. Suggest worshipping God as a way to let our worries go. Point out that often people come to worship God with a lot of worries. Yet God transforms the worries as we sing and praise. Invite one learner to show everyone how a worried person would look (for example, bent over, holding his or her head, hands over stomach), and then have a learner show how a person who has worshiped and let go of worries might look (perhaps standing, skipping, head held high, arms swinging).



3 God Takes Care of Me

Leader preparation: View the artwork “Wind from the Sea” by Andrew Wyeth. Think about times you have looked out your window when the wind blows. When have you felt comforted when the wind is blowing outside and you are safe within? Remember, when you invite learners to share responses, give quieter members opportunities to speak before encouraging a second response from more vocal children.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Wind from the Sea” by Andrew Wyeth, <http://www.art.com/products/p15524076-sa-i3804653/andrew-wyeth-wind-from-the-sea.htm?orig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=dfff3132492f45b38c1f69b8ff1b86c1&searchstring=wind+from+the+sea>
- drawing paper
- pencils, markers, and crayons
- small fan
- paper
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Look at “Wind from the Sea” by Andrew Wyeth. Ask: *How does the artist show us that the wind is blowing? What do you see out of this window? How do you feel when the wind blows really hard outside? What about this picture is beautiful? Why do you like it?*

Hold up the fan and the paper to see how the breeze moves the paper. Have learners carefully hold their hands in front of the fan to feel the breeze. Encourage learners to share words and feelings connected to the breeze.

Pass out paper and pencils. Invite the children to draw a picture of something beautiful they might see if they were looking out a window.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Growing Roots and Branches (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the directions. If possible, practice saying them without using the notes.

Supplies: None

Gather your learners, making certain there is space between each one. Invite the children to spread apart their feet. Have everyone take in a breath, hold it to the count of three, and then exhale. Repeat this process three times. Then read the following instructions.

Close your eyes and imagine you are a strong tree standing up tall in the forest. Now imagine your roots running through your legs and feet, deeply reaching for the earth’s center. Bend your knees slightly and feel the power of the earth moving upward into your feet, legs, hips, and trunk. Now imagine your body is like a tree trunk. Reach up with your arms so that they are like branches in the sky. Pretend that you feel a gentle breeze blowing around your branches. Let your whole body sway in whatever way the gentle breeze pushes your arms. Your hands and fingers can shake softly as if they are leaves. Now take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Afterward, sit with your group and talk with them about how it felt to pretend to be a tree. Explore what it felt like to experience being connected to the earth by roots. Invite learners to express with their bodies other beautiful aspects of creation. Two examples could be a bulb blooming into a flower or a wave crashing on the sea. Children could lead these motions for the others to copy.



5 A Dance of Grateful Praise

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” by exploring the websites listed below. If Internet access is unavailable, prepare to sing, play a recording, or ask a guest to come and sing for your group.

Supplies:

- hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth” by Folliot S. Pierpoint (tune: Dix), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWBo9XXD21k>
- <http://www.faithclipart.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories-for-the-beauty-of-the-earth-the-song-and-the-story.html>
- “Dance Movements,” Attachment: Activity 5
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Ask the learners to listen to or watch “For the Beauty of the Earth.” If Internet access is unavailable, you can sing, play a recording, or ask a guest to come and sing for your group. After listening together, invite the learners to stand. Demonstrate the movements using Attachment: Activity 5. Repeat the activity a few times. Experiment with different motions. For example, the phrase “God of all to you we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise” can be repeated one by one until everyone in the group does the action together for a finale.

6 Puppet Voices

Leader preparation: God gives us a voice to sing, speak, and ultimately to communicate the beauty of God’s world to and with one another. Be aware of the fluctuations of your own voice. Notice when your voice goes from high to low, quiet to strident. Question the emotions behind your voice. As you identify the qualities of voice with your learners, encourage each one to use the full range of options.

Supplies:

- three assorted puppets (you can use socks for simple puppets)
- name tags for individual puppets labeled: whisper, sing, speak

Put one tag on each puppet. Use one puppet at a time. Speak, sing, or whisper the message: “God makes everything beautiful!” Invite the learners to echo the voice of the puppet by repeating the sentence. Change puppets frequently.

Now choose a learner to speak to the group using one of the puppets. This child may name something that is beautiful and the others will repeat it. Allow other children to volunteer for this role.

Sending & Serving Activities

**7 Remembering God's Promise (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read the story of Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28:10–19a. Remember times when you, like Jacob, needed God's promise of help in a difficult circumstance. Close your eyes and picture that circumstance. How did you feel before you asked God for help? How did you feel after asking for God's help? Careful observation of your own experience will help you lead the young learners.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Say, "Jacob was alone in the desert and very afraid." (Ask someone to step up and make a fearful face.) "That night Jacob was tired, and he decided to go to sleep outside in the desert. He put his head on a nearby rock. Then he dreamed about angels going up and down from heaven." (Ask children to be angels and move around the room.) "This story of Jacob reminds us that God promises to be with us when we are afraid. God's beautiful nature is to care for all of us. God tells Jacob, 'I will take care of you.'"

Ask your learners to tell about times when they have been afraid. Invite each learner to share nighttime rituals. Some may have a story read to them or pray with their parents.

God's words, the promises to Jacob, are also words for them. God is always with us even in lonely times.

Write a group prayer on a large piece of newsprint or a whiteboard. Use words or drawings. Start by quoting, "God said to Jacob, 'I will take care of you.'" Then invite each learner to come up and write a word or draw a picture that comes to mind when they hear God's promise. Ask your learners, *What comforts you when you are afraid?* You may write the words that the children tell you.

**8 The Liturgical Child**

Leader preparation: Look for opportunities for children to share in the liturgical life of the community. One option is to create a responsive prayer that includes the children and the entire multigenerational congregation. This activity focuses on God's promise in the story of Jacob (Genesis 28:10–19a).

Supplies:

- "Responsive Prayer," Attachment: Activity 8

Explain that long ago God made a promise to Jacob. God promises to be with us always. God shows us this promise by sending us friends and people who love us. Ask your learners to talk about people who love them in their family, their school, or their worship setting. Deepen the conversation by asking: *What makes a good friend?* Connect friendship and helpful people to God's beautiful plan of caring for each of us.

Teach the simple response of God's words on the attachment: "I am with you wherever you go." Practice saying the response aloud several times with the group. Make the practice fun by saying the response with your hand on your

head, then with you lying on your back, or while jumping up and down. Afterward, add the phrases marked “One” while the learners make the response.

9 Hands to Serve

Leader preparation: Learning to serve others is one way to create and experience beauty. We identify our own needs and the needs of others as we pay attention to the blessings of life along with the places of lack and need.

Supplies:

- large piece of paper for each learner
- crayons

Give each learner a piece of paper big enough so that they can trace both of their hands side by side. Help them trace around their hands with a crayon. Ask them to draw on the palms of each hand some pictures that indicate kind acts for others or themselves. Examples could be helping others, sharing, speaking kindly, caring for the sick, caring for nature, remembering God, exercising, healthy eating, or thinking happy thoughts. Invite the children to decorate their pictures. Point out that helping one another reflects God’s love and makes the world beautiful.

Reflect

Discovering beauty in the world requires paying attention to our daily experience. Which experiences with your learners helped you become aware of God’s beauty? While remembering the positive, also acknowledge any experiences of disconnection during your time with the young learners. Ask God to continue to speak to you through the lives of the children in your group.

Attachment: Activity 5

Dance Movements

Use these movements to accompany the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” (tune: Dix).

For the beauty of the earth,
(right heel, left heel)

For the glory of the skies,
(hop, hop, hop)

for the love which from our birth
(right heel, left heel)

over and around us lies;
(hop, hop, hop)

God of all, to you we raise
(take hands of people in next to you forming a circle)

this our hymn of grateful praise.
(move to the center and end with arms raise up)

Attachment: Activity 8

Responsive Prayer

One: God, sometimes we are afraid of new places, new jobs, new responsibilities, new people, or new ideas. Please remind us of your words to Jacob.

Response: "I am with you wherever you go."

One: Many of us feel buried in problems where we are stuck with people that we cannot get along with. There seems to be no way out. Like Jacob we want to run away, but we need to hear what you said to Jacob in the desert long ago:

Response: "I am with you wherever you go."

One: Sometimes we feel alone, without friends or family to love and care for us. We feel lost and afraid, like Jacob in the desert. Remind us, O God, of the words that brought him comfort:

Response: "I am with you wherever you go."

One: Help us to remember hope, especially when problems seem too big to solve, while the world is filled with hunger and injustice. Speak quietly to us then, dear God. Reassure us of your words:

Response: "I am with you wherever you go."

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Younger children experience beauty intuitively. By providing varied opportunities for self-expression through words, movement, art, music, and dance, we encourage younger learners to express their awareness of beauty. The stories, images, and poetry of sacred scripture are not lost on young ears. Listening to the verbal and nonverbal responses of young learners can remind older learners of their early experiences of the Holy.

About this Exploration

Scripture is infused with beauty, evident in the Bible's rich images, stories, and ideas; its call to justice and right relationship with all creation; and its poetic, grace-filled language. As we interact with scripture, we discover new ways to sense the wonder, beauty, and goodness of God. We experience God's Spirit, and we are moved to worship.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Nehemiah 8
Luke 9:28–36

Leader Preparation

Read aloud each Bible Focus Passage to yourself. Notice what words or phrases stand out to you as you read. In what ways does reading aloud differ from reading silently? What did you hear or see differently? Imagine what parts of these stories might seem intriguing to children who are hearing them for the first time.

Prayer: God, your Holy Spirit makes all things new. Renew my mind. Open my ears and eyes, just as you opened Saul's. Show me the wonder of scripture. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Working Together (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the story of Nehemiah 8. This story is part of a longer narrative that tells us of how God had led the Israelite people from slavery to freedom. The story invites acting out the various roles of Nehemiah, the king, the Hebrew people, and those who worked to rebuild the temple.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) crown

Gather your group for a story. Wrap your arms around yourself saying, “Long ago the people of Israel were held in captivity for many, many years. (Invite the learners to stand and hold their arms around themselves as if they were captive.) They missed their homeland and the place where they used to worship God. (Encourage the learners to demonstrate with their bodies how the sadness would look.) After years of unhappiness, Nehemiah, a leader of the Hebrew people, went to the king to demand that king free his people. Nehemiah was afraid. (Ask the children to shake and show you a fear-filled face.)”

Now choose someone to be the king. Pretend to place a crown on the head of this volunteer who will stand with folded arms while you read the following: Nehemiah said to the king, “Oh, King, my people are unhappy here and want to go home. They have worked for generations and deserve to be set free. Please, please let us go so that we can worship our God once again!” Now go down on bended knee as if begging the king.

For the second part of the story, explain that when the Hebrew people arrived back in their homeland, they had a lot of work to do, especially when rebuilding their temple. Encourage learners to volunteer to play the following roles: lifting big stones, cutting stones with chisels, cooking for others, carrying water. Explain that the people wanted to make a beautiful temple.

Use the word “listen” as the “freeze” word to stop people from acting. The children will freeze in their places when they hear it. Pretend to be a TV reporter and interview various workers by asking: “What is your job? How does it feel to be working like this?”

2 Sensing God’s Presence

Leader preparation: Take time for quiet, and then remember when you may have sensed God’s presence when you were a child. If this practice feels inviting, consider writing or illustrating your memories. Try to remember if you have ever shared your experience. If you have not shared your experiences, gently inquire within yourself why you were reluctant. Treat your memories as sacred and blessed, trusting God’s work in you.

It is important to note that children often do not share their sacred experiences because they have no words, they are afraid of ridicule, or they know intuitively that they want to hold their experiences in silence with sacred care. Read the story of the Transfiguration in Luke 9:28–36. Wonder about how you may have reacted if you saw Jesus transfigured along with Moses and Elijah. Wonder about the voice of God from the cloud. Notice the impoverishment of words when expressing the sacredness of beauty.

Prepare painting stations for your learners. Set out watercolors, small bowls with water, and plenty of white paper. Include colored pencils and sharpeners at each station. You will also want to provide painting smocks to cover and protect clothing.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 8 ½" x 11" white paper
- colored pencils and sharpeners
- watercolors
- bowls of water
- small watercolor brushes
- paint smocks such as men's shirts

Say how the beauty of God is often impossible to describe, yet people never stop trying. Open your Bible and tell the story from Luke 9:28–36. Point out that Jesus' face and clothes became brilliant white while he was praying. The disciples who were with Jesus saw Moses and Elijah with Jesus. Then a voice came from heaven that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" This was a beautiful, special experience.

Finish your discussion by asking when the children have seen something very beautiful, and ask how that reminded them of God. Encourage the learners to draw a picture and write about their experiences. Or simply invite the children to experiment with the paint. When they are finished, be sure and tell them that their work is beautiful, and thank God for their work. After the papers have dried, encourage the children to share their experiences.

3 Asking for God's Help

Leader preparation: Think of a time when you worked very hard at a task and remembered to ask God for help. Think about a time when you worked hard and forgot to ask God for help. Was there a difference in your experiences? Was one more beautiful? More satisfying? How does asking God for help make us present to the beauty of God's work in all of creation? How does asking for God's help change our perspective?

Explore familiar songs for children on the Internet if you need to refresh your memory. Before this session check with parents and caregivers about lullabies they sing to their children. You can also invite a guest to sing with the group who knows children's Bible songs.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access

Gather your learners and tell the following story of Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth Morton, aged three, was trapped in a well for hours, she was very frightened. At first she clung to the slimy sides of the wall crying. After she found a place to hold on, she began to sing songs she had learned in church. Several hours later, rescue teams arrived. They put a microphone on the end of a long cord and dropped it down the well to monitor her. They could hear her child voice sing, "Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." No one knew for certain what Elizabeth was thinking. They did not know if she sang to comfort herself because she was afraid, or if she was remembering times she felt safe and loved by others in her church and loved by God.

While this is a pretend story, there are stories of young children who sing their favorite songs in times of crisis. Show how Elizabeth felt by crouching over and kneeling down while looking up from the bottom of the well. Show how her rescuers may have looked by standing on your tip-toes, holding your hand over your eyes, and looking down into the well. Afterward, ask the learners if they, like Elizabeth, have ever been frightened. Then ask if they, like Elizabeth, ever sang or spoke a prayer to God when they were frightened. Invite your learners to sing together “Jesus Loves Me.” Ask them what songs their parents or caregivers sing to them when they go to bed. Sing those that you know.

Conclude by saying that the Bible says God is always with us. Our songs and prayers to God are our beautiful of expressions of gratitude for God’s loving care.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Follow Me (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The beauty of worship can be lost in too many instructions and constant verbal interruption. Think of ways you have learned to worship God without instruction or words. Imagine yourself as a small child looking around at the other people who worship in church. Think about ways you can help your learners follow with the community without using verbal instruction. Increasing the sensory awareness of young learners will help them notice the beauty of God’s invitation and the people’s response in worship.

Supplies: None

Gather your group in a circle. Demonstrate, “Knees, hands, knees, hands,” clapping and patting alternately. Invite everyone to join in by keeping the same rhythm. Keep clapping until everyone helps make the steady rhythmic beat.

Without using words to explain, stop clapping and patting and see who stops with you. Pause for a moment, and then say: I see [name a child or children in your group] was watching carefully. Smile, and invite everyone to begin again; then stop and see who pays attention. Mention all the people who were watching carefully. Clap and pat the steady rhythm one more time to see if everyone follows without a verbal explanation. Avoid pointing out those who are not following. Refrain from using words to correct behavior. Encourage the ones who follow with nonverbal smiles and head nods!

Afterward, explain to the children that the Bible gives us instructions on how to live lives of beauty—lives that are pleasing to God. Ask the children to mimic your actions as you make them and then to suggest words that might describe the “beautiful actions.” Make actions for the following phrases:

- praising God (for example, you could lift your hands over your head)
- sharing
- welcoming
- saying kind words
- reading the Bible
- showing kindness
- peacemaking

5 Over My Head

Leader preparation: Listen to the song “Over My Head.” Look at your community’s hymnal to see if it is located there. Think about possible hand motions for the verses or use the ones provided below. Your group may also have its own ideas about motions for the song. If you are not comfortable singing aloud in front of people, invite someone in your congregation who could come to your group to do the teaching. You may also wish to play a sample of the song from the Internet.

Supplies:

- song: “Over My Head” African American traditional, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2DLSXYxp6Q&feature=related>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Invite the children to learn a new song. If you invited a guest to sing, introduce the guest. Sing (or have the guest sing) the first verse for the learners. Before singing the verse a second time ask: “What do the words say that someone hears?” Then say the lyrics using hand motions. The words “over my head” can be accompanied by the both hands making a sweeping motion over each head, or the children can point upward with their index fingers. “I hear music in the air” can be accompanied by cupping the ear and then pointing upward or by turning around in a circle ending with hands above the head.

Practice the motions and the words by singing several times. To keep the learners’ attention, each time you repeat the verse, ask for something new. For example, sing with a quiet voice; stand up and sing; stand and sing “over my head,” sweep your hands and then sit down again. Use any combination of directions for each repetition. Finally invite the children to sing and move, making beautiful music for God by themselves while you listen.

Point out that one way we know about God is through the Bible. Lead in a verse of the song that says, “When I read the Bible, I hear music in the air.”

Invite your group to sit down and talk about how it felt to sing and make motions to the song, “Over My Head.” Hold your hands over your chest (heart). Ask, “How did you feel here?” Encourage your young learners to use many words such as “warm,” “happy,” “friendly,” and “open.”

6 Mixing It Up!

Leader preparation: Reserve kitchen space or bring a plastic tablecloth and supplies to your room. Purchase a variety of seasonal fruit. Be aware of the variations of color, texture, and shape. Set aside one whole fruit to share and admire with the children. Chop or peel other pieces of fruit for the fruit salad ahead of time. If a kitchen is unavailable, a less costly option would be to make three kinds of gelatin in different flavors ahead of time. Follow the directions on the packages, cutting the gelatin into square shapes once it has set. Be sensitive to any food allergies.

Supplies:

- Bible
- seasonal fruit (washed and separated ahead of time)
- small cups, one for each learner
- (optional) fruit gelatin squares in three colors
- (optional) hand sanitizer

Tell the story from Nehemiah 8 as outlined below:

God’s people had not heard the scripture for many years. A teacher named Ezra read the scriptures to the Israelites. He stood on a special platform. (Stand up and hold your Bible.) When Ezra opened his Bible, all the people stood up. (Have children stand after you open the Bible.) Ezra prayed, and all the people said, “Amen, Amen” and lifted their hands. (Ask the children to say, “Amen, Amen” and lift their hands.) Then the people bowed down with their faces to the ground. (Invite children to do so. Then invite them to sit down.) Nehemiah, a leader of the people, said to the crowd, “This day is special. Don’t be sad. Celebrate and eat good food. God’s joy will keep you strong.” The people were happy that they could hear God’s words. They celebrated together.

Show the group your bag of delicious fruit (or bowls of gelatin). Lift one fruit (or piece of gelatin) out of the bag to be admired. Talk about the color, shape, and texture. Invite the learners to share their opinions and feelings about the selected treat.

Invite the children to have some special treats to remember how God’s people were glad to hear God’s word. Place the prepared fruit or pieces of gelatin into a big bowl. Place selections of the fruit or gelatin into small cups and invite everyone to sample.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Safely Home (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the story in Nehemiah 8. Practice telling the story in your own words.

Supplies:

- Bible

Tell the story of the Israelites responding to hearing scripture. Point out where Nehemiah 8 is in your Bible. Say that the Israelites had been without scripture for many years. Then a teacher named Ezra read scripture to them. The people learned about God’s laws. They read how God commanded them to have a special celebration to remind them of the time God helped them escape from slavery. The people were happy to hear about this celebration. The scripture brought them beauty and made them happy. They built booths from branches. The booths were on the flat roofs of their houses and near the temple. The people lived in the booths for a while as part of a special celebration of thanksgiving.

Gather the learners in a circle. Invite them to stretch out their arms and hands toward the middle of the circle to form a tent of hands that represents a Sukkoth booth. While most hold up their arms and hands, have one at a time stand in the middle to say, “Thank you, God, for bringing us safely home.”



8 Messages of Care

Leader preparation: View the artwork “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)” by Mary Stevenson Cassatt. Close your eyes and remember a time when you were small and held closely by a loving parent. Now view the artwork more closely. What feeling comes up for you as you look at the faces of the mother and child?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)” by Mary Stevenson Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1004323110?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- decorations such as ribbons, shiny stones, or small shells
- slips of paper for messages
- pencils
- scissors
- permanent marker
- (optional: for adult use only) hot glue gun

Place the artwork “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)” at eye level for your learners. Set up an art station. Place out the craft supplies you have brought. Invite the learners to view the picture without speaking. After a few moments ask, “What do you see in this picture?” Accept all answers, inviting each one to share. Then say, “Look at the picture again, and imagine what the child is feeling. What is the mother feeling?”

The third time, invite your learners to look at the artwork and to describe what they feel when they view the mother and child. Connect the children’s feelings with the beauty of the art and God’s creation by asking the learners to close their eyes and imagine themselves in the picture. With eyes still closed ask, “What do you see, hear, touch, and smell that is beautiful? What do you feel that is beautiful?”

Sometimes we show love through our actions. Sometimes we show it through words or pictures. Invite the children to draw a message of love. They may write a message or create a picture to give to someone they love.



9 The Blessing of a Sacred Place

Leader preparation: Think about times when you have been away long enough to miss your home. Close your eyes and remember how it feels for the first few moments when you return to your home. Now read Nehemiah 8. Think about how Nehemiah might have felt leading his people back to Jerusalem after being away a long time. Imagine how hard the people worked to restore their homes and how they turned to God in celebration to thank God for bringing them back.

Supplies:

- “A Shema Scroll,” Attachment: Activity 9
- pencils
- a 2” x 12” strip of paper for each child
- ribbon or string to tie the scroll
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the learners: *Where is your favorite place to be? Do you ever miss that place when you aren’t there?* Sometimes when we are away from home for a while, we really

miss being at home. That is sometimes called being homesick. Invite the children to tell about a time when they might have felt homesick. Help them name some feeling words for being homesick. Help the learners to connect how they felt in their body to descriptive words. If a child says, “I felt sad,” you might ask, “Where in your body felt most sad? Do you have more words to describe your feeling?”

Explain that Nehemiah and the Hebrew people were very sad and wanted to return to their home in Jerusalem. Ask a child to draw a sad face on the newsprint or whiteboard. Now explain how Nehemiah went to speak to the king, even though he felt very afraid. Invite another child to draw a face that shows fear. Conclude by telling how the king let the people go. When they finished rebuilding their temple, they worshiped God and were happy. Now invite a child to draw a happy face.

Explain that some Jewish people today have a reminder in their homes to thank God. This is called a mezuzah. It is placed by the front door. When they go in and out, they thank God by touching the mezuzah, staying connected to God’s gift of a home.

A mezuzah contains an important prayer called the Shema. Say the Shema. Follow the instructions on the attachment to make a simple Shema scroll for each learner. Encourage the learners to decorate the scrolls, making them beautiful gifts for God by drawing images that bring the children a sense of comfort and safety. Repeat the Shema prayer together.

Reflect

How did remembering your own experiences of beauty increase your awareness of God? Was there a child who was particularly sensitive to the beauty in nature, art, music, or scripture? Was there a child who was silent? Pray for all of the children and yourself as you open your heart, mind, and physical senses to receiving God’s presence through the faith practice of experiencing beauty.

Attachment: Activity 9

A Shema Scroll

Many Jewish homes have a mezuzah located on the front door. A mezuzah is a small box that contains a scroll that traditionally appeared in every Jewish household. The scroll contains the “Shema,” or prayer to God, written in Hebrew. Some people touch the mezuzah whenever they come in or leave the home. They touch the mezuzah and then kiss their fingers, showing a sign of respect for God and God’s gifts.

Making a scroll (which is stored inside the mezuzah) is a beautiful and fun way to connect young learners with the faith practice of the Jewish people.

You will need:

- 2” x 12” strip of paper
- pencil or pen
- crayons or markers

How to work:

- Across the middle of the strip of paper write the Shema Prayer: *“Hear Oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”*
- Turn over the paper and have the children decorate that side by drawing pictures or designs
- Roll the paper into a scroll from left to right with the words on the inside.
- Tie with a string or a ribbon.

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children bring natural gifts of discipleship with their enthusiasm for the world's boundless beauty. As young children reflect God's Spirit, they restore and renew possibility for the entire congregation of faith. Look for God's presence in each young learner. You can show by example how disciples experience beauty as a faith practice.

About this Exploration

As disciples, we seek to live as Jesus lived, awake to God's ongoing invitation to sacred relationship. This awareness helps us to discover beauty throughout our journey of discipleship, in both whole and broken places. We open ourselves to the possibility of restoration and renewal, both individually and in community. We connect with God as complete persons—with bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits. We learn to trust our physical senses as entry points into boundless worlds of beauty; they are signposts by which we discover the Holy in the ever-changing creation around and within us. As we engage the Spirit through beauty, God opens us to an entire world of sacred opportunity and pulls us gently, powerfully, toward transformation.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 35:20–29
Acts 9:17–20

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Close your eyes, and take three deep breaths, exhaling slowly each time. In a spirit of gratitude, ask yourself, “What have I received from ____.” Pause and note the response that comes from within. Now ask, “What have I given to ____?” Again pause and note the response within. Finally ask, “What troubles and difficulties have I caused?” Pause the third time as you acknowledge the response. Now breathe three more times, exhaling slowly each time. Open your eyes and remind yourself of God’s love!

Prayer: God who is a gift giver, thank you for what I have received from you and from others. Help me share good gifts of love, care, leadership, and discipleship with the children in this group. May I recognize each child as a gift of love from you. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.



1 The Willing Heart (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Practice reading Exodus 35:20–29. Make note of how many times “heart” is mentioned.

Supplies:

- Bible

As you read aloud Exodus 35:20–29, ask your learners to raise their hands each time they hear the word “heart.” To be helpful, pause each time you say “heart.” Explain that a willing and loving heart is beautiful to God. Read the passage again, and this time ask the learners to place their two hands over their hearts when they hear the word “heart.”

After the second reading, invite the children to tell ways they can show their willing hearts as disciples of Jesus. Some answers may include: sharing with my brother, helping my mom at home, doing my chores without being asked, reading a story with my grandma. If time permits, ask the learners to mime one of the actions they mentioned.



2 I Am a Gift from God!

Leader preparation: Consider the gifts God has given you. Remember times you have shared these gifts. Recognize how others have shared their gifts with you, creating spaces of beauty in our world.

Supplies:

- “Gift from God,” Attachment: Activity 2
- pencils and crayons

Explain to your learners that God’s love creates open and loving hearts. Explain that God gives everyone gifts to be shared with others. Invite the children to name some gifts or talents they have—gifts such as laughter, friendship, sharing, singing, dancing, drawing, or cooperating with others.

Pass out copies of the attachment. Encourage each learner to draw at least one picture inside the big heart of a way to share a talent. Artists need not be limited to one heart! Have the children take home their pictures.

Option: Have each child make two pictures. Send home one, and display the others as a gallery of gifts from God. Or ask permission to have this art used as bulletin covers for an upcoming Sunday.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.



3 Preparing for the Journey

Leader preparation: View the artwork “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot. Note the colors and artistic rendering of the Magi. Pay special attention to the rugged environment depicted in the artwork. Remember times you have taken a long journey. Call to mind times when you have taken a challenging or invigorating journey, either physically or spiritually.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1004323110?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Show your learners the artwork of “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot. Ask them to count the horses and the people. Draw attention to the mountains in the background and ask: *Do you think these people traveled over these mountains? How must that have felt?* (tiring, hot, dusty, sweaty, hungry, excited, angry) *How do you think it feels to ride on a camel?* (bumpy, smelly, like being on a roller coaster, dizzy)

Explain that the Bible tells a story of the Magi. Ask if anyone has heard the story. Say that the Magi are sometimes called wise men or kings in the story of the birth of Jesus. The Bible does not tell us how many wise men came to see Jesus. These people took a long trip to see Jesus.

Ask your learners about trips they may have taken. How did they travel—by car, by plane, by train, by bus? Where did they go? Where did they stay—in a hotel, in someone’s house, in a tent or camper? Whom did they visit? What did they take with them—clothes, toys, food, gifts? Explain that traveling gives us the opportunity to experience God’s world in beautiful and exciting ways, sharing our experiences as disciples of Jesus.

Afterward play a game. Start by saying, “I am going on a trip and I am taking [name an item] with me.” The next person in the circle will repeat what you said and add another item to the list. Continue this pattern, with each child being able to say all the items and add an item to the list. You may need to help them remember the entire list by repeating with them. If time permits, return to the artwork. Talk about all the items the Magi might take on their trip. Ask if the children have ever received a present from someone who traveled for a visit. The Magi brought beautiful presents to Jesus.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 The Man Who Hated Christians! (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read the story of Acts 9:17–20 on the attachment. If you have time, practice telling the story without the sheet, using the indicated movements and hand gestures.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “The Man Who Hated Christians,” Attachment: Activity 4

Show the children where the story is found in the Bible. Tell the story using the attachment. Explain that God did not hold a grudge against Saul. God loved Saul, and changed him from the inside out. Point out how beauty often begins with what is on the inside of a person, where hearts can be changed. After Saul learned about Jesus, his sight was restored and Christians called him by a new name, Paul. Emphasize that God is willing to forgive everyone.

Encourage the learners to act out the various parts of this engaging and beautiful story as they play Saul, the religious leaders, Ananias, and the voice of God.

**5 Puzzle Pictures**

Leader preparation: Cut out separate images from magazines, or bring symbols of the following: bulb, blooming flower, seeds, apple, winter scene, spring scene, cocoon, butterfly, cross, empty tomb.

Supplies:

- hymn: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability
- “Matching Puzzle,” Attachment: Activity 5

Play or sing “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” for your young learners. Describe how the words of the song are like a puzzle. They describe some things that change. Show the children the matching puzzle from the attachment. Help them match the things that change: seed with flower, acorn with oak tree, winter with spring, and cocoon with butterfly.

Explain that the pictures teach us something about God, who created a world of beautiful examples of life for us to enjoy and appreciate. Ask: *What does a seed grow into? What does winter turn into? What does a cocoon become? What happens to a bulb that is put into the ground? We change, too. We grow from babies to children to adults. As we follow Jesus, we change on the inside, growing into people who please God.*

6 Preparing the Worship Table

Leader preparation: Assemble the objects listed for the worship basket. Be creative and include shiny stones, pieces of jewelry, flowers, or other objects that strike you as beautiful.

Supplies:

- Bible
- purple or blue altar cloth
- decorations for worship table, such as small cross, flowers, candle
- CD player and soft music (instead of singing)
- a small table or cardboard box turned upside down
- clay

Read Exodus 35:20–29. As you read, emphasize the different ways people praised God, such as offering God pins, earrings, rings, pendants, gold objects, blue and purple linen, animal hair, animal skins, bronze, gold and silver objects, wooden objects, woven fabric, onyx stones and gems, spices, oil, incense, and—not to be forgotten—acts of willing participation.

Show the learners your basket of prepared items. Explain that when we worship together, we bring beautiful things to the worship table as our offering to God. We usually sing and move forward to place items on the worship table. Describe each item in your basket. Give each learner one item to be brought to the worship table you have arranged. Encourage each learner to practice bringing the item forward, placing it on the worship table, and then returning to a seat. After practicing, redistribute the items and repeat while singing or listening to the music.

Ask the children to fashion from clay their own objects to place on the worship table. Once they have done so, ask the participants how it felt to place the items on the worship table. Ask: *What words would you use to describe your feelings when you bring God an offering?* Remind your young learners that disciples of Jesus share their love of God by saying thank you in worship.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Hello World! A Body Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: To celebrate the beauty of each day, we can move our bodies in a morning prayer. How can you welcome each morning as an opportunity to live in the presence of the Holy One?

Supplies: None

Invite your learners to stand about an arm’s length apart. Explain that God creates beautiful surprises for us every day. One surprise is the rising of the sun every morning.

Say that stretching our bodies is a beautiful way to begin a new day. As followers of Jesus, we use our minds and bodies to worship God. Note that to be a disciple means to copy someone. Invite the children to follow you as you lead in this body prayer.

The Body Prayer: (Invite your learners to copy your motions and to repeat the words.)

- (Space your feet apart, and raise your arms over your head.) Say, “We raise our hands to thank God for the beautiful sunrise.”
- (Clasp your hands together and stretch, bending to the left and then to the right.) “We move in all directions to thank God for the beautiful creation wherever we look.”
- (Now bring your arms down with a sweep, placing palms together in front of your belly.) “We thank God for bringing us food and well-being.”
- (Bow your head toward your hands and wait for a count of three. Now lift your head, sweep your arms in front of your body over your head up to the sky.) “With our entire body, mind, and spirit we thank God for this beautiful new day.”
- (Let your arms fall gently to your sides.) “Amen.”

8 I Saw the Light!

Leader preparation: Think about the story of Saul and Ananias. Remember people in your life who have opened your eyes to the beauty of God’s love. Go to the suggested website to review the lyrics to the first verse of “This Little Light of Mine.” You may include others verses if time permits.

Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “This Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/t030.html>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Show the children Acts 9:17–20 in the Bible. Then tell this paraphrase of the story:

Once there was a man named Saul who thought that Jesus and his followers were troublemakers. He wanted to get rid them. Now, Saul was trying to be a good man. He obeyed the Ten Commandments and worshiped God every day. Yet Saul held anger in his heart and mind toward the followers of Jesus until one important day. Saul was walking along a road when a bright light shone above his head and all around his body. Saul looked up. A voice came from the light saying, “Saul, stop picking on the Christians! Why are you doing this?” Saul stopped right on the road said, “Who is that talking to me?”

The voice answered, “I am Jesus. When you cause trouble for my followers, you cause trouble for me.” Then Saul could not see! Saul’s friends took him to a nearby city. God sent a man called Ananias to visit Saul. Ananias prayed for Saul. Then Saul could see! He believed that Jesus was God’s Son. Saul was baptized and began telling others about Jesus.

God changed Saul from one who was angry and who hurt people to one who shared the beautiful love of God. Let’s sing a song together to remember the light that came to Saul.

Lead the group in singing “This Little Light of Mine.”

(Hold up one finger and wave it in the air like a candle; then move both hands up over your head and back to your chest while singing this familiar tune.)

This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I’m gonna let it shine.
Let it shine.
Let it shine.
Let it shine.

Invite the learners to make up their own verses. A couple examples might be: “Ananias shined his light, helping Paul to see” and “Saul opened his eyes to see that Jesus was a friend.”

9 What’s In a Name?

Leader preparation: Practice clapping the syllables of your learner’s names using the activity sheet as an example. Name each one prayerfully before God.

Supplies:

- “What’s in a Name?” Attachment: Activity 9

Gather your group in a circle. Say that a man called Saul used to give trouble to people who followed Jesus. After Saul learned about God’s love, he followed Jesus, too, and Saul changed his name to Paul. Then play “What’s in a name?” from the attachment. After you clap and say the syllables of a name, the named learner echoes with the same clap. If time permits, other learners can lead the group.

Reflect

Reflect on how God has shown you beauty in each of your learners’ lives. Take a moment to thank God for the intricate web of connectedness that calls us to be fully human in the image of our Creator.

Attachment: Activity 2

Gift from God



**I am a gift
from
God**

Attachment: Activity 4

The Man Who Hated Christians
Based on Acts 9:17-20

(Storyteller can stand or sit)

Saul of Tarsus was an important and rich man. He had lots of responsibilities. One thing Saul knew for certain was that he just hated Christians.

Saul spent his time rounding up Christians and putting them into jail. Saul finally went to the religious leaders, asking them to help him put in jail those who believed in Jesus. Saul just hated Christians!

The religious leaders agreed. They told Saul to go to the town of Damascus to catch more Christians and to put them in jail to stop the Christians from talking about Jesus. Saul began his journey right away. That mean man Saul just could not stand people loving Jesus!

Now Saul, as he was walking along the road to Damascus, was surprised to see a great light. *(Storyteller stands up, if seated, and demonstrates how Saul was blinded, shading eyes with hands and falling to the ground.)*

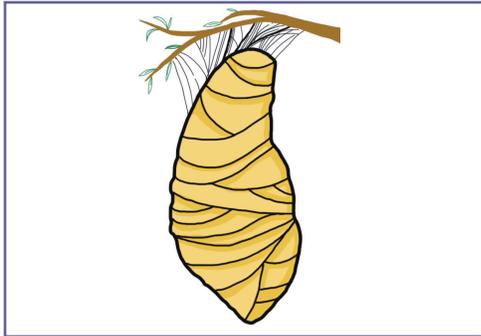
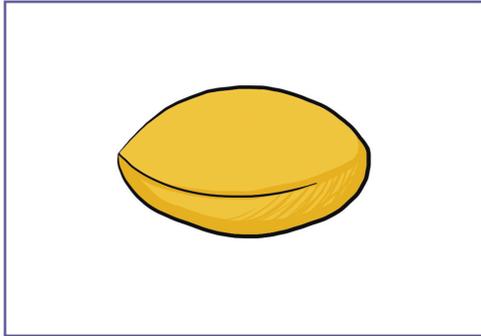
(From the fallen position, the storyteller continues.) Saul shook his head and held his eyes only to hear a voice saying, "Saul, Saul why are you hurting me?"

(Storyteller stands up and continues.) Saul is now blind, hungry, and helpless. Some friends helped him get to Damascus.

Now let me tell you about Ananias. Ananias was a Christian. He had heard about Saul, and he was very afraid of him. But Ananias heard God's voice telling him to go and see Saul. God said to pray for Saul. Ananias obeyed God. When Ananias prayed for Saul, something like scales fell off of Saul's eyes. Saul could see! Saul changed. Saul no longer hated Christians. He changed his name to Paul, and now he became a Christian. He began to tell people all about Jesus.

Attachment: Activity 5

Matching Puzzle



Attachment: Activity 9

What's In a Name?

 = one clap

 = two even claps

 = three even claps

Example One:



Calling Beth.



My name's Beth.

Example Two:



Calling Me-liss-a



My name's Me-liss-a.

Example Three:



Calling Bob-by



My name's Bob-by.

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

When adults work with children, they often find that everything old is new again! Traditions that have been practiced for centuries suddenly take on fresh appeal. Young children bring energy and insight to Christian traditions as they explore music, body movement, and beautiful artistic responses to God. When young children share their response with the entire faith community in worship, Christian traditions can be reinvigorated as adult learners come to know God again and yet again.

About this Exploration

For centuries followers of the Christian tradition have sought ways to connect with God. Layers of song, prayers, spoken word, and silent searching have characterized the heart of the community of faith in its longing for Holy connection. The ways we worship and live out our daily lives reflect these traditions, sometimes without our even knowing it. At times, traditions are left behind for generations and then rediscovered in new, relevant, and powerful ways. This exploration seeks to examine, appreciate, and perhaps revive some of our traditions and thereby bless and empower a faith that is rooted in today's world and experience.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 8
John 12:1-8

Leader Preparation

Take one day to imagine that everyone you interact with is just a grown-up child! Practice seeing through the adult facade into the heart of each person. Notice how your own feelings change toward people and circumstances. Each time you remember to “see through” the adult layer, say the following prayer.

Prayer: God, show me the heart of this person. Make me aware of your presence within each of us. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 How Majestic Is Your Name (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read aloud Psalm 8. Close your eyes and picture the word “majestic.” What images come to mind for you? Open your eyes again. Stand and move your body to express the beauty of the word “majestic.” Ask yourself how it feels to respond to a word with your body. Note that kinesthetic learners may find this style of response more satisfying and complete than those who are primarily visual or auditory. God’s beautiful plan does not create all learners alike!

Supplies:

- Bible

Gather your learners. Have them repeat the word “majestic” several times out loud. Say that other words with a similar meaning might be awesome, grand, or lofty. Sometimes the word majestic is used to describe big mountains. We can use the word “majestic” to describe God.

Now have the children practice saying “majestic” as you sweep your arms over your head in a circular fashion (Begin with hands placed in your lap, stretch the arms overhead, and then sweep them back down and place them in your lap again.) Invite them to repeat this motion.

Say that you are going to read the words to a song that many, many people have said and sung. Read Psalm 8. Insert the words “Oh, Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth,” at the beginning and end of your reading. Ask the group to make the motions with you on the word “majestic.”

Afterward, ask the children to demonstrate how they might act if they were seeing something truly amazing or awesome. Encourage movement with the entire body. Read Psalm 8 again, using new movements.



2 Moon, Stars, and Heavens, Too!

Leader preparation: If possible this week, take time to engage God’s world by observing the beauty of the moon and stars overhead. Even if there is cloud cover, look up as you take a deep breath. When exhaling, thank God for the beautiful majestic creation.

Supplies:

- large piece of artwork board or sheet of butcher paper
- markers, glitter, small shiny shapes
- glue
- safety scissors
- “Moon and Star,” Attachment: Activity 2

Say that people of faith often look at the moon and stars as an opportunity to explore God’s beautiful creation. The Bible often talks about the beauty of the sky. Psalm 8 is one example. Pass out copies of the “Moon and Star,” Attachment: Activity 2. Invite each learner to decorate a star and a moon with the available materials. Afterward, have them cut out the designs. Invite learners to glue their creation on the large piece of artwork or butcher paper that you have titled “God Makes the Moon, Stars, and Heavens, Too.”

Option: Display the art in the church, or connect with the worship leader and ask if the children may bring forward their drawing during next week's offering.

3 Something Beautiful for Jesus

Leader preparation: Read the story from John 12:1–8. Think about the story in light of the gift Mary gave to Jesus as she touched (anointed) his head and feet with expensive oil.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) small container of olive oil and paper towels

Gather your learners in a circle. Show them how to “draw” a cross with your finger, making the shape on the back of your hand. If you brought olive oil, hold your hand close to your nose and take a deep breath. Describe how the oil smells to you. Before telling the story of Mary’s anointing of Jesus, invite the children to touch and smell the oil. Offer to anoint the backs of their hands either by simply tracing the outline of a cross with your finger or with oil. Do not insist! Some may choose not to participate. Some may want to wipe off the oil immediately, so provide paper towels.

Show the children where John 12:1–8 can be found in the Bible. Then tell the story using this paraphrase:

Jesus had good friends named Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. His friends loved him, and he loved them. They showed their love in many beautiful ways. One way they showed their love was to invite Jesus over for meals so that they could eat together. Because people of this time walked in sandals for long distances, their feet were often tired and dirty. One evening, Mary showed her beautiful love for Jesus in a special way. Before the meal, she had saved her money and bought special, expensive oil. After they ate together, she took out her oil and rubbed the oil into Jesus’ tired head and tired feet. Can you imagine how surprised and pleased he would be? His tired feet, especially, were given new life in this wonderful gift.

Explain to your group that in some faith traditions putting oil on the feet or the hand or the forehead is called “anointing.”

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Jesus’ Friend Called Mary (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Call to mind some of your good friends with whom you have shared meals. In light of that memory, consider the relationship of Jesus with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Supplies: None

Explain to your group: Jesus had a close group of friends. Their names were: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus often went to their house for dinner and to talk about his day. On one of his visits with his friends, Mary put oil on his tired feet and head.

Ask, *Do you ever put oil on your friend's feet?* Encourage looks of disbelief and even some laughter. Then explain that Jesus' friends lived in a much different time than we do. Because the roads were very dusty and everyone wore sandals, it was polite to offer to wash a guest's feet. Being kind to people then as now is a beautiful way to show your feelings and share the gift of God's love with others.

Anointing sometimes happens today in churches when we want to say a special prayer for someone. Usually we place a small drop of oil on a person's forehead or hand.

Invite your group to respond by asking: *How do you help your friends? When friends come to your house, how are you polite?* Some answers may include: helping with chores or homework, sharing belongings, listening when friends are sad, sharing when friends are happy, playing together, or together washing hands before a snack or meal.

Invite two children to act out a way of being a good friend without using words. See if the rest of the group can guess what they are doing. Invite everyone to participate. Afterward describe all the beautiful ways the learners helped their friends, encouraging each one to continue to be a good and beautiful friend just as Mary was to Jesus.



5 Moving Together Beautifully

Leader preparation: Think of the many ways people bring beauty to worship, including movement and dance. We can pray, sing, and move with a spirit of love as expressions of beauty. Remember a time you felt moved to "move" in worship. How was that experience for you?

Review the directions on "Movement Instructions," Attachment: Activity 5, for this simple choreographed group activity so that you can explain the directions while participating with the children.

Supplies:

- piece of soft fabric approximately the size of a single bed sheet (a piece of gauze also works)
- "Movement Instructions," Attachment: Activity 5

Explain that people of faith find many ways to show their love for God in worship. Invite your learners to share what actions they have observed in worship services. Some answers may include: standing, sitting, kneeling, singing, dancing, praying, speaking, and even being quiet.

Show the children the piece of fabric. Explain that you will be learning ways to move together using the fabric. Spread the fabric on the floor. Ask everyone to gather around the fabric. Follow the dance directions on the attachment. Afterward ask the learners how it felt to move together. Ask, *Did we dance with the fabric? Was music necessary to move together? Did you miss music?*

Now ask what movements people make during worship services. Some examples may be that people walk together during an offering, people stand and sit together when singing and praying, or some people close their eyes and even fold their hands to pray. Try having the children take turns modeling some of these actions while the others follow.

Moving together and watching others for cues encourages us to pay attention to one another and connects us. Moving together is one way we worship beautifully.

 6 A Litany of Preparation

Leader preparation: Many art experiences are enhanced by preparing our minds, bodies, and hearts through praying together. Help your young learners practice this faith tradition of centering prayer, which can be shared in worship or any time they confront beauty. By using motions to connect with the words, the children are likely to experience and eventually choose an attitude of reverence, which creates a pathway within each person for beauty to transform.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Red Canna” by Georgia O’Keefe, <http://www.art.com/products/p10032683-sa-i674918/georgia-okeeffe-red-canna.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&ui=4FA2E7AB9F664A828CD2028E434AEDC4>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Ask your learners to take a big breath and then exhale. Before you show the artwork, say a prayer together. Invite the children to copy your actions as you pray:

“Oh, Holy One, be in my head so that I can understand the beauty of your world.” *(Pause to hold your hands to the side of your head.)*

“Oh, Holy One, be in my eyes so that I can see the beauty of your world.” *(Pause to cover your eyes with the palms of your hand.)*

“Oh, Holy One, be in my mouth as I speak beautiful words of love.” *(Pause to put fingers over your lips.)*

“Oh, Holy One, be in my heart, filling me with love for your beautiful creation.” *(Pause to place both hands over the heart.)*

After the prayer show the children a beautiful picture by a woman named Georgia O’Keefe. Display the artwork “Red Canna” by Georgia O’Keefe. Ask what colors the children see, how they think the flower might smell, and what might it be like to be wrapped in the center of the flower. Finish by repeating the prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities

 7 The Most Beautiful Day (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Beautiful days are often unexpected. Gratitude can transform an ordinary day into a work of beauty. Encourage your learners to create fun ways to participate in the Christian tradition of giving thanks to God.

Supplies: None

Form a circle with your group. A beautiful day is one in which we thank God for all the gifts that are given to us. Ask: *What colors do you see on a beautiful day? What do you smell on a beautiful day (the salt in the ocean, the smoke from a cookout, fresh cut grass)? What does a beautiful day taste like (a cold lick of ice cream, a glass of lemonade, a cup of hot chocolate)? What does a beautiful day sound like (e.g., dogs barking, laughing, a train whistle in the distance, birds singing)?*

Let’s think of some fun ways to give thanks for the beauty of each day. I will begin by clapping and then thanking God for someone I am grateful for. Then you can clap with

me and name someone you are grateful for. After practicing, encourage your learners to thank God for their favorite food, their favorite song, or their favorite color (to name a few examples). Once a favorite is chosen, then an action can accompany the favorite, always beginning with, “I thank God for . . .”

Some actions that accompany favorites may include: jumping up and down, hopping on one foot, patting the head, and turning in a circle.

Conclude with these words: *It is good to give God praise and thanks. We can give our thanks by ourselves and we can give our thanks in our community of faith when we worship. Most of all we can thank God for the beauty of each day and ask God to help us share the beauty with others.*



8 Praising God Together

Leader preparation: Reading Psalm 8 can help young learners make a connection to the greatness of God. As children praise, they can come to see their place in the beautiful design and order of creation, which is to live in cohabitation with the, “sheep, oxen, beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea and whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”

Supplies:

- “How Majestic Is Your Name,” Attachment; Activity 8

Invite your learners to make a circle. Follow the directions on the activity sheet. If time permits, encourage learners to include new motions for the beasts of the field, the fish, and the birds. You may wish to share your praise response to Psalm 8 with another group or in worship.

9 For the Beauty of the Earth

Leader preparation: Listen to the guitar and voice version from the YouTube link of the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth.” The refrain of this traditional hymn makes a beautiful spoken or sung antiphon for children, which can be shared in worship. Practice singing or saying, “Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.”

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth” by Folliot S. Pierpoint (tune: Dix), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGt4-KyFwe4&feature=related>

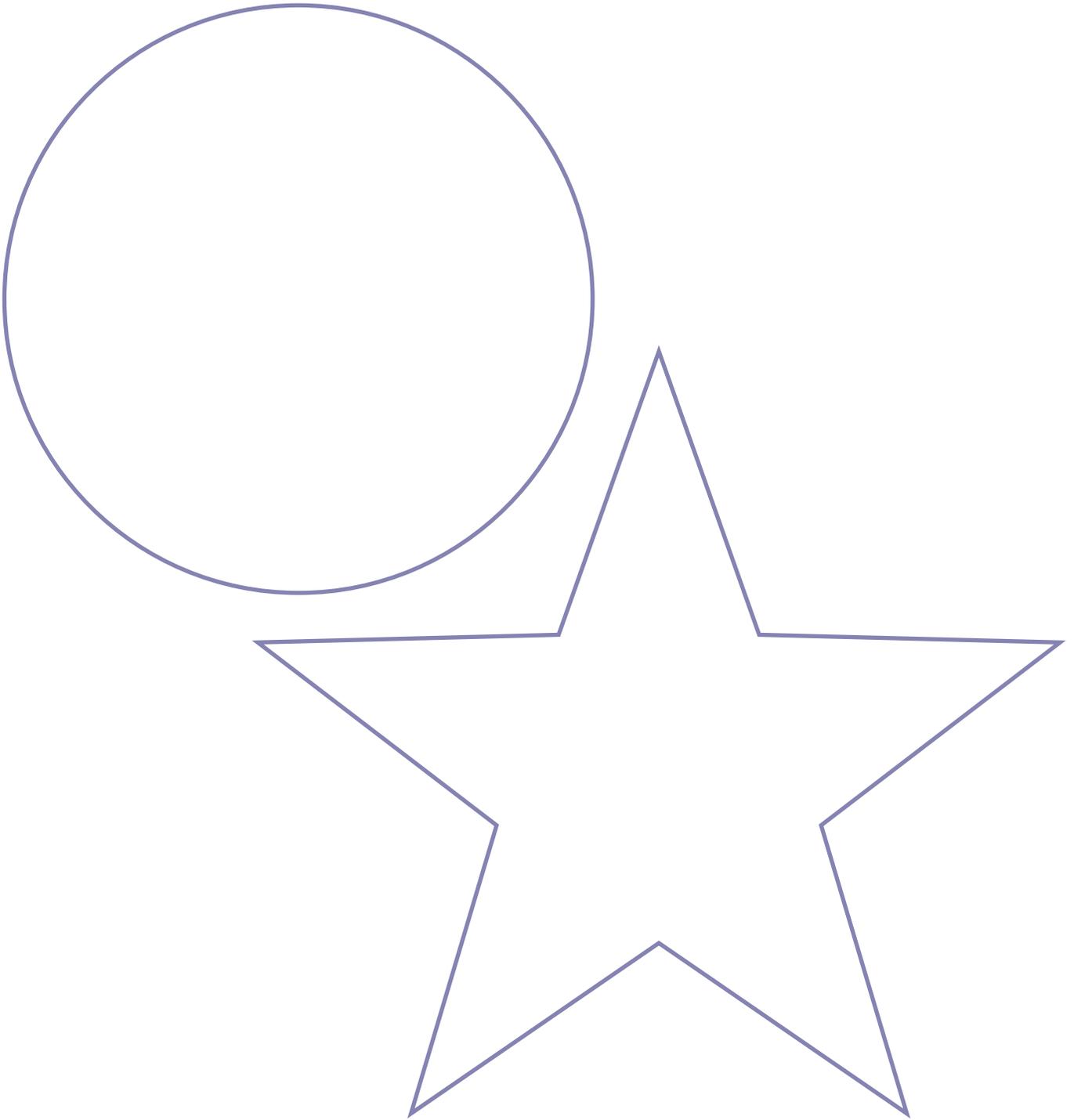
Seat your learners in a circle. Play the video clip of the hymn so they can see and hear the music. Ask each one to name something for which he or she wants to thank God. After each one shares, sing or speak the refrain of the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth.” The words are: “Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.”

Reflect

Spend a moment to remember when your spirit felt uplifted as you worked with your group. Were you able to catch a glimpse of the beauty expressed through our faith traditions? Was it the music, the art, or the movement that uplifted your spirit? Also ponder if your spirit felt detached or deflated by any event. Explore the situation with an uncritical eye. Was there a message in that moment for you from God? Now thank God for the opportunity to explore your own faith with the young children.

Attachment: Activity 2

Moon and Star



Attachment: Activity 5

Movement Instructions

Place fabric (size of a single sheet) flat on floor. Invite learners to gather around, facing the fabric.

Joining the group will help them follow directions for this movement activity. You can speak the directions as you do them, allowing for auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners to catch on to the pattern.

1. Take two giant steps backward.
2. Take two giant steps forward.
3. Repeat 1 and 2.
4. Join hands with the people next to you and move counter clockwise around the fabric one time (you may have to get the circle going in the right direction by joining hands with the learners).
5. Now turn and go around clockwise.
6. Drop hands. Repeat 1 and 2.
7. (Before repeating the circles:) Take up the cloth with both hands. Now circle one time around counter clockwise.
8. Continuing to hold the cloth, circle around clockwise.
9. Set down the cloth.
10. Repeat 1 and 2, ending with heads bowed, eyes looking to feet, hands at sides.

Attachment: Activity 8

How Majestic Is Your Name
An Action Prayer
Adapted from Psalm 8

Psalm 8 tells us that we have been made to care for all the creatures of the earth. Pray the words after me while we do the motions together.

God, we praise you for the sheep and the oxen
(hold up two fingers to the side of the head for sheep horns).

God, we thank you for all the beasts of the field
(pretend to walk on all fours).

God, we thank you for the birds of the air
(use your arms and hands to flap like wings).

God, we thank you for the fish of the sea
(put palms together in front of your body and move them from one side to the other as if a fish swimming in the sea).

God, how majestic is your name
(sweep arms out and up over the head and down again the side of the body).

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Helping young learners to share their experiences of God in words, music, and artistic expression becomes the joy and the challenge for adult leaders. The world of these children is mostly centered on their immediate environments. They are slowly becoming aware of broader global concerns, but for the most part, their sense of context and mission relates to the places they regularly go and the people they know. A sense of fairness is important to this group, as is security. Knowing that God is good and fair is a key learning.

About this Exploration

The beauty that surrounds us—in our relationships as well as the gifts of creation—points us to God. When we actively engage with our faith, we open ourselves to seeing beauty everywhere, in an ever-widening context. As we awaken to a new appreciation for the Divine, we are better equipped to reflect beauty ourselves and join with others to experience the grace and glory of God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Ecclesiastes 3:1–13
2 Corinthians 5:16–20

Leader Preparation

Spend a moment to think of ways God has made you a new creation in Christ. Think of a recent time when you have renewed your attitude or opinion toward a person or circumstance. All children need to be reminded that mistakes can be corrected with God's help.

Prayer: *Holy One, create in me a clean heart so that I can live as your new creation—wherever I am each and every day. Amen.*

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① A Breath for Peace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Become aware of your breath, that essential act of your body. Try thinking of God's goodness as you inhale. As you exhale, pray for peace for all those you encounter.

Supplies: None

Explain that peace is a beautiful experience that God gives us. Peace fills us from the inside out. Ask the learners to place both their hands on their stomachs right below their belly buttons. Invite them to breathe in and to watch their hand move outward. Ask, "Where did the air go?" Most will say, "Inside of me." Now practice inhaling, and then ask the children to exhale like they are blowing up a balloon. Ask, "Where did the air go?" Most will say, "Inside the pretend balloon!"

Ask each learner to inhale and then exhale again. After a few tries, invite people to lay their hands lightly in their laps. Now invite them to inhale while thinking the word "love" and exhale thinking the word "peace." Ask, "Where did your breath of peace go?" An answer could be, "Into the room."

Ask your group to name situations they encounter during a regular week, such as eating a meal together as a family, going to school or day care, visiting friends, going to the grocery store, and so forth. Choose one of these and practice breathing God's peace. Name the activity, breathe in God's love, and then breathe out God's peace. Ask the children where they imagine their breath of peace going. Encourage them to practice this breathing prayer at home during the week.

② No Time to Waste!

Leader preparation: Reflect on Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Read aloud to yourself, appreciating the rich and sacred language. Acknowledge a time in your life when your experience of God has moved you forward because the "time was right." Thank God for speaking to you in the specific context of your life, as God speaks to all of creation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- matzoh or pita bread
- cinnamon
- chopped dates and almonds
- juice
- a personal object that connects you to another generation (perhaps a piece of jewelry, a photo, a family object)

Invite your group to listen carefully as you read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Ask each listener to raise a hand each time you say the word "time."

After the reading, explain that timing is very important in God's world. Often we are called to wait or to hurry, depending upon the circumstance. For example, when the Hebrew people were forced out of Egypt in Bible times, they could not stop to wait for their bread to rise before baking. Ask the learners if they have ever helped bake bread. Explain that yeast, also called leaven, is added to bread dough, and then there is a waiting time. During the waiting time, the dough

rises. After the dough rises, it is baked. Yet the Hebrew people did not have time to wait, so they took their “unleavened” bread dough and left Egypt.

Explore together how the Jewish people celebrate the time when they left Egypt in a hurry by calling the event Passover. During Passover many Jewish people eat only unleavened bread called matzoh. During that entire week many Jewish people still eat matzoh to remember how called God them to move quickly during a time of great danger.

Show the learners a personal object that connects generations, such as a necklace, a photo, or family object. Explain how your object connects you to people in your family who lived before. Make the connection with how the Hebrew people connect with their families by celebrating Passover.

Now sit around your table, exploring the individual elements of your feast. Name each item. Encourage each learner to engage the various elements of the feast by offering a bit of each item to everyone. Describe what you taste. Encourage conversation about each learner’s experience by asking how that item tastes to them. Does it remind them of another food, time, or place?

When finished, explain to the learners that all of the items eaten together were foods from Bible times. Connect the beauty of sharing food over the centuries with other people of faith.

③ Name the Season

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower,” which is often called “The Hymn of Promise.” Review how to make tissue paper flowers.

Supplies:

- hymn: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- computer with Internet access to play video
- tissue paper
- pipe cleaners
- link to instructions for making tissue paper flowers, <http://crafts.kaboose.com/flower2.html>

Introduce the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” to your group. Invite the children to engage with the song by holding their hands, fingers spread, over their faces. When they hear the word “reveal,” they can pull their hands away to reveal their own smiling faces. Demonstrate this action, and have the children try it. Then ask, *What do you think “reveal” means?* Give the example of how the earth hides and then reveals an amazing flower. Say that people can also be revealed as beautiful over time.

Play the song. As everyone listens, encourage explorative movement. It is easy to sway back and forth to the steady rhythm, moving left to right. Try demonstrating this motion with your own body. See if anyone imitates you.

Help the children to make flowers from tissue paper. (See the suggested link in the Supplies list.) They will layer several rectangles of tissue paper on top of one another. Have them (1) fold the tissue paper accordion-style length-wise, (2) wrap a pipe cleaner around the middle of the folded paper, and then (3) unfold the paper and gently separate the layers.

One way to share God's beauty is by giving a gift to someone. Have the children each make two flowers, one to keep and one to give away to someone in the church or to a neighbor. Or have the pastor or an elder deliver the flowers to people in nursing homes or who are homebound.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Let Your Love Flow (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity demonstrates how God's love, like water, flows from one person to another.

Supplies:

- pitcher of water
- small paper or plastic cups

Show the learners the pitcher of water. Pour some water in a small cup, saying, "Water is beautiful. Look how it flows naturally from the pitcher to a cup." Explain that the love we have for God also flows easily unless we block the flow. Ask what are some ways that we block our loving feelings? Some answers may include being angry, treating other people in a mean way, not helping.

Now pour the water from the pitcher to the cup again, and say, "Water is a beautiful reminder of how God's love flows from one person to another." Now pour the water from one cup to the next cup. Repeat four or five times with different cups.

If time permits, decide together what actions help keep love flowing. Each time someone gives an answer, the children could take a sip of water. *Does praying to God help? Do kind actions help? Does saying thank you to God help? Does sharing a drink with someone help?* There are many ways for us to help keep love flowing.

Option: Set up a table with pitchers of water and cups. Add a sign that says, "Water is a beautiful reminder of how God's love flows from one person to another." As people pass by, have the children offer a cup of water.



5 A New Creation

Leader preparation: If you have one readily available, look at a photo of yourself when you were a baby. Think about how you have changed and grown over the years.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Guatemala: Procession" by Betty LaDuke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1004323110?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- "Once I Was Little," Attachment: Activity 5
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Ask the children what they remember about the birth of Jesus. Be sure to mention that Mary, Jesus' mother, rode a donkey. Now show the artwork "Guatemala: Procession" by Betty LaDuke.

Name the figure in the middle of the art as Jesus. Say that Jesus grew up and did what God wanted him to do. Growing up is an important process. We can grow stronger, and we can also grow in our ability to follow God. Ask the children what they can do now that they couldn't do when they were younger. Some answers may include the following: I can help with chores now. I can play with my brothers and sisters. I can learn new things and share them with others.

Explain that God changes all of us, makes us a new creation, both inside and outside. We grow, we get taller and bigger, and we also become the people God wants us to be on the inside. Ask, *What kind of a person do you think God want us to become?*

Teach the poem and movements on the activity sheet, connecting the life of Jesus to God's beautiful creative process.



6 A Time to Love

Leader preparation: Ask one or two people to help with this activity. While they draw individual outlines on the butcher paper, the learners can decorate their hearts.

Supplies:

- butcher paper on a roll (enough to draw the outline of each learner)
- markers and crayons
- construction paper
- heart shape for tracing
- ribbon
- "Big Heart," Attachment: Activity 6

Invite the learners to remember the last time they gave or received a safe hug. *What did it feel like? What words describe the feeling? What did it smell like? Were eyes closed or open? Did feet touch the ground?* Now connect the experience of hugging to how we can share God's love.

Roll out a length of butcher paper on the floor. Show the learners how they will take turns lying on the paper with arms outstretched. Draw each learner's outline. While you are working with the outlines, invite the learners to decorate the big heart on the attachment. Help cut out each child's decorated heart and glue it to his or her outline in the center of the chest. Roll up the papers, and tie them with bright ribbons for the learners to take home.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 All Things New (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Recall the tune to "The Farmer in the Dell." You can hear the tune and read the lyrics on the YouTube site listed below. Exchange the simple tune's words to the words of scripture from 2 Corinthians 5:17, and practice singing several times.

Supplies:

- (optional) song: "Farmer in the Dell," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEoe1xssh-w>

Use the following text, which is based on 2 Corinthians 5:17, to sing to the tune of “Farmer in the Dell”:

Everything is new.
Everything is new.
Jesus comes to bring new life,
so everything is new!

Sing the tune and words one time while the learners listen. Then break the song into short phrases, and encourage the learners to sing each one after you. Finally, put all the phrases together to sing the entire song.

Gather in a circle and turn one direction while you sing, “Everything is new, everything is new.” Then reverse directions to sing, “Jesus comes to bring new life, so everything is new!”

After singing, invite the learners to share experiences they are looking forward to. Some answers may include birthdays, outings, going swimming, or baking cookies. Help the children to see that looking forward to new experiences helps us to experience the beautiful world that God creates each and every day.

8 Praying For the World

Leader preparation: Praying for children around the world increases awareness of God’s beautiful creation and sensitivity to other people. Practice the prayer below with your group and offer to share in worship at a later date.

Supplies: None

Show your learners how to say this prayer with the actions. Afterward, ask what other concerns or praises could be added to your prayer. Your learners may have specific names to add. Receive all suggestions, and then repeat the prayer. Before saying, “Bless the children everywhere,” add the names and situations mentioned by your group. Actions for these additions are not necessary.

Prayer:

Holy God,
Bless the children who have no homes (use hands over your head to make a roof).
Bless the children who go hungry (bring hands to mouth as if eating).
Bless the children who miss their families (wrap arms around your body).
Bless the children who have no friends (hold arms out, palms up, and sweep them in front of the body).
Bless the children who cannot hear (cup hand to ear).
Bless the children who cannot speak (cup hands around mouth).
Bless the children whose bodies are sick (drop head downward and look at the ground).
Bless all of the children in God’s beautiful creation (place hands across chest).

Conclude the entire prayer with “Bless the children everywhere.”



9 Christingle

Leader preparation: Review the information about the Moravian Church on the web page below. One Moravian Church custom includes the beautiful “Christingle” celebration, which offers simple visual symbolism to remember God’s gifts. For Christians, the greatest gift from God is the sending of Jesus, who came to the world as a baby, grew to manhood, and then gave his life for the world. Celebrating Christingle provides the opportunity to think about children in need and to offer gifts of prayer and money. Make one sample so that you are familiar with the process when you demonstrate for your learners.

Supplies:

- “Making a Christingle,” Attachment: Activity 9
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christingle>
- oranges, one for each learner, with a small cross cut in the top
- pieces of red ribbon
- sticky tape
- 3” square of silver foil for each learner
- 4” candle for each learner
- selection of nuts and/or dried fruit
- cocktail sticks

Explain to your learners that a Christingle is a Moravian way to celebrate and share God’s beautiful gifts. The Christingle reminds us to share the beauty of the world, its seasons, the colored fruits grown and eaten, and the light from the sun that guides our way. The Christingle also helps remind us to share the good news of the birth of Jesus. After creating a Christingle, speak the blessing outlined below, asking the children to repeat the underlined phrase.

The orange represents God’s beautiful love in creating the world.

The sticks represent God’s beautiful love in the changing four seasons of the year.

The fruit and sweets represent God’s love in providing beautiful fruits of the earth.

The lighted candle represents God’s beautiful love in sending Jesus, “the light of the world.”

The red ribbon represents God’s beautiful love in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we share with others, we share God’s beautiful gifts in love.

Reflect

As you prepared for and worked with your young learners, did you experience a separation between what is considered sacred and what considered secular, or were the boundaries blurred? As we practice drawing strength from beauty, all of life becomes enlivened and our faith is refreshed.

Attachment: Activity 5

Once I Was Little

Once I was a little one, (
Squat down as low to the ground as you can.)

Now I am much taller.
(Stand back up as tall as you can.)

I have also grown bigger,
(Stand up on tiptoes.)

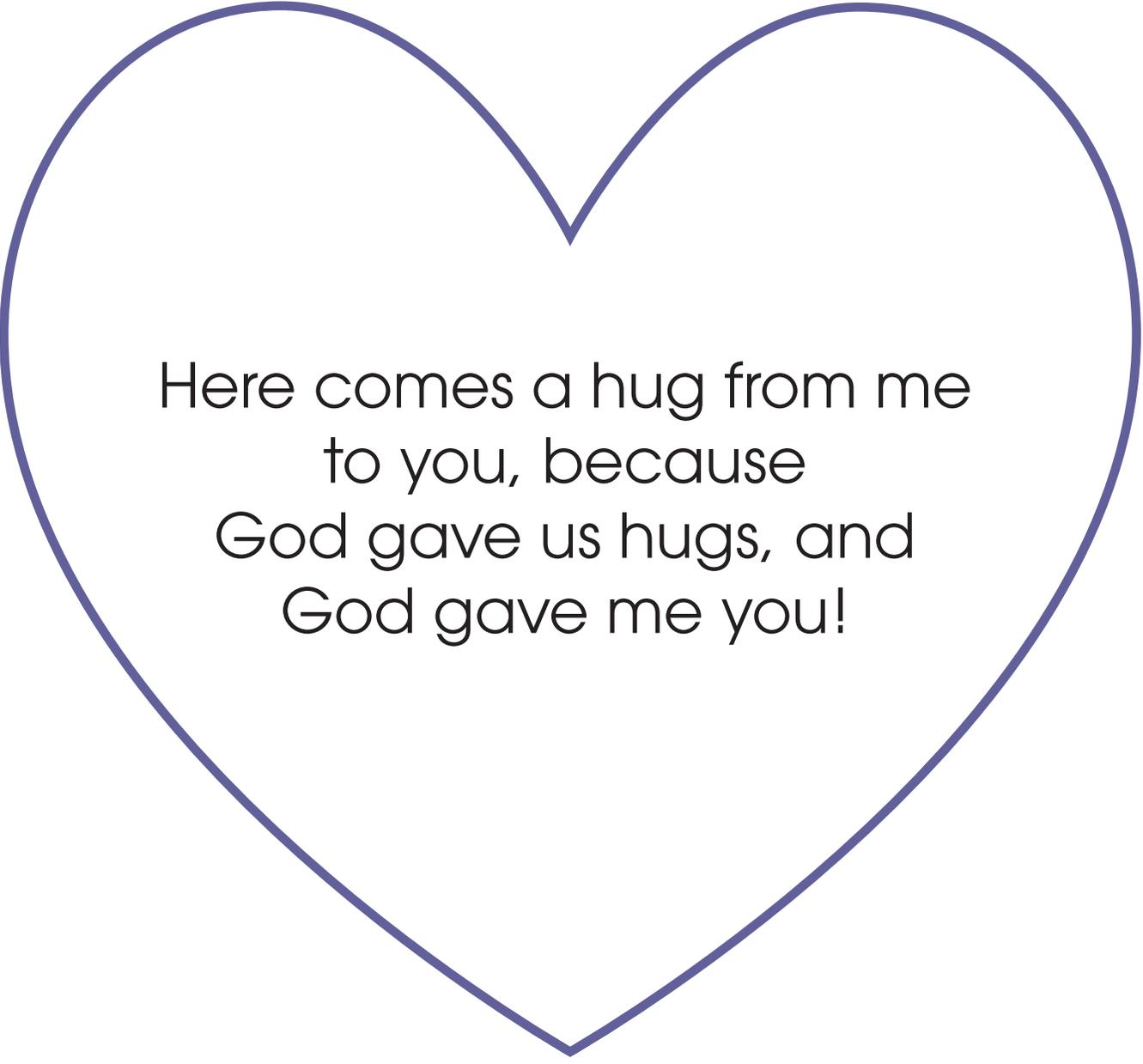
Even though I was smaller.
(Squat back down to the carpet.)

Big or small, short or tall,
(Stand up and stretch arms over the head for "big" and then put hands close together for small as a baby.)

God creates within us all.
(Form a heart with the shape of index fingers and thumbs of both hands.)

Attachment: Activity 6

Big Heart



Here comes a hug from me
to you, because
God gave us hugs, and
God gave me you!

Attachment: Activity 9

Making a Christingle

Gather your group and demonstrate how to make a Christingle.

You will need:

- oranges, with a small cross cut in the top
- pieces of red ribbon
- sticky tape
- 3" squares of silver foil
- 4" candles
- selection of nuts and/or dried fruit
- cocktail sticks



How to work:

- Cut a small cross on the top of an orange.
- Fasten a piece of red ribbon around the middle of the orange, and secure the ribbon with sticky tape.
- Place the foil over the cut in the orange.
- Put the candle on top of the foil, and push it firmly into the cut.
- Put a selection of nuts or fruit onto four cocktail sticks, and insert the sticks into the orange evenly near the base of the candle. Make certain the exposed ends of the sticks are covered with a piece of fruit or sweet.

Explain the symbolism as you demonstrate how to make the Christingle.

Symbolism for the Christingle

The orange represents God's love in creating the world.

The cocktail sticks represent God's love in the four seasons of the year.

The fruit and sweet represent God's love in providing the fruits of the earth.

The lighted candle represents God's love in sending Jesus, "the light of the world."

The red ribbon represents God's love in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Encourage the children to take home their Christingle and place it in a window to show the light of Christ to all who pass.

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Young children enjoy the present, finding beauty in their minute-by-minute exploration of God's world. Talk of future and vision may sound very far away to this young group. Yet creating opportunities to experience tangible beauty right now creates expectancy and grateful awareness for the future, especially when expressed in prayer, praise, and worship with the entire community of faith.

About this Exploration

As we engage with God, we grow in our capacity to understand God's work. Yet the beauty of God's handiwork is all around us in creation if we open ourselves to experience it. We often move from the traditional understanding of what it means for someone or something to be beautiful to a deeper awareness of the Divine in all that has been created. In Future and Vision, we explore the beauty of the cosmos, the earth beneath our feet, and the sea below. As we marvel at God's handiwork in worship, we dare to imagine the wonders of God's realm, both now and in the future.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Job 38:1-11
Revelation 21:2-5

Leader Preparation

Take a moment to think about the last time you wrote an old-fashioned personal letter. Reflect on how e-mail, texting, phone conversation, and personal letters express different voices or different parts of the self. Thank God for the beautiful and diverse expressions of each aspect of creation, including yourself.

Prayer: God, you speak to me in many different ways: through nature, through people, through all my senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. Please heighten my awareness of your presence in all things, especially the children in my group. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Native American Blessing of Beauty (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the words of this American Indian blessing, which helps us to sharpen our awareness of nature. Ask God for the eyes to see nature’s beauty.

Supplies: None

Gather your group and ask them what special time they are looking forward to that will happen soon. Some answers may include a holiday or birthday, having visitors, visiting grandparents, swimming in the lake, baking cookies with a parent, playing soccer, end of school, or beginning of school. Explain that we look forward to experiences that will happen in the future. There are other directions that help us see God’s beautiful world. Invite the learners to stand. Point to “in front of.” Now point above the head, to the ground, to each side, and then behind, asking the learners for words for each direction. Some responses will be: behind, to one side or the other side, above, below, sky, earth.

Sit down, and explain how Native Americans share a blessing about the directions that reminds us to experience the beauty of God’s creation all around us. Tell the children that as we say the blessing together, we share the beauty in words. Invite the children to stand, and lead them in the blessing:

- Bring beauty before me as I wander (take a big step forward).
- Bring beauty behind me as I wander (turn around and face backward)
- With beauty above (arms raised high), and beauty below (arms circle to point to the ground),
- Let my eyes (hold both hands over the eyes as a shade as you turn again to face the front) see only beauty from this day on.

Pray: God, you are here with us now. You go with us into each new day. Thank you, God, for always caring for us. Amen.



2 Where Were You? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look over the attachment and practice the motions.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Where Were You?” Attachment: Activity 2

Show the children where Job is in the Bible. Using Attachment: Activity 2 as your guide, explore the story of Job. It is difficult for young children to understand that all questions do not have answers. This story reflects on the bigness of God and points out that God’s love fills all spaces, even the empty ones where an answer is not available.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.



③ Deep and Wide

Leader preparation: The book of Revelation describes water as “living.” Young children learn to appreciate the use of this phrase by exploring emotionally charged words that describe water. The YouTube video will help to familiarize you with this well-known camp song, which compares the water of a fountain with God. The song can be shared with the worship community or with another group of children.

Supplies:

- song: “Deep and Wide,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EquWCB-pnvE>
- artwork: “Navaro Rapids” by Ando Hiroshige, <http://www.art.com/products/p10023130-sa-i802528/ando-hiroshige-navaro-rapids-c1855.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=ab4fda6b36f84ed3b285828650303e96&searchstring=navaro+rapids>
- (optional) small water fountain, such as a meditation fountain
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Show your learners the artwork “Navaro Rapids” by Ando Hiroshige. Encourage the learners to use words of emotion to describe what they see. Ask, *How does the water seem? Is it happy, calm, angry, restless, quiet, or sad?* Talk about all the places you have seen or experienced water. Continue to connect feelings with the experience.

Describe a fountain of water. If available, demonstrate with a small water fountain. Or, if there is a place of continually flowing water in your church, take the children there. Ask, *How does water feel? What does it taste like? How is water like God’s love? Do you think water is beautiful like God’s love?*

Teach the song “Deep and Wide,” using the following directions. As you introduce each direction, connect the learners with the beauty of God’s love as expressed through water in the artwork and in the song.

Deep and wide.
 Deep and wide.
 There’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.
 Deep and wide.
 Deep and wide.
 There’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.

Motions:

- Deep: hold hands together in front of you and move one hand up and one hand down
- Wide: hold hands together in front of you and then move the hands apart sideways
- Fountain: bend over and place your palms together in front of your body; as the word “fountain” is sung, spring up with the hands together and arms over your head like a fountain shooting up

Repeat this song three times, getting a little bit faster each time. Repeat the song, dropping off singing one word for each repeat. For the first repeat close your lips and hum instead of singing “deep.” Continue to make the motions. For the second repeat, hum for “deep” and “wide,” while continuing to make the motions. By the last repeat you will only be singing the connecting words, not any of the nouns, for which you will only be making motions and humming.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 The Beautiful Kin-dom (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The book of Revelation was written at a time when it was very dangerous to be a follower of Jesus. The emperor wanted people to pray to him as if he were God. One hundred years after Jesus was executed, a man named John, the author of Revelation, was sent to a lonely island called Patmos because he was a Christian. While he was a prisoner, John wrote letters to his family and Christian friends. John wanted his friends to have hope and to be brave. John had dreams called visions of how God's future world would be beautiful and would include everyone. God's future world would be a place where everyone was happy and no one would weep from sadness again.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- blank paper
- markers and crayons

Ask your learners if they ever have dreams. Encourage each one to share as everyone else listens. Explain that a man named John who lived on the island of Patmos also had dreams that he wrote about in letters to other Christians. His letters were put into a book of the New Testament, and the book is called Revelation. Revelation means "to show." Demonstrate the word's meaning by holding your hands in front of your face and then moving them away. Explain how your face was revealed when your hands moved. Encourage the learners to hold their hands in front of their faces and then move them away. Read the background information provided in the leader preparation section above.

Explain that John revealed his dreams of the future of God's world in his letters. Some people call this place in the future heaven (or God's kin-dom). Ask your learners to imagine what God's future world would look like for them. On newsprint or a whiteboard list the words they use. Invite the learners to draw a colorful picture to go with one of their descriptive words. You may invite two learners to work together, or two learners to work on the same word separately. Gather everyone together to share their visions of God's kin-dom. After each one shares, encourage the group to repeat the words, "Thank you, God, for the beautiful vision of your coming kin-dom."

 5 Colorful Shapes

Leader preparation: Sometimes we are so distracted by specific colors, smells, and textures that we do not recognize the basic shape of objects. This activity in crayon rubbing encourages the learner's awareness of simple shapes. Before the activity, transfer the shapes from the attachment to tag board or heavy card stock. Cut out several shapes for your learners to use for their crayon rubbing activity.

Supplies:

- "Beauty Shapes," Attachment: Activity 5
- tag board or heavy card stock
- large pieces of newsprint for arranging the shapes
- chunky crayons without paper wrapping
- white paper to lay on top of the shapes

Arrange the shapes on top of the blank piece of newsprint. Tape white paper over the arrangement. With the flat end of crayon, rub over the items until shapes appear. Use several colors for the rubbings.

Point out the way the shapes seem not to be there. When we rub the crayon on the shapes, they appear. Sometimes the future can seem scary because we don't know what will happen. However, just like we can see these shapes when we rub them with crayon, we can know that if we look for God and if we pray, we will see signs that God is with us.



6 A New Creation

Leader preparation: Before the learners arrive, make copies of Attachment: Activity 6. Cut apart the words from the Bible verse. Place each on a small card. The quotation from 2 Corinthians 5:17 states, "In Christ you are a new creation." If you have a large group, print each word on several cards, creating as many Bible verse sentences as there are people in the group. Hide the cards in the room. Be sure the cards are visible yet not obvious.

Supplies:

- index cards
- pen
- "Bible Verse Cards," Attachment: Activity 6
- tape
- scissors

Tell the children that you hid words of an important Bible verse in the room. At the count of three, everyone can look for one of the words printed on a card. If someone finds a word, that person can step to the front of the room and hold it up. After all the words have been found, move the words around until they make the sentence, "In Christ you are a new creation."

Have the learners repeat the verse several times. Each time you repeat, "In Christ you are a new creation," suggest a different approach: quiet voices, whisper voices, or singing voices. You can stand up or sit down to say the verse. You can even turn around and clap. Perhaps one learner will have an idea of how to repeat the verse in a creative way!

If time permits, repeat the hunt by choosing two learners to hide the words while the others step outside the door. After playing this game several times, explain to your learners that because of Jesus, God's beautiful plan is to make every day a new beginning or an opportunity to try again to be the person God calls us to be.

Sending & Serving Activities

**7 Lots of Letters (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Think of three places in your meeting space where you will set the stacks of paper.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 8½" x 11" sheets of blank paper
- crayons
- box or basket to contain the rolls of paper for the game

Show the children where to find the book of Revelation in the Bible. Explain that the man who wrote this book was named John. John was an early follower of Jesus. During early times, Christians were punished for following Jesus, so John was sent to a very lonely island called Patmos. While John was on the lonely island, he had dreams about the future of God's "kin-dom." John shared the dreams in letters, which he sent to his family and Christian friends. The letters became the book called Revelation, because they showed a hope-filled vision for a beautiful future.

Now explain the game. The children will pretend to be John of Patmos. Divide the children into teams. Each person will go to one of the three stations and color or print his or her name (depending on individual capabilities) on a piece of paper. Then the player will roll up the paper, run, and drop the roll into the container. After players finish with one station, they should return to another. The end of the game is when each child has dropped three letters in the container.

8 Newspaper Prayers

Leader preparation: Intercessory prayer can be easily understood by young learners. When someone is hurting, a child can ask God for what that person may need. It could be a doctor, food, money, or any number of solutions. This practice helps young learners realize that hope is in the future and that asking God for help means you have noticed the need and that you imagine a solution. For this activity, choose a photo from the newspaper that tells of a story to which the children can relate. Be sure not to overwhelm the children with a story that is graphic or catastrophic in nature.

Supplies:

- daily newspaper

One way to be aware of people who need our prayers is to look in our newspaper. Show the photo you brought. Ask the children to tell a story about the person (or people) in the photo. Ask, *What do you think might have happened to this person? What do you think this person might need? How can we pray for this people to give him or her hope for the future?* Help your learners name specific ways that the people in the photo need help. Then lead the group in a prayer that asks for the help.

Pray: God, please help these people. They need . . . (learners may mention needs). We know you love all people. Bring each one your peace. Amen.

Ask your group members if they have any prayer requests for their families, friends, or self. Explain that praying out loud helps, but praying in your own mind also helps. Sometimes just saying the name of someone you are praying

for, out loud or in your mind, is the best prayer of all. Show this practice by beginning: *Gracious Creator, we would like to name people who have come to our attention today* (Allow the children time to name names. If they remain silent, simply sit in silence for a minute before closing.) *Thank you, God, that you know our thoughts and you hear our loving prayers. Amen.*

9 Give God a Moment

Leader preparation: In the days before you lead this session, practice stopping in the middle of an activity to pray, “I will remember God as God remembers me.” You could set an alarm on your phone or your computer as a reminder

Supplies:

- kitchen timer or watch with alarm

Show the learners the timer. Explain that together you will play “Give God a Moment.” When the timer sounds, everyone will stop walking and moving (without touching others) around the room while the entire group will say a prayer together. The prayer is: “I will remember God as God remembers me.”

Make the game more interesting by whispering one time, clapping and saying the words, or singing to the melody of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.” (I will remember God, as God remembers me).

After the game ask, *How did you feel when you were interrupted by the bell and stopped to pray to God?* Some answers may include, annoyed, okay, silly. Accept all experiences as important.

Conclude with the idea that the beauty of God’s creation for the future depends upon how we notice God today. Encourage your group to share this faith practice at home with their families as they make room for God in their busy lives.

Reflect

How have your learners inspired your hope for the future of the faith community? Have their words inspired you? Have their actions? Consider Jesus’ words, “Let the children come to me.” Can you hold a vision for the world that includes children at the front of the line, leading the way to God’s kingdom? Thank God for your work with your young learners, taking time to name each one.

Attachment: Activity 2

Where Were You?

An Action Story about Job 38:1-11

Job was not happy. He used to be rich. Now he was poor. When he lost his money, he asked God, "Why did you do this to me?"

(Have the listeners hold up their palms, shrug their shoulders, and repeat, "God, why did you do this to me?")

Job used to have lots of land. Now his land was gone. As he stared at the land he no longer owned, he asked God, "Why did you do this to me?"

(Have the listeners hold up their palms, shrug their shoulders, and repeat, "God, why did you do this to me?")

Job's family once included healthy girls and boys. Now his children had died. Job asked God, "Why did you do this to me?"

(Have the listeners hold up their palms, shrug their shoulders, and repeat, "God, why did you do this to me?")

Job once had a happy home life. Now his wife was always made at him. As his wife yelled at him, Job turned to God and asked, "Why did you do this to me?"

(Have the listeners hold up their palms, shrug their shoulders, and repeat, "God, why did you do this to me?")

God did not answer Job. Job was very unhappy. He was angry that God had no answer. Job was angry at God.

After listening to Job's complains, God spoke. God asked, "Where were you when I created the world?"

(Invite the learners to make a round shape with their hands for the world.)

Where were you when I created the oceans?

(Invite learners to make a wave with one hand.)

Where were you when I created the forests?

(Invite the learners to reach both arms up into the sky and sway from side to side.)

Where were you when I created the birds of the air?

(Invite learners to flap their arms like birds.)

Where were you when I created the sky where the birds fly?

(Invite learners to hold their arms up to sweep over their heads indicating the sky.)

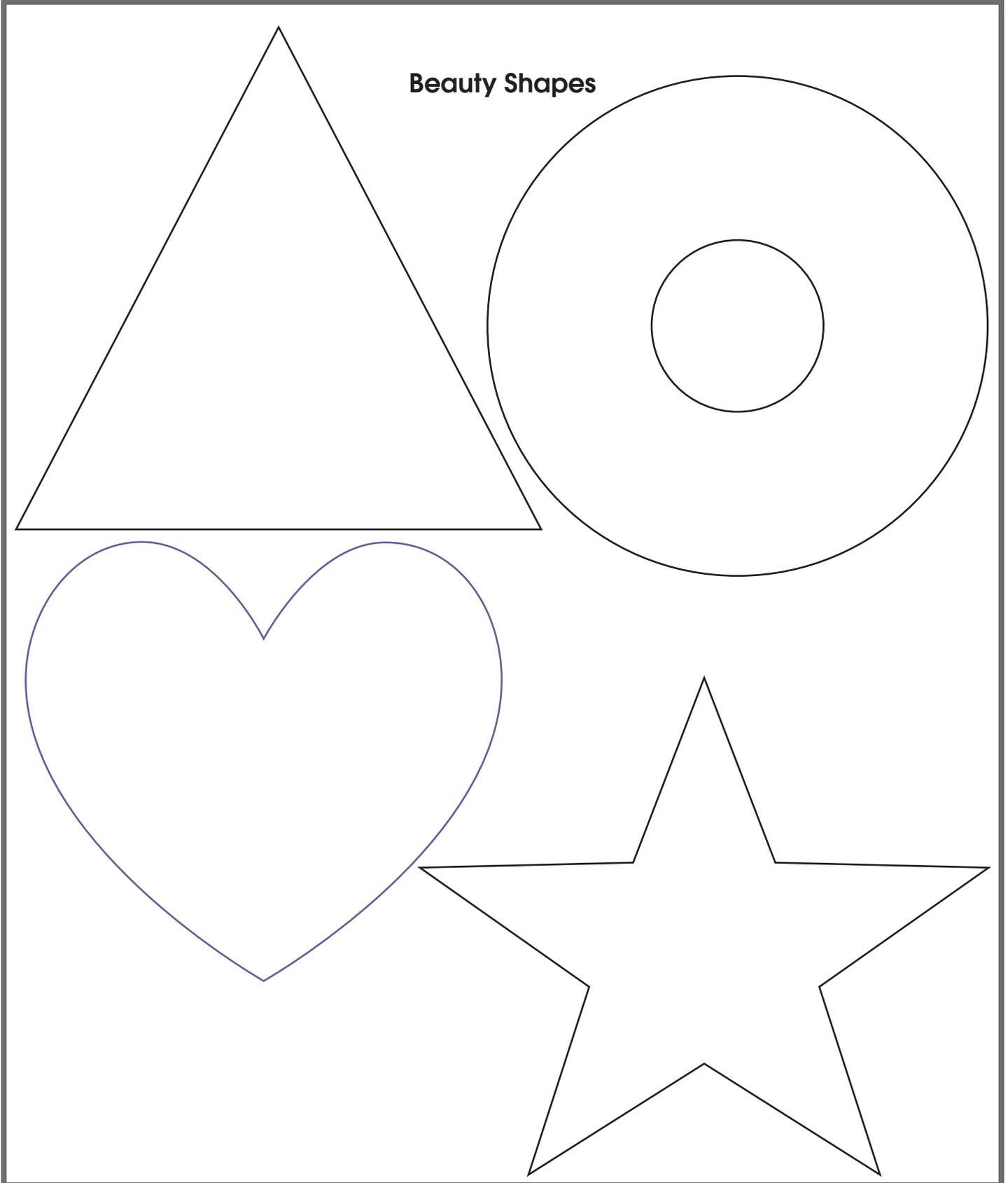
What makes you think you can understand a universe that I made when you are not me?"

When God spoke to Job, Job changed. He felt different inside. He felt less unhappy. After all, God must still love him because God spoke to him. God's love was so important to Job that he thanked God and gave God praise

(Invite learners to dance and move around saying, "Praise God!" Then invite them to sit again.)

We can learn from Job that God does not answer all questions. Sometimes instead of asking the same question over and over, we need to stop and listen. When we listen to God, our anger can turn to thanks and praise.

Attachment: Activity 5



Attachment: Activity 6

Bible Verse Cards

IN

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CREATION