

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

The learners in this group (ages eleven to fifteen) straddle the line between childhood and young adulthood. Sometimes they will still be drawn to the items and thoughts and ways of a child. At other times, they will be trying on the “clothes” of young adulthood. Developmentally, they are maturing and can be asked to do more and think differently. What a wonderful time to help guide them in the ways of discovery!

This group has the benefit of still seeing through children’s eyes, experiencing wonder as children so easily can do. At the same time they are old enough to be able to understand the beauty of the tiny atom and the limitless universe at the same time. They may not have experienced as much brokenness as their older counterparts, but they have surely experienced some loss, hurt, or disappointment. Through this Exploration, you will be able to lead them through learning about space, the planet, and the galaxy, helping them grow closer to their faith the whole way.

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

Leader Preparation

This is an age of discovery for the children you are preparing to serve. They are maturing and growing by leaps and bounds, yet they straddle that sometimes wonderful and sometimes scary world of the middle years. Through this Faith Practice we want to help them be open to the many ways in which they can perceive both beauty and brokenness. We want to help them know that God’s wisdom is greater than all of ours, and with God we will ferry safely to the other side.

Prayer: Creator, Mother-Father, though days become filled with work, family, home, and friends, remind me be open to your presence through the little moments of beauty in my day. As I plan to lead these youth in discovering beauty, open my eyes, my ears, and my mouth to your presence in all things. 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 Give Me Five (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Take a few moments to relax and unwind. Think about the five senses and ways you may have experienced beauty today. What does beauty smell, taste, look, sound, and feel like? Enjoy the thoughts of these little moments of beauty in what was probably an otherwise hectic day. Now take a moment to thank the Creator for the gifts of creation.

Supplies: None

Beauty exists around us all the time in small moments and unexpected places. Have everyone sit on the floor, if there is space, and get comfortable. Encourage participants to take a deep breath and clear their minds. Ask people to share how they experience God’s presence in beauty through the five senses.

The questions all start with the stem: What does beauty [. . .] like? Insert the words “look, smell, taste, hear, feel.” On the first round, ask and answer the first question. Don’t give the group all of the questions at once, or that is all they will think of while the other participants are talking. Make sure all are encouraged to share a response for each sense. Finish by having all participate in a prayer of thankfulness for the small moments of beauty they experience in their lives.

2 Cocoon

Leader preparation: Ask participants to bring in a baby photo of themselves that they are comfortable sharing with the rest of the group. In case there are participants who do not have access to a baby picture, locate pictures of babies in a magazine or on the Internet to share. Bring seeds or a plant bulb, a cross, and a picture of a cocoon. Locate the YouTube video for “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Arrange to have a means to play the video.

Supplies:

- hymn: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- baby pictures
- seeds or plant bulb
- cross
- picture of a cocoon
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Lay out on the table the baby pictures, the seeds, the cross, and the picture of a cocoon. Give time for participants to look at the items. Ask each participant to give one word to describe what these items have in common. List their words on newsprint or a whiteboard. Play the song, and sing it together.

Again ask what the items have in common and have each person give a one-word description. It can be the same word a person used before, or it can be a completely different word. List these words in a second column on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Read the lyrics of the song. *What does the song have to do with the items? What does each item represent in its current form?* Go to each item one by one and talk about how it starts out and what it grows to become. Start with the seed and the cocoon.

Experiencing Beauty

YOUTH

- 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.

What are the stages and the requirements for a seed to grow into a plant or the cocoon transform into the butterfly?

Next, discuss the cross. *What was the cross originally? What did it mean and what has it grown to mean both to Christians through the ages and to them individually?*

Now move on to their baby pictures or the pictures you provided. What does it take to grow from an infant to a young person to an adult? As babies, they could not have imagined where they would be today. As young people, they cannot truly imagine where they will be in a similar number of years. They can guess what they want to be and what they hope to be doing, but just like the bulb, the seed, the cocoon, and the cross, they have to trust that God alone sees the promise and unrevealed beauty of the future.



3 Sea Glass

Leader preparation: Get a copy of Andrew Wyeth's artwork "Wind from the Sea." Find images in magazines (*Better Homes and Gardens*, *Country Living*) of a bright, prettily decorated room.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Wind from the Sea" by Andrew Wyeth, <http://www.art.com/products/p15524076-sa-i3804653/andrew-wyeth-wind-from-the-sea.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=dfff3132492f45b38c1f69b8ff1b86c1&searchstring=wind+from+the+sea>
- magazine images of rooms
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Look together at the artwork "Wind from the Sea." What is striking or noticeable about the room in the painting? Do the youth consider the room beautiful, and if they do, why? What could/would they change? Encourage them to focus on the whole picture—not just inside the room, but the view as well. Now show the magazine picture of newly decorated rooms. What is striking or noticeable about these rooms? What is beautiful about these rooms? What could/would they change?

What can they name that gets more attractive with age or use? Did they have a favorite stuffed animal or toy? As it became more used and worn, did they love it or appreciate it less? Would they have traded the toy that had all of the memories for a brand new toy? What about long-term friendships? They can have their ups and downs. They can have moments of brokenness, but they can also have moments of great joy and beauty. Ask the group to identify what it is about things and people that stands the test of time. Encourage additional suggestions of things that get better with age.

Re-examine the artwork. Is the artwork only about brokenness, or is it also about possibility? Is there the hope of discovery in the open window or the road driving away from the house? What about the wind coming in from the sea?

Prayer: Dear One, open our eyes to possibility. So often when we see something or someone who appears to be broken, we look away or discard the item. We don't see the promise and possibility that you see in us every day. Help me to understand that the book is more than its cover and to look for the beauty in all of your creation. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 The Good News (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- Bibles

We may have read some sections of the Bible often and know certain stories very well. Maybe they are the stories of Holy Week, Easter, or Christmas. There are thousands of beautiful, informative words that have passed by the wayside. Give each participant a Bible. Start by opening the Bible to the New Testament. Have everyone find all four Gospels. Let the group know that you will be “discovering” parts of the Gospels and looking for new information, new passages, and new stories.

Open your Bible and read the first passage that you find. If you are in the middle of a story, go back enough verses for the story to make sense. Does anyone recognize the story or verse? Invite a volunteer to do this also. Follow the same protocol of making sure that enough of the passage is read to make sense of the story or verse. Does anyone recognize the story or verse? Do this until everyone has had a chance to respond. Did anyone land on the same spot? Was there overlap between stories from different Gospels? Talk about the texts that were just read. Ask how the group would describe the text: instructive, narrative, or parable? Have the learners compare and contrast the language used and the information gathered from the different readings. Encourage the learners to think about beauty not just as traditional beauty of a person or object, though those may be included, but as a relationship, an interaction, a landscape, or the language used in the passages. Ask: *Even though the word “beauty” may not have been specifically included in the text, where did you see beauty? As readers or listeners, we often focus on the characters and the action in a story. In this activity, we want to really listen to the words and interact with the text to seek out the beauty to be found in the text of the four Gospels.*

Keep track of the passages used in this activity, and try the activity again another time. The participants may be surprised at the discovery of whole sections, stories, and verses they had never before encountered.

Prayer: Whether I am visiting or revisiting your good news, let my eyes, ears and brain be receptive to new discoveries so I may always have a sense of wonder when I reencounter the stories of your Son. Amen.

5 God in the Small

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 28:10–19a. Purchase pipe cleaners and pony beads. Go to <http://www.ehow.com/how/6144984/make-model-out-beads-wire.html> for instructions on making DNA from pipe cleaners and pony beads. Bring a picture of the double helix structure of DNA to show to the participants. Not all will be familiar with what the structure of DNA looks like. You can Google the words “double helix+image” and find a number of good images.

Supplies:

- Bible
- pipe cleaners
- pony beads
- scissors
- picture of DNA strand

Read Genesis 28:10–19a. Jacob dreams that he sees angels ascending and descending from heaven. He sees the angels, talks with God, and is promised that his descendants will cover the globe. In this passage we hear about the enormity of God’s domain. There is another “ladder” that describes the smallest of God’s domain, which is DNA. DNA is tiny, but mighty. It determines every cell in everybody from the smallest to the largest creature. Have participants create DNA from pipe cleaners to remind themselves that God’s domain ranges from the smallest of the small inside a cell to the enormity of the heavens and the planet.

Prayer: You are truly a genius, dear God. You created each cell in each part of every living thing. You created the heavens where angels dwell. You have filled the earth with the descendants of a thousand Jacobs. Never let me cease to be amazed by your hand and presence in all that exists. Amen.



6 Wasted Worry?

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 6:24–34. Bring three lunch-size paper bags. Cut slips of paper about 2” x 2”.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- three lunch-size paper bags
- slips of paper
- pencils
- “Serenity Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 6
- (optional) laminate for the Serenity Prayer

Read Matthew 6:24–34 together. Ask participants how worry makes them feel. Describe the physical and emotional symptoms that can result from worry. Worry can be stressful and upsetting, but remind the participants that even at times that can feel like their darkest moments, God loves them. Even in bad times, an all-loving God cares for us.

Distribute the slips of paper and invite the learners to write down two or three (one if it is a large group) things that they worry about, one to a slip of paper. Have them fold their papers and put them in one of the bags. Mark the other two bags GOD and ME. Talk about the types of situations that they can worry about and those that need to be lifted up to God. The types of situations that would go in the ME bag are ones that we have control over. If there is a big math test coming up, I know I can study. The types of situations that would go in the GOD bag would be situations that we might worry about, but over which we have no control, such as the weather and other people’s behavior.

Pull out each slip from the first bag, and read it aloud. Ask the group if it would go in the GOD bag or the ME bag. If there is no agreement, take time to discuss the situation and, if there is no consensus, take a vote. Is it possible that a situation could go in both bags? Remind everyone to be kind and respectful. What feels large and worrisome to one person may not be a big issue to another, but a

worry is a worry. The exercise is meant to help the participants take a step back and perhaps discover another way of seeing a situation.

For all people, young and old, it can be very freeing to learn how to look at difficult or trying times through words of the Serenity Prayer. There is freedom, peace, and beauty in understanding what we can change and what we cannot. Distribute a copy of the prayer to each participant. Encourage participants to carry the prayer with them. If possible, laminate the copies so that they are more durable.

Remind the participants that we have a wonderful Creator to whom we can bring all types of worries: big or small, personal or global. There is beauty in the love and care that the Creator has for all of us in all situations. We are never truly alone, no matter what occurs.

Prayer: Heavenly One, you know my every need, my every worry and fear. Give me the strength and sight and wisdom to understand what I can control and what I need to give up to you. Amen.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Feed My Sheep (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Locate the name of a food bank or food pantry served by your church or your district.

Supplies:

- paint
- markers
- colored pencils
- paper

Hunger is an issue that faces every nation in the world. Families struggle to make ends meet; local food pantries struggle to meet the need of the hungry in the community. People who are having a hard time especially need little moments of beauty and words of affirmation. Have the participants think about what images and words would feel comforting in a time when you are hungry. What beauty can the participants share with others? How can they share God's love with those who come to the food bank? Have each participant create a card of hope and promise for the people who come to the food bank/pantry. This is a gift of food for the soul as well as the food for the body.

Prayer: Thank you for your abundant love that fills our lives. We are blessed with family and friends and your presence. Help me to remember those who struggle more and have less. Help me make their load a little lighter. Amen.

8 Pass It On

Leader preparation: In this activity, you will make books for younger children (preschool and prekindergarten age). Find somewhere to donate the books, such as another group in your church, a local shelter, or church run/faith-based preschool/prekindergarten in your area.

Supplies:

- Bibles, including children’s versions
- paper, both white and heavy construction
- markers
- glue
- craft supplies (google-eyes, sequins, beads, fabric, and so forth)

Invite participants to make books of their favorite Bible stories to give away to younger members at church. Have the group brainstorm stories that they would like to share with younger kids. What Bible stories lend themselves to being told to younger kids? Jesus and the children? David as a young shepherd? Miriam protecting the baby Moses? Encourage each participant to pick a story that really has meaning to him or her. They are going to create books using a variety of materials. They can draw them. They can add flaps. They can use a variety of medium to make the book fun and interesting to see and touch.

Talk about what they liked as young children. What was their favorite book? Did their books have words or no words? Were they colorful? Encourage the youth to discuss what they found appealing about those books. Children like books that are visually attractive and tactilely appealing. Ask participants to create a “thing of beauty” that will appeal to their readers. Each book should have a cover with the “illustrator’s” name on it. They can work individually or in teams. For some of the young children receiving the books, this may be the first time that they will encounter the Bible story being told. These books are meant to engage, interest, and entertain younger children as they begin their faith journey.

Prayer: Thank you for all the people who helped start me on my own faith journey by reading me books, telling me stories, and singing songs with me. Help me to remember how important it is to serve and support those who are younger and just beginning on this faith road. Amen.

9 Getting to Know You

Leader preparation: Invite older members of your congregation to come to the group, or, if unavailable, to complete a questionnaire. It would be better to have the one-on-one time, but if they cannot, have them return the questionnaire with the answers.

Supplies:

- paper
- pencils

Sometimes we forget the beauty of older people and things. We can be drawn to that which is new and shiny. Also, we sometimes we find ourselves in a culture that emphasizes new as better—the newest game, the newest toy, the newest gadget. It is often said that we live in a disposable culture. We are encouraged to think that older means outdated, less valuable, and worn.

In Activity 8 participants were encouraged to expand their relationships with the younger members of the community. This activity focuses on the value of the older members of the community and our relationships with them. Not everyone has an opportunity to engage or interact with older members of the church or in the community, so this activity gives them that chance. The participants are asked to discover something new from someone older, to seek out beauty and wisdom in age.

Create a questionnaire as a group that will be used for an interview. Brainstorm things that the youth want to know about the older folks who will answer the questions. What was their favorite toy or game? Did they play sports? What was their favorite place to visit, and why? What was their greatest joy? Be curious and discover new things. Collect questions as a group that can be typed up for the following week. If the older members cannot come to the session, provide a questionnaire so they have all week to complete it and return it the next time you meet. When everyone has had a chance to get his or her questions answered, share the results. As an individual, what was the most surprising thing to discover? As a group, what was the most surprising thing? Have all share a moment of beauty that they experienced as they conducted the interview or read the responses given by the interviewee.

Prayer: Remind me, Wise One, that older does not mean broken or without value. Older means living life and knowing much. Thank you for the opportunity to have community members who care enough for me to share their stories. Amen.

Reflect

Together, we have been given the chance to connect with the young, the old, and ourselves and to see value in all of them. We had the opportunity to celebrate the gifts of the Creator from the smallest atom to the vastness of the heavens. We discovered more about the ways and the places to experiences and look for beauty, both here today and every day. Through this Exploration we have been encouraged to explore, discover, and see the spark of the Divine in all things and all people.

Attachment: Activity 6

God, grant me
the serenity to accept the
things I cannot change;
courage to change the
things I can;
and wisdom to know the
difference.

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Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Our learners have had varied exposures to and experiences with scripture. They may or may not be familiar with many of the stories of the Bible, Old or New Testament. Developmentally they are able to engage with new stories and new verses and to experience scripture in new ways. They can be expected to have a deeper understanding of words and meanings. At the same time, it is important to engage their prior knowledge of the stories that are so important to our faith. This Exploration may help them to experience the beauty and meaning of scripture.

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:

Luke 9:28–36
Nehemiah 8

Leader Preparation

Think about what scripture has meant to you. When are the times you call upon or recall it—moments of sadness, joy, celebration, loss. The gift and beauty of the words can work as a balm, act as an instruction manual, or give us the words to honor the Creator. Enjoy your time reading passages again, experiencing the words for the first time and engaging with these new learners as they too experience these sacred texts.

Prayer: Words and stories are important to both our personal and shared histories. The scriptures guide us, teach us, and lead us. They connect us with your Son and all the people of faith who came before us and held these texts to be sacred. God, help me help the youth to see the beauty of the gift—the beauty of the words, experiences, and stories of your people. Help me be a conduit and carrier. Help all of us hold your book in our hearts and be open and willing to share its wonder. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Beauty and the Bible (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use a concordance to look up the use of the word “beauty” in the Bible. You may find a concordance in the church library or in the minister’s office. Or, if Internet access is available, find one on the Internet at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- concordance
- paper
- pencils
- (optional) computer with Internet access

The concordance is a great tool for looking up how often a word is used anywhere in the Bible. Notice the Bible translation for which the concordance is used. How many times would the participants guess the word “beauty” shows up in the Bible? Take a few moments to look at the list in a concordance. Beauty is often discounted as a vanity or expresses the beauty of the Creator and creation. Beauty also turns up in the four Gospels in reference to a person doing a “beautiful” act for Jesus.

Have each participant create an acrostic for the word BEAUTY or KALLOS, which is the Greek word for beauty. An acrostic is a poem in which each letter in the word represents a word or a line. For example, for B-E-A-U-T-Y, B could start the word beauty. The next word or line in the poem would start with E. This pattern continues until the poem is completed. Encourage the youth to use as many words from scripture as they can find in the concordance. Allow time for participants to share their poems if they would like.

2 Beautiful Words

Leader preparation: Collect a few examples of images of Islamic calligraphy from books or the Internet and an example of an illuminated manuscript. Bring in a book or books on calligraphy.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- scrapbooking papers
- card stock
- markers and pencils
- images of illuminated manuscripts (search for the British Library of Illuminated Manuscripts for many examples)
- images of Islamic calligraphy: <http://calligraphyislamic.com/>
- (optional) instructions for making an illuminated letter: http://www.ehow.com/how_4525950_illuminate-a-letter.html

Display examples of Islamic calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts. People of faith have used these art forms to make their scriptures beautiful and to honor God through the beauty of their work. Have the participants each select a verse from the Bible that they would like to illuminate or turn into their own form of calligraphy, or they can simply use the first letter of their first name. They can choose any scripture of meaning to them. A few verses about beauty include

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.

Psalm 27:4, Psalm 50:2, 1 Peter 3:4, Romans 10:15, and Revelation 21:2. Participants can write the words over and over in a pattern. They can illuminate a verse. Encourage anything that converts the written word into a work of art.

③ Transfiguration

Leader preparation: Read Luke 9:28–36. Be prepared to give a brief description of Elijah and Moses. Elijah was an important Old Testament prophet, and it was a common Jewish belief of the time that Elijah’s return would precede that of the Messiah. Moses was another important leader and prophet. Moses’ story can be found in the book of Exodus. Their presence in the New Testament story of the Transfiguration is important because they help establish Jesus’ role as the Son of God.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- white paper
- crayons
- paper clip or orange manicure stick for each participant

Ask: Have you ever seen someone dressed up whom you normally see in everyday clothes? In what ways did that person’s appearance seem significantly altered? Has this experience ever seemed surprising, confusing, exciting, or maybe even disorienting?

Read Luke 9:28–36. Here Jesus is transformed/transfigured/alterd right before Peter, John, and James. His garments became dazzling white, and his face was altered. How might Jesus have been dressed when he went up on the mountain? What might Jesus’ clothes have looked like when he was transfigured? We have no documentation of what Jesus wore, but there is no reason to think that it was anything different that the ordinary desert-dwelling individual of his time would wear. The fact that his clothes became beautiful, white, and brilliant was an extreme contrast to what he normally wore. His face was also transformed to the point that he did not look like himself. Finally, the disciples heard a voice that stated, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him.” Why would God transform Jesus in this way? For whom did God transform Jesus—the disciples, Jesus, the person who hears the story 2,000 year later? How does God’s “big revelation” change how the disciples and, ultimately, we see Christ?

Have participants use brightly colored crayons to cover a piece of paper. There is no design to this coloring, just random colors. Then use a black crayon to cover the entire page. With a paper clip or orange manicure stick scratch a design, image, or picture to represent the story of the Transfiguration. Something beautiful emerges from something seemingly plain and dark.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 More than Words (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look through the hymnal index and locate hymns that are based on scripture. These are located in the Scripture Reference index at the back of the hymnal. Read the lyrics of a few hymns. See if there are ones that you had not known before. Familiarize yourself with the index. Another option would be to locate CD/mp3/YouTube versions of a portion of Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*, "Thy Word" by Michael W. Smith, a Gregorian chant, "Jesus Loves Me," or any songs/hymns that you know that use scripture for the lyrics.

Supplies:

- hymnals
- (optional) music listed above in "Leader preparation"

Ask the participants how many ways they think they can interact with scripture. They may be surprised to discover that they probably sing a number of songs based on scripture without even realizing it. The psalms were originally songs and are often sung as part of contemporary church services.

Christians have a history of putting scripture to music. Distribute the hymnals. Start by looking at the Scripture Reference index at the back. Now have participants leaf through the hymnal and look at the tops of the page to see how many hymns are based on scriptures.

Why do we put text to music? Does the music give the text more meaning or make it more beautiful? Psalm 95 and 96 tell us to "sing to the Lord" and "sing to the Lord a new song." If you are able, play, listen to, or sing some lines of music that is scripture-based.

The youth may be familiar with some musicals based on scripture, such as *Godspell* or *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Read Psalm 98 in closing: "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! Indeed, Lord, you have given us many gifts and one of the greatest and most beautiful is music. We are thankful for the ability to celebrate, lament, create through this gift and hope our offerings are ever pleasing to your ear."

5 Guatemala Procession

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork "Guatemala: Procession" by Betty LaDuke. Google images for "Guatemala procession," or locate a book that contains images of the Holy Week processions in Guatemala. Have images available to share with participants. Collect a variety of magazines that can be cut up and used by participants.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Guatemala: Procession” by Betty LaDuke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/15822304?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- computer with Internet access and projection capability
- images of Holy Week processions in Guatemala
- (optional) magazines
- (optional) colored paper
- (optional) scissors
- (optional) glue

Guatemala has some of the most beautiful Holy Week celebrations in the world. The processions are colorful and elaborate. Show the participants the artwork and images of the celebrations. What do they notice in both?

What are other church celebrations that the participants have heard of or seen that are filled with color and beauty? What made those celebrations particularly spectacular—the people, the display, the colors, the costumes, the music? How do these large-scale activities relate to faith?

If the participants were going to celebrate a story or passage from scripture, which story would it be? Have the youth work with a partner or in small groups to choose a Bible story that they would turn into a large spectacular procession. It could be any story or passage from the New or Old Testament—Moses, Garden of Eden, creation, Christmas, or the Magi. What colors would they use? What style of art? Who would be involved? Where would the celebration be held?

Option: People may create a piece of art that displays a scene from scripture in a similar style to the artwork “Guatemala: Procession.”

6 Telling the Story

Leader preparation: Read Nehemiah 8. Locate a crèche and a communion set or a picture of both to be shared in the learning area.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- crèche or communion set, or picture of a crèche and communion set

Scripture contains all sorts of things—laws and rules, stories, poetry, genealogy. Ask the participants if there are any stories that they have heard more than once. Were they the stories of Holy Week, Easter, Christmas, the Good Samaritan, Noah’s Ark, Moses and the Red Sea? Are there some stories that are told over and over and some that are acted out?

Read Nehemiah 8. Not many people may know this story. It is a story of storytelling. People could not read the way people read today, so they would have only learned the law, how and when to worship, how to celebrate, and what to build from a scribe such as Ezra. Storytelling enabled Ezra to pass down the traditions of the Jewish faith to his people. Today, people can read and access the stories of our faith on their own, but we still value the showing and telling of stories.

Bring out the crèche and communion set or pictures of both. Discuss what they are. What stories do these objects represent? Have participants describe what they know about the roles of these two objects. Have them describe any other

crèches or communion sets that they have seen. Were they fancy and elaborate, or simple and unadorned? What materials were they made from, and what did they look like?

Whether these objects are simple or elaborate, they are all meant to be beautiful in their own way. Someone created these objects to be representative, either in their beautiful simplicity or grandeur, of two stories important to Christian faith. Discuss with the group why these objects have meaning, and how they help us remember the stories. The Bible holds our stories from generation to generation.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 A Beautiful Thing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 4:8–10.

Supplies:

- paper
- straight edges or rulers
- pencils
- pens
- markers or colored pencils
- Bibles

Read Philippians 4:8–10. Discuss what it means to be or to do something true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, and excellent. Discuss ways in which one could be all of these in relationship to God, others, and self. Discuss each attribute in detail.

Invite participants to create a calendar for one week where they will focus on each one of these attributes. Distribute paper and art supplies. Have the participants create a one-week calendar. They can decorate it however they want, but there needs to be room to have all seven days and space to write on each day. Have participants write one word per day (true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, and excellent) on their calendar. They can write these attributes in any order. They also need to write the words “God,” “others,” and “self” on each day.

Encourage the youth to refer to their calendar first thing every morning and to be mindful of the day’s attribute. At the end of the day, they should think back over the day and write on the calendar or in a journal how they managed to live out the day’s attribute. Continue this practice for the rest of the week with a different attribute as the focus for each day.

8 Creation

Leader preparation: Print some mandalas. They can be located online in free printable form. You can also look at some of the mandalas of Hildegard von Bingen and the European rose windows and decide if you would like to share them.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- printable mandalas: <http://www.free-printable-mandala-coloring-pages.com/free-mandalas-to-color.shtml>
- pencils, fine-tipped markers

One way we experience God's beauty is through the creation of the planet and all it contains. Have the participants find Genesis 1:1-2:4, the two different stories of Creation. Have them also read Psalm 8. Ask each participant to share a part of creation that he or she finds particularly beautiful: animals, rocks, plants, water, and so forth.

Mandala is a Sanskrit word that, loosely defined, means "circle." This circle encompasses all of creation, the entire universe. Although originally associated with Eastern faiths, mandalas have been used by Christians as symbols of faith, creation, and beauty. An eleventh-century nun, Hildegard von Bingen, was famous for her mandalas. Feel free to share any of her mandalas. Some even think that the famous rose windows of Europe look like and may be related to mandalas.

Mandalas are used to help the person coloring the mandala to focus on the center. In this case, God is the center with creation surrounding the center. Have participants choose a mandala that they would like to work with, and ask them to have the mandala represent the aspect of creation that they like the best.

9 Sharing the Word

Leader preparation: See if you can locate a Bible in Latin or Greek. If not, locate passages in Latin or Greek to share. Look for a King James Version and try to locate passages or Bibles in other languages. The website Bible Gateway (<http://www.biblegateway.com/>) provides the Bible in many different languages and in many different translations.

Supplies:

- Bibles or scripture passages in a variety of languages (see <http://www.biblegateway.com/>)

For centuries, the Bible was restricted to the clergy. Most people could not read their own language, let alone the Latin or Greek that the Bibles of the time were written in. The general population's access to scripture was limited to what the clergy decided to share with them. When Martin Luther and his colleagues translated and printed the Bible into German in the 1500s, there was a major shift in access to scripture for the common person. There had been other versions of the Bible translated into other languages, but this was the first mass production aimed at put the Bible into the hands of the average person.

Bring out all the various editions of the Bible or text that you were able to locate. Give each person a different Bible or passage. If you do not have enough for each person to have his or her own, have them share. Give them a few minutes to look through their Bibles. Does anything look familiar? Are any words the same? Have each group or person trade their Bible or text with another. Do this until everyone has had a chance to see all or most of the different versions.

Regroup and talk about what people heard, read, and saw. Have they ever been somewhere that they did not speak the language? How did it feel? How did it feel when they heard their own language again? The Bible educates us in a variety of styles. Some books of the Bible are more instructive, some are written to tell a story, and some are meant to be beautiful poems and songs to honor God. We cannot appreciate the beauty and meaning of the words used if we cannot understand the language. The ability to share and appreciate scripture through worship, song, and reading is how we learn about our faith and communicate it to others. We can only do that if we have a Bible in a language that we understand. Can they imagine a time when they would not have access to the Bible? What would it be like to not even be able to read the basic stories of faith? Discuss the value of having a common language through which to communicate all that the Bible has to offer within the faith community, as well as outside of it.

Reflect

What surprised you the most about today's session? Which scripture passages did you find most intriguing or encouraging? How did the youth respond to the activities? Give thanks for the energy of this group, and take a few moments to envision future meaningful experiences together.

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

As disciples of Christ we are asked to be both followers and leaders. We are to follow Jesus and help lead others to him. These young believers are old enough to be both. With an increased ability to understand more of what a disciple is called to do and be and stronger sense of the beauty of Christ's role in their lives, this is an important time in their faith development. Grab their growing hands and lead them on the path you walked not so long ago!

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

Leader Preparation

When we think about discipleship, we are asked to focus on the ways we are to walk in the footsteps of Christ. We are following a more than two-thousand-year-old tradition of listening to and engaging with Jesus through the texts of the New Testament. We may have heard some of these words hundreds of times in a variety of venues, but I encourage you to read, listen, and engage with fresh eyes, ears, mind, and heart as you work through what might be, for some of the participants, new information or a new way of experiencing faith.

Prayer: Holy One, as I lead this group of youth, help me to follow Jesus Christ in the most beautifully simple of ways: by loving you, loving others, and loving myself. Help me also to remember that as simple as these words may seem, their practice can be hard to do. Give me strength in hard times when loving seems the toughest thing to do. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Discipleship 101 (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Discipleship is about following. Throughout the Gospels we are told how we are to act as disciples of Christ. Read Luke 10:25–29. Prayerfully consider how such a brief passage could be so important and sometimes so difficult to follow.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pencils

Ask the participants to identify times during that day or prior week when they had to read instructions or follow directions. Ask: *Who or what gave you the instructions? Why do we use the word “follow” in relation to directions or instructions?*

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells stories (parables) and often gives specific instructions about how we are to act. Read together Luke 10:25–29. If we think of these verses as directions, what are we asked to do? Jesus’ instruction manual is beautifully simple: love God, love others, and love yourself. Not so hard, right?

Have each participant make a slip of paper for each of these three words—GOD, SELF and OTHERS. Have them shuffle their slips of paper and place them face down in front of them until it is their turn. Tell them that they are brainstorming an instruction manual for being a follower of Jesus.

You can complete this activity as a group or in small groups. If you are doing this activity as a group, you will flip over one of the pieces of paper. Whatever word shows on the card will be the starter for people to act out an example of how to show love toward God, others, or self. Go around the table once.

For the second round, the participant has to think of an example of ways to show love to a name not listed on the card. For example, if the participant had the word GOD on his/her first piece of paper, and then s/he needs to think of a way to love others or self. You can also do this in groups of two or three. If you do this activity as small groups or partners, gather as a whole group to hear from each of the small groups.



2 Oldest of Prayers

Leader preparation: Make copies of the version of the Prayer of Jesus used by your congregation. Make copies of the attachments so that each participant has a copy.

Supplies:

- dictionary
- “Target,” Attachment: Activity 2a
- “The Prayer of Jesus,” Attachment: Activity 2b
- markers or colored pencils

Ask the participants what the Prayer of Jesus, often referred to as the Lord’s Prayer, is and where it is found in the Bible (Matthew and Luke). What words do they know? Have they memorized it? In the Christian church, the prayer is

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.

commonly said using at least three different words: debts, sins, or trespasses. Distribute copies of Attachment: Activity 2b. Which version is used by your congregation? Have they heard of or said any or all of these words as they prayed? What is a debt? What is a trespass? What is a sin? Provide a dictionary if some people want to look up definitions. The Greek word *hamartia* is used throughout the Bible and is translated as “sin.” *Hamartia* also means to “miss the mark.” It is used as an Old English archery term, also to mean “missing the mark.” Reread the part of the Prayer of Jesus and change the section to say “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Sin is also defined as something that separates us from God, others, and ourselves. If we think of sin the terms of missing the mark or separation from God, self, and others, in what ways might we sin?

Give each participant a target, Attachment: Activity 2a. At the middle of the target is God. Have participant reflect on ways we can miss the mark. Was someone short with a friend? Did they gripe at a checkout person? Did they cut in line? They can also say hypothetical ways that they might sin. Encourage participants not to think of this as a “beat myself up” session. This process is meant remind us of the ways, both big and small, that we miss the mark or separate ourselves from God, others, and self. The brokenness of separation can be repaired through the beauty of drawing oneself closer to God.

Now have the participants think of ways that they don’t miss the mark. Have them think of ways that they come closer to God, others, and themselves. Have them fill in the rings with ways that they walk in Jesus’ footsteps.

Once the participants have had the time to work on their targets, remind them that they are being asked to be mindful, not to feel guilty or bad. The activity is a way to think through the ways they make the right choices and actively work to become closer to God.



3 Follow that Star

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot. Read Matthew 2.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/353317458?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

The story of the Magi or kings is a well-recognized, often told story from the Bible, Matthew 2:1–12. What do the participants think they know about the story? Have them retell as much of the story as they can from memory. Write on newsprint or a whiteboard the details they give.

Now bring out the artwork of Tissot’s “Journey of the Magi.” Give everyone time to really examine the artwork. What about this painting makes them curious? Where would they place themselves in this procession, and why? In what ways is the painting similar to or different from their expectations?

Once everyone has had a chance to contribute, read Matthew 2 as a group. What details stand out from the Bible reading? Review the details they listed. What on their list is confirmed in the text? In what ways are the Magi examples of discipleship?

Encourage the youth as they go about their regular trips this week to think of themselves as disciples of Jesus. How might this change their perspectives?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Beautiful Space (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 35:20–29. As some of your participants may not be familiar with the details of the story prior to this passage, read chapters 34 and 35 so you can summarize this with the participants. You can also choose to read those chapters to the group if you feel that they do not have enough background.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pencils
- markers or colored pencils
- rulers

Read together Exodus 35:20–29. The “tent of meeting” was the tabernacle, the portable dwelling place for the presence of God during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The Israelites were asked to bring items of beauty to be used in creating and furnishing the tent of meeting, for its service, and for the holy garments. What adornments are used in your worship space, such as altar cloths, stoles, or other decorative items? If possible, go look at the sanctuary. What adornments are used? Why might we want our worship spaces to be beautiful or have beautiful things in them?

The space where your group meets is a worship space. It may not be the sanctuary, but anywhere we gather to study and work on our faith is a worship space. If you were architects and designers, how would you redo or add to the room where you meet? What would you bring in? What might you remove? Break into small groups. You can divide the jobs between the members or work on each step together. You should have architects and designers. Use the existing floor plan for your worship space and make both an architect-style drawing of what it should look like and a designer’s drawing of what it could look like. What changes to walls, furniture, and decorations would you make? What changes would make the space meet the needs of the type of worshiping that happens there? Have each group share their plans.

More importantly, what can the group do to make your space one that nurtures them as disciples? How can you make your learning/activity space beautiful? Ask participants to think of a way to contribute something to the activity space (even the smallest of items) to make it a place where they would want to worship. If the space you use is not dedicated just to your group, maybe think about a large storage bin where you can put items that you bring out every week to make the space your own. Have the participants think of anything they would like to share, and encourage them to bring it the following week or next meeting time.

Prayer: Dear God, the beauty of your creation surrounds us. When we create a beautiful worship space we honor your handiwork and you. When we engage with the beauty around us we draw ourselves closer to you and hear you speak in the language of creation. Amen.



5 Embrace

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)” by Mary Cassatt. If you can locate other Cassatt images online or in a book, bring those as well.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)” by Mary Stevenson Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1383221331?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- clay, Sculpey, or Fimo

Invite the participants to study the artwork “Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child).” Do not tell them the title of the piece. (If anyone recognizes the artwork, ask that person not to give the name just yet). Have each participant come up with a title for the work and write his or her idea on a piece of paper. Collect the pieces of paper and make a list of the ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the participants to describe what they think is happening in the picture. Who is present? Where can they find God in the picture?

Give them the actual title of the work. Mary Cassatt was a famous American female artist from the late 1800s. Most of her artwork illustrated women’s daily lives, and a number of her subjects were of mothers and their children. Why would someone draw, photograph, sculpt, or create a piece of art that was about these small moments in life? Give a few moments for the participants to recall a small beautiful moment with a parent, grandparent, step-parent, or caregiver. Invite those who are willing to tell about one of those memories.

Although they may not have noticed, God was there in that moment in the beauty, the intimacy, the kindness, the love. Even though God may not be visually present in the painting, God is present in both the painting and in the moment that they are remembering.

Give each participant a piece of clay. Ask them to sculpt something, either the moment they already thought of or another one that reminds them of a small, beautiful moment with someone they love.

Prayer: Holy Mother-Father, I am grateful for the gift of relationship with you, my heavenly parent. Remind me also to be thankful for the relationships that I have every day with the people who surround and love me through small moments of kindness and love. Amen.

6 Over My Head

Leader preparation: Locate lyrics and a CD/mp3/YouTube version of “Over My Head” or have music available if you have someone who can play it.

Supplies:

- song: “Over My Head” African American traditional (tune: Over My Head), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6GVc0rFTFw&feature=related>
- paper (10” x 10”)
- pens, pencils, or colored pencils
- (optional) computer with Internet access

Read the lyrics to the song, listen to the music, and sing the song together. You can add other verses such as “Over my head I hear laughter in the air,” or “I hear trouble in the air,” or “I see beauty in the air,” and so forth. Invite the youth to think up additional verses.

Often when we think about our life path and faith path, we think about the ground under our feet (the present), or we think about where the path is going and are very forward-focused. (Are your parents and teachers always telling you to watch where you are going?) In moments of silence, in moments of loneliness, or when we think about Jesus, this song encourages us to pay attention to the music that is in the air. The song also reminds the listener of the presence of God.

The music that surrounds us is almost like a soundtrack for a movie. The movie is our lives. When the youth have those moments of silence, moments of loneliness, or moments of faith, what music makes up their soundtrack or playlist? What songs make up the times of great joy and playfulness? Music is a gift from the Creator of untold beauty and value. Music has the ability to make us feel strong emotions.

Give each participant a 10” x 10” piece of paper. Invite them to create a mock-up of a CD cover for a soundtrack of their lives. What songs would be on the CD? Encourage them to list at least six to ten songs. The songs can be church music or secular music, instrumental or vocal.

Prayer: Conductor, Composer of the music of all of our lives, remind us to take time to slow down, breathe deeply, and look to you. Make us aware of your eternal presence and to appreciate the notes, stanzas, and songs that give beauty and meaning to our lives. Amen.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Jesus Says (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 6:17–38 (Sermon on the Plain), Luke 10:25–38, Matthew 6:9–13, and Philippians 4:8–10.

Supplies:

- Bibles

There are many ways and many times in the New Testament where disciples of Christ are taught to be faithful and righteous in their actions. Jesus teaches through sermons and parables and in direct answers to questions. Read together Luke 6:17–38, Luke 10:25–38, Matthew 6:9–13, and Philippians 4:8–10. The por-

tion of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6) that starts with “Blessed are” is often referred to as the Beatitudes. “Beatitude” is defined as supreme blessedness or happiness. Often, people are told to think that people are blessed or happy if they have a beautiful house, expensive cars, all of the most recent gadgets, and a lot of money. We think of blessedness as being tied to beauty, wealth, and possessions. Jesus throws a monkey wrench into this thinking by saying the blessed are poor, hungry, and weeping and their reward will be great in heaven.

Play a slightly altered version of Simon Says. Choose a participant to select a verse from the readings. She or he will say: “To be a follower of Jesus, we should . . .” Have the participants act out the verse using charades and see if the rest of the group can guess what they are portraying. An example could be “turn the other cheek.” Have each participant choose a different verse to act out and see if the group can guess. If the group is small, have each person take a few turns. If someone struggles to find an example, return to the text and help him or her locate a verse to share.

8 Light the Way

Leader preparation: Locate a room where you meet that you can make completely dark. Cut “stones” out of paper or tag-board. Move furniture out of the way so you have a clear area for your path.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- stone shapes cut out of paper or tag-board
- flashlights or small battery-operated lanterns

There are many references to light throughout the Bible. Light can represent beauty, transformation, baptism, purity, and cleansing. Read Matthew 5:14–16. Discuss what forms light takes and why light is important. Ask the participants if they have ever been anywhere truly pitch black, such as a dark country road, an apartment in the middle of a blackout, or a cave. Have the participants describe that experience. Was it scary? When they finally turned on headlights, lit a candle, or turned on a flashlight, how did their surroundings look and feel? Light has both literal and figurative meanings in the Bible. Which types are in the passage that was read earlier?

Have participants sit on one side of the room together. Create a path on the floor with paper stones. Now tell everyone that you are going to turn the lights off, and it will become dark in the room. Designate one participant ahead of time to turn his or her light on as soon as you turn off the lights. (Make sure the light works ahead of time.) Have the first participant stand up with his or her light source and look for the path. Have another participant join the first participant without turning on his or her light. Once the second person joins the leader, have that participant turn on his or her light. Continue until you have the full group walking the path. Once all have had a chance to turn on their lights and walk the path, turn the lights back on in the room and talk about what happened. What happened to the room and the path when one light was on? Two lights? All of the lights? When it was pitch black, did they know where the path was? How could they have found the path without light?

Psalm 119:105 asks that God’s word be a “lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The passage from Matthew says that as disciples of Christ we are to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Light takes on various meanings in our faith lives. God’s words light the path that we are to follow. Another meaning is that we can

let our personal light shine and be a beacon to others. In Matthew 26:6–13, the words can be translated from the Greek as a good work or beautiful thing. Jesus reminds us that good works are also small, beautiful acts of kindness. Our good works can be as simple as opening a door, carrying someone’s groceries, or giving something to someone (anointing Christ’s head) even when others think it is foolish. We are reminded that our good acts are things of beauty. Large or small, they serve as beacons to others.



9 Optical Illusion

Leader preparation: Read Acts 9:1–31 so you are very familiar with the story of Saul. Find optical illusions on the Internet or in books. Escher prints are interesting, too.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Optical Illusions,” Attachment: Activity 9
- (optional) additional optical illusions from the Internet or in books

Introduce Saul to the group. Some participants may be familiar with this Bible character. The focus passage is Acts 9:17–20, but reading verses 1–31 may provide more context for the story. When the story begins, Saul is not a good person. He persecuted Jesus’ disciples and sought to imprison them and have them killed. While traveling the road to Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around him, and he heard the voice of Jesus asking, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul was also blinded. After three days, God had Ananias go to Saul to lay hands on him. Saul regained his sight. Focus on verses 17–20. In this passage, Saul was literally blind and regained his sight.

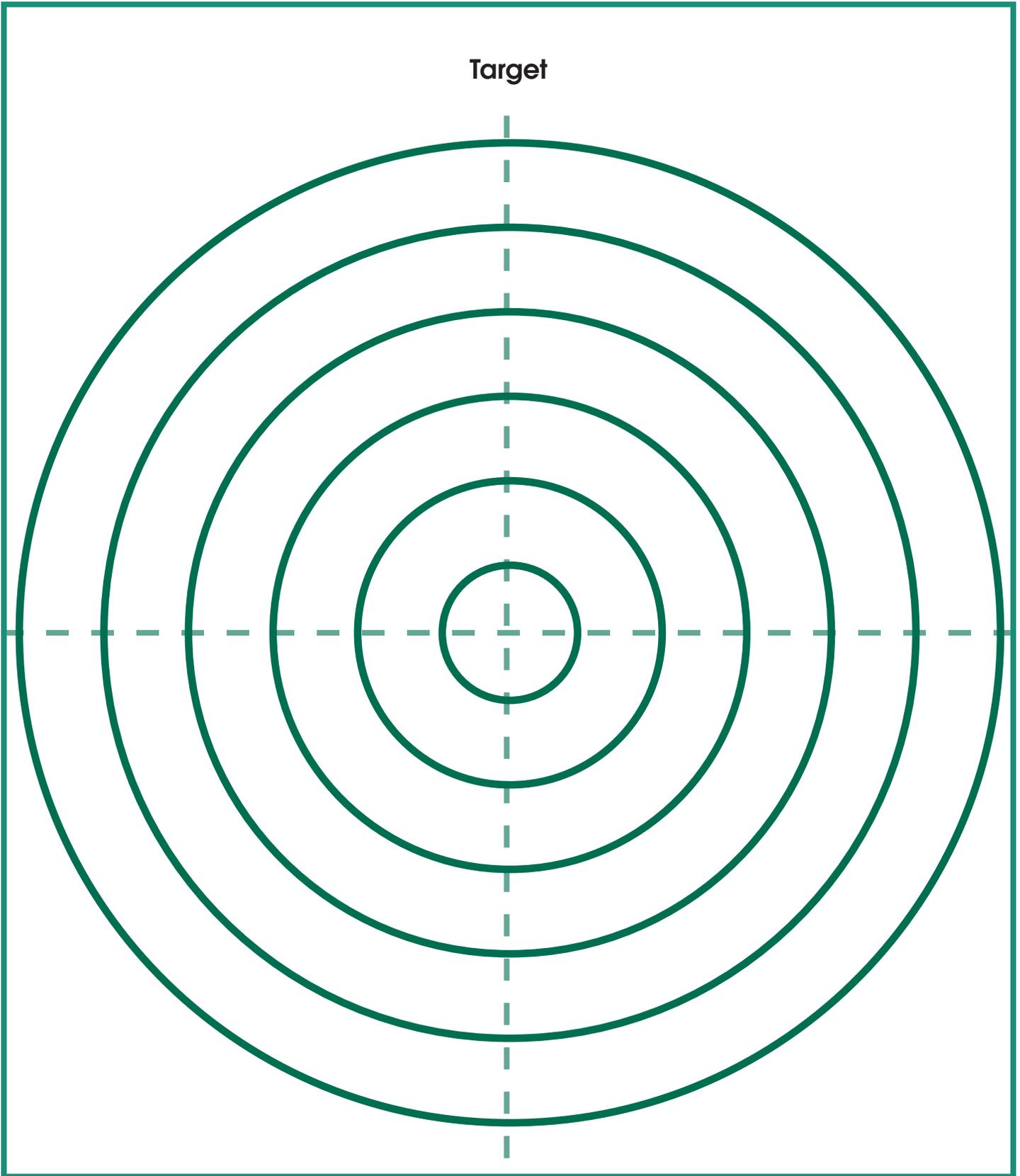
Ask: Can we always trust our eyes? How do our eyes play tricks on us? Distribute copies of Attachment: Activity 9. Ask: What is an optical illusion? What do you see?

In his eyes, Saul’s persecution of the Christians was right. God blinded him, and then gave him back his sight to help him understand. When the scales fell off, he was given fresh eyes through which to see the world. Oftentimes in life we see things one way when they are really quite different. We become too focused on what we want or who we are. We judge others at first sight. As disciples of Christ, we are offered the chance to see ourselves and others through fresh eyes. We are encouraged to look past the illusions that keep us from doing what we should do and being who we should be.

Reflect

What an honor it is to have led these fine young people on your path! In what ways did you find them lighting your path in this session? What beauty did you discover in this session? What went well? If you were to lead this session again, what would you modify?

Attachment: Activity 2a



Attachment: Activity 2b

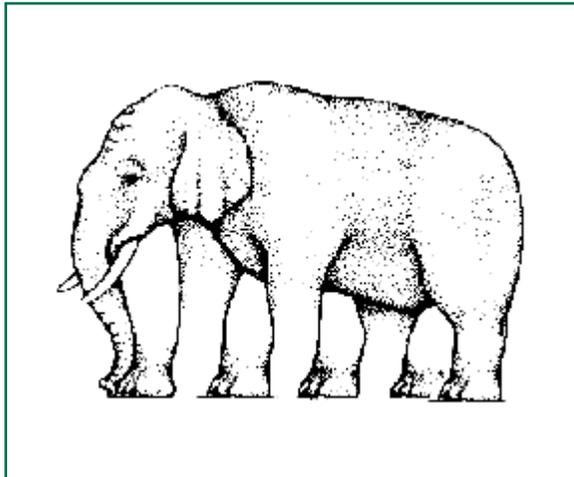
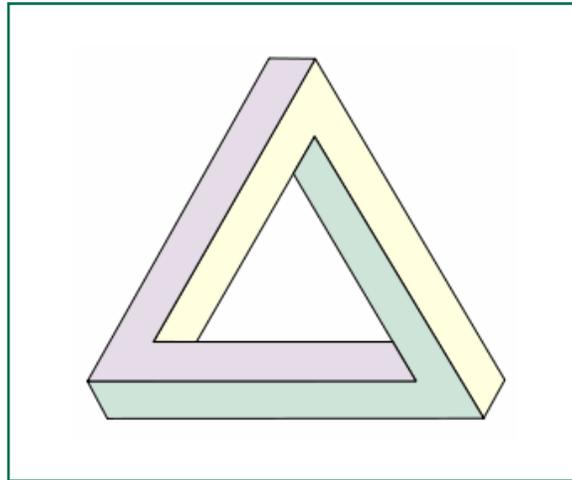
The Prayer of Jesus

	Matthew 6:9-11	Luke 11:2-4
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)	<p>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.</p>	<p>He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."</p>
King James Version (KJV)	<p>Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.</p>	<p>And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. ³ Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.</p>
Common English Bible (CEB)	<p>Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name. ¹⁰ Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven. ¹¹ Give us the bread we need for today. ¹² Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us. ¹³ And don't lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.</p>	<p>² Jesus told them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom. ³ Give us the bread we need for today. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation.'"</p>
The Message	<p>Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best—as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.</p>	<p>⁴So he said, "When you pray, say, Father, Reveal who you are. Set the world right. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil."</p>

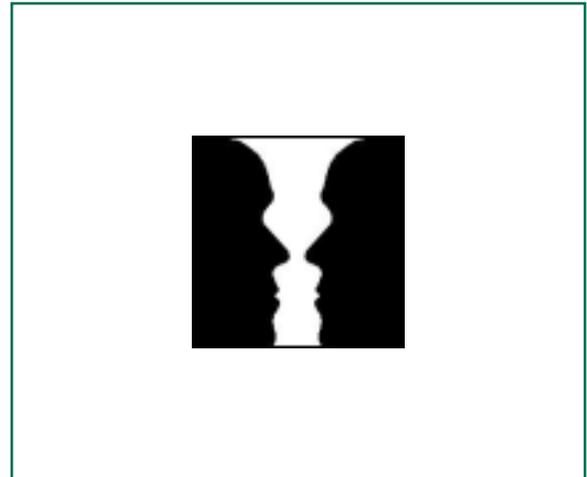
Attachment: Activity 9

Optical Illusions

The Penrose triangle is considered the impossible figure. The Penrose triangle appears to be solid on the page but it cannot be built.



How many legs does this elephant have?



Faces or vase?



Sax player or woman's face?



Seal or donkey's face?

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

There are two types of tradition explored in this session: personal Christian traditions and the traditions of more than two thousand years of faith. These learners straddle the worlds of childhood and adulthood, just as all of us straddle the worlds of past, present, and future. Though the youth only have between eleven and fifteen years on this planet, make sure that they know that you honor their faith history and their experiences. Help them to engage not just the facts of faith, but the beauty that arises from its practice.

About this Exploration

For centuries, followers of 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 this 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

As Christians, we have a long and diverse history of experiences. As adults we need to help make sense of and create meaningful interactions with text, stories, music, and the history of our faith for the next generations. We need to understand the past to know where we are going and where we should be going. Be open to sharing your own traditions and stories as a Christian and to enjoy the faith creation of those who have just started the journey.

Prayer: Dear God, please be present with me and the youth as we gather in your name. We are grateful for the gifts that surround us: friends and family who care, the beauty of your creation, this wonderful place where we come together today. Help me help the youth to see the beauty in all of their surroundings. 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 Where We Worship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Where we worship is a part of Christian tradition. In this activity, we are going to think of the different places that we can worship. Is it in a local coffee shop, outside at a park, or just in our church sanctuary?

Supplies:

- paper
- crayons, markers, colored pencils

Read Matthew 18:20. Ask: *In what places do we gather to worship?* Discuss briefly the idea that worshipping God doesn’t only happen on Sunday morning when we gather in a sanctuary or church-school room. Describe a time that you worshiped outside of the church. Then invite participants to talk about ways and places they may have worshiped outside of what we think of as regular worship time. Distribute paper and drawing instruments and have participants draw their ideal place to worship. Allow time for them to share their drawings and how and why it is their favorite place to connect with God.



2 Sacred Spaces

Leader preparation: Consider some ways throughout Christianity that people have sought to make worship spaces beautiful. Look for pictures (in books, on the Internet) of a variety of types of worship spaces. Find pictures of at least eight to ten different styles of churches ranging in age and culture—examples could be Stave Churches, the Sedlec Ossuary, the Sistine Chapel, Gallarus Oratory, Hagia Sophia, Olon Church in Ecuador, and Hore Abbey. Use images of churches from every continent and churches made from a variety of materials. One picture should be of a worship space that is dilapidated (Hore Abbey or similar church that is in ruins). Include images of your own sanctuary, building, or worship space.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of beauty that surrounds us every day in all ways. Whether found in the creations of your hands—the mountains, a sunset, my pets, my friends and family—or in the creations of our hands as we glorify you, we are thankful every day for the ways you reveal yourself to us. Amen.

Supplies:

- images of churches from around the world, from a variety of cultures and time periods
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Venn Diagram,” Attachment: Activity 2

Create a slideshow of images, or display pictures of interior and exterior pictures of churches. Have participants pick one or two that really interest them and talk about what they like about the structures. How do those buildings make them feel called to worship? Is it the building materials that interest them? Is it the design? Do they feel more called to something colorful and elaborate or something simple? Does the structure look like their current worship space? Does the structure have to be beautiful or visually appealing to be somewhere they would want to worship?

- 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.

Look at how these churches are the same and how are they different. Use the Venn diagram on Attachment: Activity 2 to compare and contrast the pictures. Talk about the time periods, the materials used, and the symbols shown. Ask why are some churches ornate and some plain. Does how a church looks change how they feel about worshipping there? Point out the picture of a worship space that is dilapidated (Hore Abbey or similar church that is in ruins). Ask: *Is this church still beautiful in its brokenness? Can God still be worshiped there?* Finish by talking about what makes your own worship space special.

3 Christian Symbols

Leader preparation: Locate and collect a variety of examples of the cross and ichthys (Christian fish symbol), including different materials, styles, or sizes. The collection should include examples that the participants may have seen throughout the church. If time and space allow, you can do a “scavenger hunt” with the participants, looking for places in the church or worship space for examples of these symbols.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your presence here as we gather. Help us see you in our daily lives through the image of the cross, the beauty of the world around us, and the relationships that we have with our friends and family. Thank you for your ever-present grace. Amen.

Supplies:

- crosses and ichthyuses in a variety of materials or pictures
- craft materials such as paper, paints, markers, fabric, clay, model magic, and metal

Talk about symbols in general. What are examples of symbols the participants know, such as logos from popular corporations or products? What about team mascots? How often do the youth notice symbols? Talk about two traditional Christian symbols: the cross and the ichthys. Ichthys (sometimes spelled ichthus), from Koine Greek *ἰχθύς* (capitalized IXΘΥΣ or IXΘYC), is the Greek word for “fish.” Discuss the meaning of the cross and the story of the ichthys. Ichthys can be read as an acrostic of “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior.” An acrostic is a poem or other writing in which the first letter of each line spells a word. Share with them the story that because of the threat of persecution early Christians had to keep their faith a secret. If they wanted to see if someone else was a Christian, that person would draw one half of the fish and see if the other person would draw the other half. These symbols have the same meaning whether created out of two simple lines or with elaborate materials, colors, or decorations. Invite participants to create their own versions of the cross, the ichthys, or both. Encourage them to share and discuss their creations and why they created the symbols the way they did.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Psalms Speak (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Have a collection of Bibles for your participants to use. Think about psalms you have read or heard in the past. Are there certain ones that were your favorites? Reread them. Why were they special? Was it that you heard them or read them at a particular moment in your life? How and why did they speak to you? Take time to read Psalm 8.

Prayer: Blessed One, thank you for giving me ways to praise you in word and song. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight (Psalms 19:14). Amen.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- magazines or books with pictures of people, animals, nature, and the cosmos
- large sheets of paper
- markers, pencils, colored pencils, or oil pastels

Ask participants what they know about psalms. What are psalms? Where are they found in the Bible? Where have the participants heard them? Are there any psalms that they know by heart? Make sure the youth have some basic facts about the Book of the Psalms. For example, there are 150 psalms, they were sacred songs/hymns, many of them are believed to have been written by David, there are different categories of psalms (thanksgiving, lament, praise), and some psalms can fit into multiple categories.

Now read Psalm 8 as a group. You can read it from one Bible or use multiple versions to compare texts. Discuss the type of psalm (thanks, praise, lament). How does this psalm describe our human relationship with God? How and why are we special? What does this psalm tell us about creation?

Divide Psalm 8 into stanzas based on the number of participants. They can work individually or in groups. Give each person or group a stanza. On a sheet of paper have everyone illustrate a stanza. They can use images, words, and symbols. Use the same size paper for every stanza so that the papers can be connected when everyone is done. Share the completed psalm with the group, and reread the text from the Bible.

Think about where you find beauty in the Creator's handiwork. Have participants look through books and magazines for examples of the beauty of God's creation. Share a few examples of what you find beautiful or what might be thought of as commonly and uncommonly beautiful. Encourage participants to share their pictures and what they find beautiful about them.

5 Songs as Celebration

Leader preparation: Think about hymns that you love. When did you sing them? Do you remember them from childhood and regular worship services or from a particular time or place in your life? Our hymnals act very much like the Book of Psalms. As a church, we sing hymns for various reasons at a variety of times: worship, Vacation Bible School, funerals, baptisms, church camp, retreats. Do you have a favorite type of hymn, such as praise, thanksgiving, lament? Think about

why we sing to God by ourselves or as a congregation. Think about song as a form of worship in itself.

Supplies:

- hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth” by Folliot S. Pierpoint (tune: Dix), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/f/b/fbeauty.htm>
- hymnals
- (optional) computer with Internet access to play video

Start by discussing hymns and hymnals. *Why and where do we sing hymns? Do we only sing hymns in church?* During regular worship? Show the sections of the hymnals: index, index of first lines, tune names, hymns based on scripture, copyrights. Are there any hymns that the youth can think of off the top of their heads? Have them look up hymns they know. Demonstrate how handy it is to have an index of first lines in case you don’t know the hymn name. Choose a famous hymn tune such as Hyfrydol. *How many hymns in your hymnal use that same tune? Why would we have hymns with the same tune and different words?*

Look at the words of the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth.” Read the lyrics one time as a group. Have each person identify one word or phrase that really sticks with him or her. Ask what does the word(s) mean to that person. Encourage everyone to share. Read the lyrics again and have the youth share what word(s) stuck with them this time. Was it the same word(s)? If not, what was different on the second hearing?

Why do we thank God for beauty? What kind of beauty is described in this hymn? Ask the participants to name times they have experienced beauty in nature. Everyone will come with differing levels of interaction with nature. Encourage people to think outside the box. They may have experienced nature in a summer storm, a warm raindrop or double rainbow, a puddle they played in, or a park where they played sports. If they look back on that moment, how did they feel? What did this moment in nature feel, smell, and look like? Did they feel like God was there in that moment? Looking back on that moment now, how and where do they see God?

Pray together: Dear Creator, thank you for all the beauty that surrounds us. Help us take time to feel the beauty of your creation in warm spring showers and the heat of sunshine on a sunny day, in the wonderful smells of flowers and fresh cut grass. Help us see you in leaves and trees, hills and mountains, streams and oceans. Slow us down, and keep us open to all the small and large moments of beauty that surround us every day. In your name we pray, Amen.

⑥ Raise Your Voice

Leader preparation: When we think of music as a way to praise God, we often only think of “church music,” such as hymns or classical music. Are there pieces of music in other genres that stir strong emotions in you? Maybe a song reminds you of a time, a person, or a place. Whether in a sad or happy song, music has a special ability to touch us through its beauty. Reflect on that favorite or meaningful song. When you listen or listened to it, did you feel God’s presence? Listen to that song right now. Feel the beauty of God’s creation washing over you.

One option for this activity is to have your participants choose their songs in advance and submit them to you. If you are not familiar with the song and it is not instrumental, only find the lyrics online or have the participants submit the lyrics with their songs. If you do not have access to a computer for use during the

session, ask the youth to bring the song in some form of usable format for your group (perhaps as a CD or mp3 player with speakers).

Supplies:

- computer, CD player, or speaker system for mp3 player/iPod
- a favorite song to share
- (optional) music from the participants

Hymns and church music are ways we can worship God. We sing songs of thanksgiving, praise, and lament just like those present in the Book of Psalms. Often, though, there are songs in our daily lives that are very meaningful. These songs may be jazz, classical, hip-hop, rock, R & B, or any form of music not traditionally thought of as church music. These songs are also not always happy songs. Some are songs of great sadness or loss, but they connect with the listener.

Appreciate that not everyone will feel the same way about styles of music. Every participant may not experience God in the listening, and that is okay. Even though our experiences are not all the same, we can appreciate and be respectful of the choices of others. Start by sharing your own song with the group. Play a portion of your song, and talk about how and when you have experienced God's beauty by listening to it. Is it the words or the music or particular places in the music that you appreciate? Talk about how the song engaged/transported/moved you and what that feels like. What are the physical feelings you have when you hear the song?

Ask group members to share aspects of music that they have found beautiful and to explain why. If they have brought music, share portions of the songs. How is the Creator present with them at the moment? Whether it was a moment of great joy or sadness, this beautiful creation of song was there to connect them with God.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 A Friend in Need (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reread the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Be prepared to briefly describe how parables worked in the Gospels.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Parables are stories that can be found in the New Testament. They are stories told by Jesus to educate his listeners. They use images and symbols and often appear to be simple stories, but they are often interpreted as having much deeper religious meanings. They are often allegorical, representative of issues of the time and matters of faith.

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is answering the question of who qualifies as a neighbor. In this story the Samaritan and the Jew are unlikely companions. The people who pass the injured man (a Jew) are also Jewish, but they offer no help. Ultimately, the man who does stop (the Samaritan) would not normally have interacted with the injured man. They may or may not have been enemies, but they would have felt no obligation to help one another. So, who is Jesus saying is your neighbor?

Choose youth to act out the roles of the robbers, the injured man, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. As they act out the parable while you read it, stop periodically to ask each actor what he or she is thinking. Why might someone rob someone else? Why might people pass them a needy person by? Why would the Samaritan stop?

Now take a few minutes to revisit what Jesus asks us to do. *As a part of our Christian tradition, whom are we asked to be compassionate toward? Who is our neighbor?* Ask the participants to think of a modern-day example, such as opposing gangs, warring countries, rival teams, or cliques/groups at school. Can they think of a time when they were the injured person? Ask the group to create its own modern-day version of the parable.

The words “beautiful thing” are also translated as “good work.” *In the modern parables, what was the “beautiful thing” that was done for them or someone else? Why are these acts of beauty, kindness, and decency, no matter how small, important to Jesus?*

Prayer: Dear God, you have shown us kindness and compassion. Help us experience beauty in all of the moments of kindness and compassion that we encounter, even when—especially when—they come from a most unlikely source. In Christ’s name, we pray, Amen.

A Beautiful Thing

Leader preparation: Read John 12:1–8, Matthew 26:6–13, and Mark 14:3–9. Think about a time when someone performed an unexpected kindness for you. How did you feel? When have you done the same for someone else? How did it make you feel?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- cooking oil

Note that it is not often that we hear the same story in all or most of the gospels. The story of the anointing at Bethany can be found in three of the four Gospels. As a group, read together John 12:1–8. You can share with the participants the location of the other stories if they want to read them later. Identify who is in the story and what is said. Point out that the woman in the story takes a very expensive jar of ointment and pours it on Jesus. It is a selfless act that Jesus calls “beautiful” in Matthew and Mark (RSV translation). Ask the group what about this act makes it beautiful—the cost of the jar of ointment, the act itself, or the kindness she feels for Jesus?

Note that the tradition of placing oil on people has been around for centuries in the Christian church. Have everyone repeat the following words together: May God bless you and grant you peace.

Ask people to extend their right hands, palms down. In turn, place a drop or two of oil on each person’s hand. After each anointing, the group will say, “May God bless you and grant you peace.”

Have someone place oil on your hand as the group recites the blessing.

9 Yes, They'll Know We Are Christians

Leader preparation: Locate a recording of the song “They’ll Know We Are Christians.” As an option, have people bring t-shirts or other fabric for this activity.

Supplies:

- hymn: “They’ll Know We Are Christians” by Peter Scholtes (tune: St. Brendan’s), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XhUsJD0w1M&feature=vwrel&feature=related>
- newsprint
- pencils, markers
- computer with Internet access and projection capability
- plain t-shirts (or other fabric)
- (optional) fabric markers

Play the song one time. Sing it together. Talk about how this song says we will be identified as Christians: unity, love, working together, walking together. This song suggests that we show our faith through relationships with others. We show who we are by how we are. There is beauty in both the grand gestures and the quiet moments of faith.

What does the group think of the images chosen to accompany this music? In what ways do the images support the theme of the song?

In the early days of Christianity, it could be deadly if others knew you were a Christian. Christians were forced to hide their faith and meet only in secret. In modern times, in most places in the world (but not all), you can be proud to be Christian and demonstrate your faith. Invite the participants each to create a paper t-shirt or bumper sticker (or a fabric version) to be an outward sign of his or her faith. How would people want to show to the rest of the world that they are Christians?

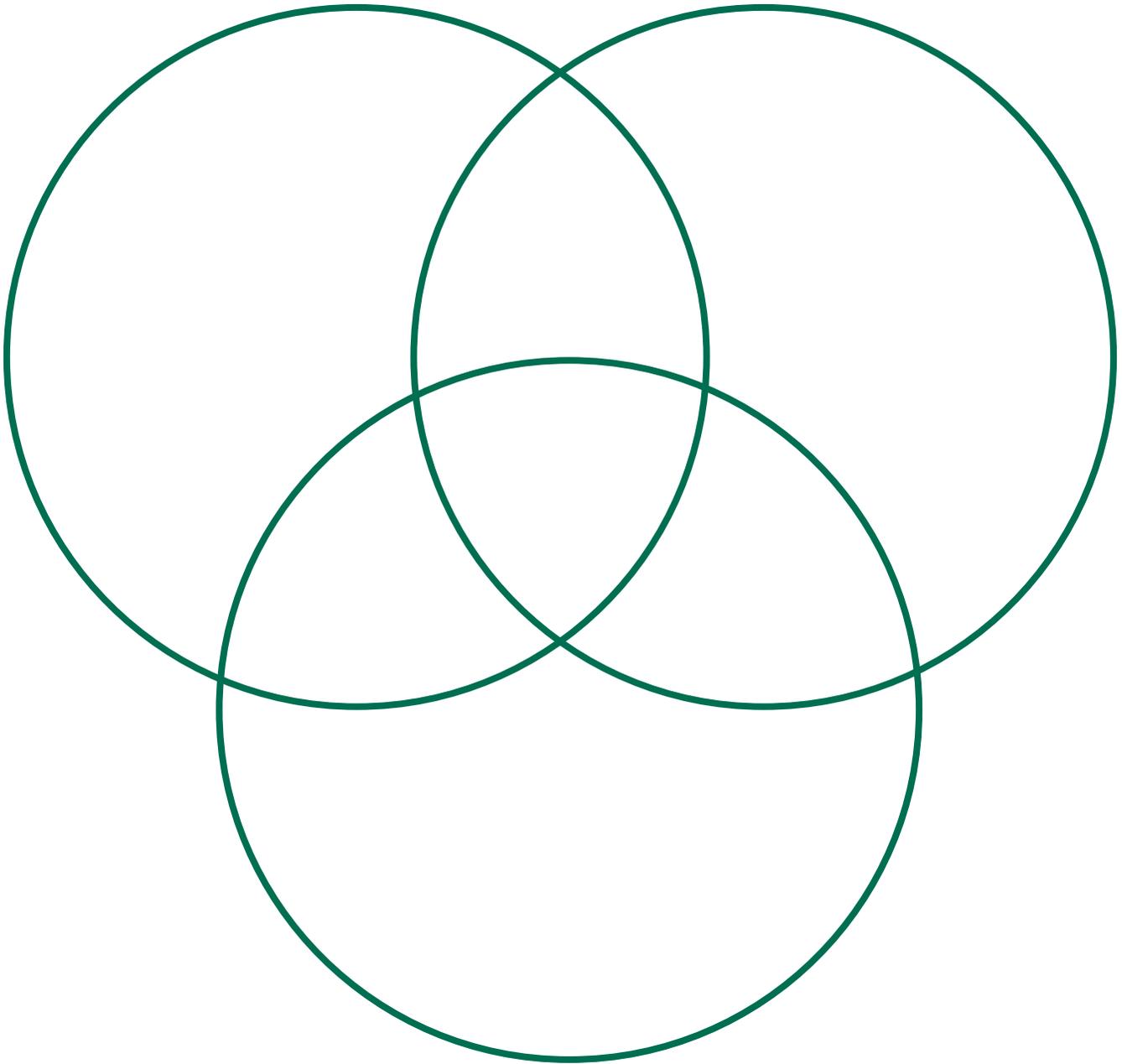
Reflect

We celebrate the traditions of our families, our culture, and our faith. Remembering the traditions of our faith—and creating new ones—allows us all to be part of a faith family that stretches back across time and forward to those who are yet to come. Help us to understand the importance and beauty of the past, the present and the future.

Attachment: Activity 2

Venn Diagram

Write details that tell how the subjects are different in the outer circles.
Write details that tell how the subjects are alike where the circles overlap.



Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

What a great time to be talking to these young ones about this Context and Mission Exploration! These young learners (ages 11–15) are just starting to really understand who they are and what they can be. They are also developing strong instincts about right and wrong and service to others. They can look beyond themselves and not only comprehend the needs of others, but see the beauty that is created when they participate in service and mission. They also can begin to better see the importance of their roles in this faith family.

About this Exploration

The beauty that surrounds us—in our relationships as well as in 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

The anointing at Bethany was an important moment; Jesus was approaching his death on the cross. After Jesus is anointed with expensive ointment, the woman who anoints him is chastised by others in the room. Jesus answers that this woman is doing a “beautiful thing” for him. We are reminded by this story that we probably play every role in the story at some time: sometimes we are the woman, sometimes the skeptic who judges her actions, and sometimes the recipient of a “beautiful” act. No matter who we are, we are to remember the beauty of kindness and our actions in service to others.

Prayer: Remind us all, Holy One, that when we act in Christ’s name, we create beauty wherever we go. You give gifts to us so that we might be sent to serve wherever we are needed. In your name we pray, 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Mission Possible (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Mission is a large part of what we are asked to do and who we are to be as Christians. Think of missions that you personally support or that are supported by your church. Be prepared to talk about one that has special meaning to you. Think of some small missions that this group might be asked to do: shovel the neighbor’s walk, deliver a meal to a sick parishioner, carry groceries for someone at the grocery store, water the neighbor’s plants, begin a card ministry, and so forth.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- envelopes
- paper
- pencils or pens
- dictionary

A large part of who we are and what we are called to do as Christians is to participate in mission. Ask the group how they would define mission. Write their suggestions on newsprint or a whiteboard. Use a dictionary to find a definition. The word comes from the Latin *missio*, meaning “to send.” Just as Jesus sent out his disciples, we are sent to be and to do in Christ’s name. Mission work is not always just large-scale projects. Mission can and does include small, lovely, daily acts of kindness.

Read aloud Matthew 26:6–14. In the Contemporary English Version (CEV) and the New International Version (NIV) the woman’s act of anointing Jesus is called “a beautiful thing.” We are called upon by Jesus to do these beautiful things.

Give each participant a piece of paper on which to write one small daily mission that someone in this group might be asked to do: shovel the neighbor’s walk, deliver a meal to a sick parishioner, carry groceries for someone at the grocery store, water the neighbor’s plants, and so forth. Refer to the definition words they identified. In what ways will these daily missions fulfill that definition? Have them fold their papers and put them in envelopes. Gather the envelopes.

Divide the group into pairs. Explain that each pair will be given two “missions.” Both participants are to get a chance to act the part of a “doer” and a “receiver” of the gift. Give each pair two envelopes. Have them open their envelopes and brainstorm how to act out their “missions.” After everyone has had a few minutes, ask the group to come back together, and have each pair act out their missions for the rest of the participants.

Talk about what it felt like to be both the giver and the receiver. Often people say that being the giver feels best, that they receive more from the act of giving than receiving. When everyone has had a turn, talk about any additional “beautiful things” or good works that participants could or would do in their daily lives.

Prayer: Dear Creator, make me your eyes, ears, hands, and feet here in my community. Help me to look every day for the “beautiful thing” that I can do in your name for those around me. Amen.

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 Where in the World

Leader preparation: Research the missions that your church supports locally, nationally, and globally. Also look at missions supported by your denominational and ecumenical offices. Gather information either from flyers, magazines, or websites. Find out where these ministries are located or where their service areas are.

Supplies:

- list of missions programs
- maps: local, national, and global
- small stickers to place on map—one color for your own church’s missions and one for the denomination’s missions
- Bibles

Have participants look up the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. Ask people to read aloud this passage. Talk briefly about the significance of the Good Samaritan, but focus on the part of the passage that asks, “Who is my neighbor?” and the last verse, which has Jesus telling the listener to “Go and do likewise.”

Present the descriptions of the missions served by your church and talk about each one—what is its mission, and whom does it serve? Read the descriptions of each mission or program. As you finish reading/discussing, have a participant put a sticker on the map on the area served. Repeat this for all the missions you identified.

Study at the map. Whom do we traditionally think of as our neighbors? In the story of the Good Samaritan, it is clear that our neighbor is not just the person who looks like us or sounds like us or even always thinks like us. As people of faith we are called by Jesus to “Go and do likewise.” We are called to do a “beautiful thing.”



3 Peer Pressure

Leader preparation: Compare the story of the anointing at Bethany in John 12:1–8, Matthew 26:6–13, and Mark 14:3–9.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Feeling Cards,” Attachment: Activity 3

Read aloud the three different Gospel accounts of the anointing at Bethany. Invite the participants to describe feelings they have when they do a good deed and when they feel peer pressure. On the blank cards on the attachment, add feelings the youth suggest. Select one version of the story. Pick someone to play each role in the story. Have the feeling cards ready and easy to access.

As someone reads the story, talk about the possible feelings of each character at each part of the story. Have the “actors” hold up a feeling card that expresses how they think their character feels. Allow the characters to make their own feeling cards if the feeling is not already named on a card. Ask the audience if they agree. *How does the woman feel when she does this “beautiful thing” for Jesus? How does Jesus feel when she is doing this for him? How are the others feeling? In all three stories, someone expresses displeasure. How does that person or those people feel? Why might they feel that way? How might the woman feel when the others express these negative feelings?*

Now fast-forward about two thousand years. Have any of the participants had any negative peer pressure or been treated poorly for doing good deeds? Describe an instance where they may have been doing a “beautiful thing” for some-

one else and been treated as a goody-two-shoes. Encourage the participants to remember the words of Matthew 25:34–40. The participant’s choice to care for others and do the right thing is Christ’s mission for all of us.

Prayer: Let me hear your call to love the stranger as I love my family, my friends, and myself. Help me make the right choices even when they are difficult. Walk with me when I need to know that I am making the right choice to care for others as you have always cared for me. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 One of Us (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–20. Find pictures of faces of a variety of people—different races, cultures, religions, ages, gender, and income. Look around the church for magazines, brochures, fliers, promotional materials, and books.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pictures of a variety of people

Discuss briefly the role of Paul’s letters. Each letter was written to address a particular situation. The title of the book of in the New Testament (Romans, Corinthians) identifies the group to whom the letter is addressed. These letters, written to faith communities of Christians, were usually meant to respond to a crisis or issue that arose within that group. Read together 2 Corinthians 5:16–20.

Show the photos you brought. Invite the youth to study the pictures. Ask: *What do you think you know about the people in the pictures? Tell a story about each person pictured. How quickly do we make assumptions or judgments about the people we see? We tend to see other people through a “human point of view.” When we look at others that way, we are often quick to judge and assume that we know their stories. They look different, old, young, rich, or poor.*

Clearly, this is not a new phenomenon, as Paul wrote about it during the infancy of the Christian church. What if, as Paul tells us, we look at everyone as a “new creation” in Christ? Look at the photos again, and tell a story about the people as “new creations.” *What might their stories be? How might we change our ways if we look at everyone as God’s beautiful children? If we assume the best and not the worst, how does the story change?*

Encourage participants to practice this approach all week. As they encounter someone new or even someone that they have perhaps struggled with in the past, ask them to look at that person as a new creation and see how that change feels.

Prayer: Open my eyes, dear God, to the possibilities that the stranger passing me on the street, the classmate in the hallway, the rival, the “other” is in indeed a “new creation” through you and through Jesus. Help open my human eyes to your beautiful and precious children who live all around me. Amen.

5 The Turning Seasons

Leader preparation: Review the song “Turn, Turn, Turn” by the Byrds, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB6jhbtDUZE>. Prepare to share it with your group.

In what seasons of life are your youth? What seasons have you experienced recently? In what ways does Ecclesiastes 3:1–9 connect with your life today?

Supplies:

- song: “Turn, Turn, Turn,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB6jhbtDUZE>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Play the video “Turn, Turn, Turn.” Ask everyone to notice which images appeal to her or him. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–9. Note the pairs of words that represent opposite “times” in life.

Invite the group to view the video again. This time, have them reflect on how suited the images are to the words. Discuss people’s reactions to this setting of the music. In what ways are the images helpful as we seek to understand the passage? If the group were to choose images for this scripture text, what might they be? Why?

6 Light My Way

Leader preparation: Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–9.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- beeswax sheets and wicks
- small tag-board labels
- ribbon
- markers

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–9. Ask the youth what they think it means that there is a time for every matter under heaven? Reflect on the passage together. Each couplet talks about opposites. Some are moments of beauty, and some are moments of brokenness. Ask: *As people of faith, why is it important for us to understand that life comes with both highs and lows? Where is God for us in both the beauty and the brokenness? How might this passage remind us to be aware of the right time, the time to do one thing and not to do another thing?*

In times of difficulty, loss, and brokenness, it is often hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. At such times we are encouraged to remember the promise and hope that comes from Christ’s resurrection and the promise of Easter. Even in the most desperate moments, there is beauty, hope, light, and promise. Peter Benenson, the English lawyer and founder of Amnesty International, has been quoted as saying at a Human Rights Day ceremony on December 10, 1961, “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” The candle circled by barbed wire has since become the society’s emblem.

To help remember this quote and be reminded of the light of Christ, invite the youth to make two candles, one for themselves and one to give to someone who would benefit from receiving one. To make a candle, roll a beeswax sheet around a wick. Once the candles are rolled, have the participants make tags with messages of hope and promise to tie to the candles.

Prayer: *Light of my life, remind me to come to you with both my sorrows and joy, moments of beauty and moment of brokenness. Also help me to offer your light of hope and promise to someone in need. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities

7 That's So Random (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think of some small acts of kindness you have given or received. Did they make you smile? Feel more valued? Appreciate the beauty in the world?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- roll of masking tape
- markers

Talk about random acts of kindness. What do the participants think that phrase means? The phrase came into popularity in the early 1980s; it represents a person or group of people doing a kindness or good deed for someone else just for the joy of it. Examples might be: paying for the person behind you at the movies; seeing someone struggle in the lunch line at school while they look for money and helping them pay their bill; offering to carry a backpack, bag, or instrument for someone at school; or helping a neighbor with groceries or a heavy item.

What might be a large or small random act of kindness that the participants have performed or could perform? On newsprint or a whiteboard, have the participants create a list of these random acts of kindness. Have they helped a complete stranger or done a kindness for a friend or family member just because? If they have been either the giver or the receiver, how did they feel? Encourage the participants to be mindful and open in the week ahead for a possible moment to perform a random act of kindness.

Have each participant cut off a piece of masking tape long enough to go around his or her wrist. Fold the tape so the sticky part of the tape is all covered. Have them decorate the "bracelet" with RAK (Random Acts of Kindness) or "Beautiful Thing." The bracelet can be as wide or as narrow as the participant wants. Also, it may be as decorative or plain as people want.

Help them attach the bracelets, and ask them to try to wear them for a few days, at least, and a week if they can. They should try to look at the bracelet each day and watch for chances to practice random acts of kindness. Also, if you have time at the next gathering, spend a few minutes for each participant to share a RAK or beautiful thing that she or he did during the week.

Prayer: *Dear Father-Mother, give us the sight—we who have been blessed by others—to notice opportunities to bless others. May our actions and words show the beauty of our path. Amen.*

8 One

Leader preparation: Look up information on the history of Ten Thousand Villages. See the website: <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/>. This company helped start the fair trade movement, but more importantly, it came about when one woman saw great need and began working out of the trunk of her car.

Supplies:

- short video from the Internet, if possible, about the ministry of Ten Thousand Villages
- (optional) computer with Internet connection, projector
- (optional) canned food, clothing, water, blankets, or boxes to represent shelter

Ten Thousand Villages is a mission that was started by Edna Ruth Byler in 1946 out of the trunk of her car. On a trip to Puerto Rico, she could not believe the poverty that she saw. She began bringing handcrafted items back to the United States from around the world. The goal was to create a marketplace for these artisans' items, pay them a fair wage for the work that they did, and educate people in her own country about their plight. The mission has grown to 390 locations. It is amazing to think that one woman started this very successful venture because of a trip to another country. Usually, a mission or charity starts because one person sees a need and decides to find a solution to the problem.

Talk about the most basic human needs: food/water, clothing, and shelter. Sometimes it is hard to remember that there are people who cannot get their most basic needs met. Split into three groups, each representing one of these issues. Each group needs to brainstorm a need that they may know of or may have heard of locally, nationally, or internationally relating to each one of these basic needs. Once they come up with the need, they decide how to meet the need. Encourage the youth to act locally if they can. For example, do they have clothes they can donate? Can they volunteer some time at a food bank or shelter? Do they have a friend who they know could use a good meal?

Invite the groups to share their ideas. Challenge everyone to be on the lookout for ways to meet others' basic needs over the coming week.

Prayer: God, thank you for the abundance that surrounds me every day. Keep me mindful of those who have little or none, and alert me to ways that I can serve those around me. Amen.



9 Drop in the Bucket (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think of missions and needs that you have encountered in your community. How do you feel when you contemplate the great variety of needs? What brings you stamina and hope?

Supplies:

- bowls
- spoons of various sizes
- cotton balls
- eye droppers
- water

Talk about the missions that your church supports locally, nationally, and globally. What part of your church budget is dedicated to outreach and mission? What special offerings are collected through the year, such as Week of Compassion/One Great Hour of Sharing? Have any of the participants been involved with

those missions? What groups or charities do they support with their families, through school, or through other groups such as scouts? Invite participants to describe their involvement. Maybe it is a natural disaster, a short-term need, or an ongoing project. We often talk about the journey of a thousand miles starting with one step. What does that mean? Often, when we look at a problem or a need, it seems so large; and, sometimes it is.

Divide the group into pairs, and give each pair two bowls, one with water in it. Place the bowls some distance apart, and give each pair a selection of utensils (cotton balls, spoons, eye droppers). Their task is to move the water from one bowl to the other. What works, and what does not? Let them try different ways, if they want. When they are done moving the water, talk about strategy. Think back to the saying about a thousand miles. Just as with any mission, the task can seem daunting. You won't be successful with every method. It may take longer than you thought to complete the task. It is the same with a mission. It can seem and feel overwhelming when you hear about the need. You may have to try different methods to meet the need and it may take a long time.

It is important to remember how important each step is, how critical each person is. Sometimes when you are a young person, you can feel that your efforts aren't needed or that they won't do enough. Maybe you only bring in one can for a food drive; maybe you only have one dollar or one hour to give. Each of those is a drop in the bucket, a step on the journey. Don't give up. In Matthew 26:10 Jesus reminds us of the importance of the "beautiful thing," the good work. A kindness, an act of compassion, no matter the size, is a thing of beauty to Jesus.

Prayer: Help me, God, to stay strong and not lose faith when something seems too big for me. I know with you beside me that I can be who you need me to be and do what you need me to do. Amen.

Reflect

In what ways did the group demonstrate a growing understanding of mission and their participation in Christian mission? What simple tasks did they describe as a mission they could undertake? Where do they see themselves in Christ's mission? What was your greatest challenge in this session? How would you address that situation in another session?

Attachment: Activity 3

Feeling Cards	PROUD	EMBARRASSED	KIND	
	SAD	ANGRY	GIVING	
	HAPPY	JOYFUL	FRUSTRATED	

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Our young friends are growing in their ability to see a new depth in their faith. They are open to the experiences we offer them and to the relationships in which they engage. They have the openness of mind and the eyes of a child that allow them to really see the beauty and glory of creation. They also have the benefit of being able developmentally to grasp the notion of the future of their lives and their faith. Encourage them to look down, look up, look ahead, and look inward as they take this faith journey with you.

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 divinity 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

As people of faith, we need to look both at the micro and the macro of our lives and our faith. Whether it is the beauty found in the vastness of the universe as we look through a telescope or the most minute detail seen only with a microscope, both are the amazing works of the Creator. Similarly, the most minute detail of today's faith or the far-off vision of who we will become on our faith journey are also the amazing creation of the most Holy One. Take time to appreciate and celebrate all that we have been given and anticipate the wonders to come.

Prayer: Heavenly One, you offer us the beauty of this day, the memories of times past, and the promise of a future yet to come. We are honored to walk this path together. I am particularly blessed to be part of these young peoples' lives as they travel this part of their journey with me. Help me to be a guide, a support, and someone who helps them see and be filled with the beauty and promise that is a future with 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 All in a Day's Work (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about something you enjoy doing that you want to do well such as writing, playing a sport or an instrument, working with wood, painting, or riding a bike. What kind of effort have you put into the activity to be good at it and to enjoy it? Did you practice all the time; did it come naturally; was it a combination of both natural talent and practice? How did you feel when you achieved your goal or finished your work of art? Can you see beauty in both the practice and the accomplishment? Now think about the practice of faith. When has it come naturally and when has required practice? Have you experienced beauty as you have practiced your faith? Be mindful of your faith and ready to share with your participants.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bible

On newsprint or a whiteboard write the following words: basketball, volleyball, football, violin, drums, painting, pottery, dance, writing, public speaking, singing (anything that requires practice to be good). Ask the group what these activities have in common. Note that to be really good at any of them requires practice. Ask who are the best of the best in a variety of fields? Invite the group to brainstorm names together. Think about music performers, athletes, actors, attorneys, ministers, doctors, and so forth. Talk about the fact that even though prodigies may have great natural talent, they still have to practice their art.

Invite the youth to describe things for which they have to practice in order to improve. This could be anything from school studies to cooking to painting to any number of activities. Have them talk about how they felt when they first started an activity, when they were novices. How did it feel when they became more accomplished at the task? What words would they use to chronicle their progress? If they don't mention the word "beauty," suggest that to them. Talk about how it felt to finally participate in the big game, the recital, or the science competition; to finish the piece of art; or to achieve their goal. Can they see the beauty in the final "product"?

It is the same with our faith. In what ways do they practice their faith—going to church or church school, working on a mission project, singing in the choir, playing an instrument in church? Do they also practice their faith in little moments every day—creating something just for the joy of it, being kind to a friend in need, holding the door for the person behind them, singing a song? There is beauty in both the small moments of practice and the larger completed "work of art." Remind them that everyone who is faithful still has to practice her or his faith all the time. It is called practicing for a reason.

What future goals do they want to set for their faith life? How will they plan, daily, to achieve them?

Close by reading Psalm 32:8: "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you."

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 Five and Seven

Leader preparation: The week before doing this activity be mindful every day for a moment where you felt God’s presence in a small moment of beauty—a sunset, freshly baked cookies, the warm sun on your arms, or a song on the radio. Make a mental note of each event, or jot it down and bring it to the activity. Ask your group to do the same and bring their lists.

Haiku is traditionally a style of Japanese poetry that follows the meter of five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Haiku was traditionally about nature, but the form is used for a variety of subjects. Provide a few examples of haiku poems so the youth can hear the word usage and meter.

God, father mother
Plentiful is your bounty
Days filled with beauty

Supplies:

- patterned paper—origami or scrapbooking paper would work well
- fine tipped pens or markers
- pens, pencils
- scrap paper
- (optional) sample haiku poems

Talk with the participants about their week. Ask: *What small or large moment of beauty did you experience? Which of your senses did you use in the discovery of beauty? Which experience had the greatest impact on you?*

Describe haiku—a Japanese poem that follows a set 5-7-5 pattern. While there are a variety of traditions, in this activity we will use the three lines and seventeen symbols in the entire poem: five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Haiku was traditionally about nature, but it is used for a variety of subjects. Read the Haiku above or any you located in books or on the Internet so the group can hear the word usage and meter. If you brought examples, leave them on the tables for the youth to read as they work.

Have the youth write a haiku about the experience from the prior week where they felt God’s presence in a moment of beauty. Encourage them to have fun with this activity. Poems can be funny or serious, but should give the reader/hearer an understanding of the experience. Once they are happy with the final product, have the youth write their haiku on the patterned paper. When everyone is done, encourage each to share his or her haiku with the rest of the group.

Prayer: God, thank you for the beauty that can be found in the smallest, simplest moments in life. Thank you for chocolate chips cookies, a beautiful flower, my favorite song on the radio, a soft warm jacket, the smell of freshly cut grass. I love knowing that I can find your love and grace everywhere, every day. Amen.



③ Details, Details

Leader preparation: Study the Georgia O’Keeffe artwork “Red Canna.” Locate an image of a full red canna plant for comparison. Even better, find a live red canna. Look for books or images on the Internet of close-ups of moth wings, butterfly wings, fruit, architecture, bridges, and any type of structure. You could Google search “close up” or “extreme close up” and find a variety of images. Search in advance so you don’t have any surprises!

Supplies:

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

Often we focus on the big picture. We look at sweeping mountain vistas, wide ocean views, sacraments or important celebrations in the church and see the beauty in the big picture. We experience God in the beauty and grandeur of the scene or the moment: the waving of the palms on Palm Sunday or the scenery at the nativity pageant. Ask the participants for examples of the “big” places in life when they experienced God or felt God’s presence. These moments can help us experience the vastness of God in our lives.

At the same time, God is in the smallest moments and the smallest details. Display the artwork “Red Canna.” Talk with the youth about what they see. Have they heard about Georgia O’Keefe and her pictures? Have they seen any of her art? Encourage them to talk about the color and the detail. Show them the picture of the full-size red canna. Can they see beauty in the detail? Can they see God’s hand in the smallest of details as much as the big picture? Show the participants the other close-up pictures you compiled. Encourage them to guess what they are.

As we think about the future, we can take comfort in knowing God’s beauty and presence can be found in the smallest places.

As appropriate for your space, have participants get up, move around, and look for small details that appeal to their eyes, such as fabric, architectural details, blades of grass, rivets on a structure. Invite the youth to photograph or draw these details. Many cell phones are equipped with cameras. Encourage the youth to focus on something that is a small part of a whole. Have them all come back together and share images, drawn or photographed, and talk about their images. What appealed to them? From what larger item or image did the detail come? Talk about God’s hand being found in the smallest brushstroke or the finished painting, the part and the whole.

Prayer: Creator, so often we search you out and find you in the tall mountains, the vast oceans, the big moments in our lives. Help us to remember to appreciate and experience you in the little moments, the slightest details. Thank you the constant gift of your presence. We go into the future with the assurance of your presence and your care. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 God's Real Estate (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If possible, make arrangements for the youth to go throughout the building to approximate the area in square feet of each space where people gather for worship, fellowship, or study.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) phone book
- (optional) 25' or longer tape measure

The room where you meet for your activities is a sacred space where the participants gather to learn how to be Christians, both in their daily lives and as they move throughout their lives. How big would you guess this space is? (Hint: to find the area of a room, multiply the length by the width.) Show the youth how to measure using their feet. If available, have them use a tape measure. Guess how many other rooms are used for worship in the building/church where you meet. How much sacred space is there in just this one building alone? If you guess the rooms are about the same size, tally up the results and talk about the size of rooms dedicated to worship and practice of faith. This is one building of many.

Have them think about the names and numbers of other churches in their area and the greater area around your city or town. A phone book might be a helpful resource for this. Explain that we are not going for exact numbers. We know that some churches have more space and some have less. For a "guess-timate," use the statistics from the building where you meet, and multiply that number by the number of worship spaces in your geographical area.

Don't forget that we also practice faith in our homes as well. Add those numbers to the guess-timates.

Consider times when they experienced God in nature or at a sporting event or a concert. You probably cannot figure out the dimensions, but that's okay. The main point is to see the ever-widening circle of space dedicated to God. As the youth get older, move into the world, travel, and have new experiences, those circles will widen out even more. The world is a vast place, but there is an amazing amount of "real estate" dedicated to worshiping God and practicing faith.

Prayer: Creator, Mother-Father, thank you for this room where we meet and these friends here today. Thank you also for all of the wonderful places where all who want to worship and experience you can go to know you and feel your presence. We're grateful that you go with us as we grow into our futures. Wherever we will go, there you are. Amen.

5 Mountain High, Valley Low

Leader preparation: If you have not read the story of Job before or need a refresher, you can locate a synopsis on the Internet or at the beginning of any annotated Bible. Be prepared to discuss the overall story as part of this activity. Find books or bring a computer to look up statistics about the planet. You want to be able to look up areas covered by water and land, tallest mountains, deepest depths of the ocean, sizes of the continents, countries, cities, and states.

Supplies:

- books, computer, or both to look up geographical statistics
- Bibles
- large pieces of paper or long roll of paper
- markers, colored pencils, crayons, oil pastels, or paints

Introduce the story of Job. Job, a character in the Old Testament, was a righteous man who loved and honored God. He was blessed with wealth and a good family. Satan contended that Job was only faithful to God because of the plenty that he had in his life. If that plenty were taken away, Satan believed Job would curse God. God allowed Satan to test Job; Job's possessions were destroyed and his children killed. Still he did not forsake or curse God. His body was covered by painful boils, but he did not curse God. God visited Job and established that God was sovereign over all creation. God also reassured Job that his possessions and family would be restored to him.

Read together Job 38:1–11, and discuss it. God is talking with Job about the creation of the earth and the water. With the youth consider the vastness of God's creation. Start researching the true enormousness of the numbers and statistics of the planet. Divide the group into small groups of two or three, and give each small group something to research, such as the size of the land masses on earth, the size of the oceans, the tallest mountains, the deepest oceans, the country where you live, a country where you do mission work, the state where you live.

Have them regroup and discuss their findings. How big is the planet? Compare and contrast the numbers that they researched. How much of the planet have they seen?

Ask each group to draw what they researched—preferably having everyone working on the same piece of paper so that all of the aspects of the planet are represented in one place. As they work, talk about how we are like Job. We were not there when the earth was created. However, we have a somewhat greater ability to take in the enormity of creation. Because of technology and the information available to us, we can somewhat experience oceans, the massive deserts, the vast plains, and the tallest mountains. We can truly be thankful for all of the beauty that God created. Ask: *How does knowing the elaborate and vast nature of creation make you feel? What hope for the future does it give you? Why?*

Prayer: Dear God, we are grateful for all that you have created, even if we have never experienced it directly for ourselves. We can look at the smallest things and feel you close to us every day. We can also look at the largest of your creations, the lands and the waters that cover this planet we call home, and know how all powerful you really are. Thank you that we can see in creation a vision for the future that is good. Amen.



6 The Power of Creation

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Navaro Rapids.” You are welcome to do a bit of research about Hiroshige (1797–1858) and Ukiyo-E, Japanese wood-block prints.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Navaro Rapids” by Andro Hiroshigi, <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>
- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Quickly show the artwork to the participants. Ask them to give you the first word that popped into their minds when they saw the artwork. List all their words in a column on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask them the first feeling that they had and list those in a second column.

Now closely examine the print. Ask what they see when they focus on the image. Have them say what words and feelings come to mind after exploring the image further. Are they the same as when they first saw the image? Tally up how many of the participants described a pleasant feeling and how many described an unpleasant feeling. Tally up how many words expressed beauty.

Can an image can be both beautiful and ugly, scary and serene? The word “awful” can describe something extremely ugly or unpleasant or something that is impressive or inspires awe. What examples are there of when the power of God’s creation can be scary? (Tornados, hurricanes, thunderstorms) When are those same things beautiful? (Pictures of the eye of a hurricane, the large clouds that occur before a storm, photographs of lightning)

The power of creation can be terrifying, and as Christians we work to help a neighbor in need when these things have happened. It is also important as we move through our lives to look for beauty where we can. Sometimes we can fear for the future because of uncertainty about possible natural disasters. As Christians, we can work to observe and create beauty; it will be for us a way to communicate with God. As we grow in faith, we can meet the future with hope. We can train ourselves to be open to beauty wherever it can be found.

Prayer: Creator God, you have created a planet that can seem both awful and awesome at the same time. Help us as we grow in faith to be always open to seeing beauty wherever we can, even in times of brokenness. That ability to experience beauty in that moment gives us hope and reminds us of your grace. Amen.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Where in the World? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We are often quite absorbed in the minute or the space we occupy. We are focused on that which is most present for us, for good and for bad. Take a few minutes to breathe deeply, clear your mind, and think about a place you would really like to be. As people of faith, we are often so preoccupied in the here and now that we don't look ahead to where we are going. Take time to think if you wish you were somewhere else with your faith. Are we so focused on Sunday morning that we forget that our faith is a work in progress and we have places to go and people to see? Take time to consider the future. Where would you like your faith to take you?

Supplies:

- tag board, card stock, or heavier weight paper
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Invite the youth into a meditation, a quiet moment for beauty, by posing the questions from the leader preparation section above. Take a few minutes to breathe deeply and clear your mind. After each question, pause for silent reflection. Remind them that we are all often quite absorbed in the minute or the space we occupy. We are focused on that which is most present for us, for good and for bad. What does that mean? Ask them for examples of how they can be totally caught up in the moment.

We can pause to slow down the pace of the day and just enjoy the moment. Sometimes that moment is enjoying a sunset, a bird singing, or the aroma of cookies baking. As people of faith, we are often so preoccupied in the here and now that we don't look ahead to where we are going. Take time to also think if you wish you were somewhere else with your faith.

Are we so focused on Sunday morning that we forget that our faith is a work in progress and we have places to go and people to see? Take time to consider the future. Where would you like to go and who, as a person of faith, you would like to be? Do you want to volunteer? Do you want to engage with a specific mission? Encourage youth to stretch their thinking to find ways to be faithful that fit with their personalities and interests (perhaps in art, music, or sports).

Have participants cut out two bookmarks from the tag board, card stock, and paper. One bookmark is for a physical place that they would like to visit, such as a museum, a city, a country, or an area of the world. On one side of the bookmark, have them write the name of the place. Ask them to decorate the other side to represent where they want to go. The second bookmark is for where they want to go or who they want to be as a person of faith. Have them write that place on one side of the bookmark and decorate the other side with images that represent where they want to be or what they want to do to grow in faith.

Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

8 A Vision of Heaven

Leader preparation: Find a brief description of the Book of Revelation for the youth. The website <http://www.pbs.org/> has an extensive, but good, write-up about the history and meaning. Check with your pastor or church library for information.

Supplies:

- Bibles in a variety of versions (NRSV, *The Message*, and others)
- Sculpey or Fimo clay and a plastic bag if the clay can't be baked at church
- pencils with sharp tips

Introduce the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. The writer's name was John, and the current scholarship puts its creation either in 68 or 95 CE. The book is called the Book of Revelation, Revelations, and The Apocalypse (the Greek word for revelation). The language and images are detailed, symbolic, and very colorful.

Read Revelation 21:1–5 in at least two different versions. Ask the group what they think it means and why do they think that the image of a bride is used. Contrast the beauty of the bride with the images of the second half of the reading—tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain. When the participants think of the New Jerusalem, do they have the same image? Is heaven beautiful and adorned like a bride? Is it free from tears, mourning, crying, and pain? Is heaven the opposite of brokenness? Can we experience this beauty on earth now? When someone comforts us or we feel joy or happiness, can we experience this beauty from the Creator here and now?

Have participants think of words that describe these moments of comfort and joy. Some examples might be love, warmth, joy, kindness, charity, or friendship. Encourage them to select words that have meaning to them in their lives, and to share those words.

Have them create word stones with the clay and pencils. Fashion stones out of the clay, and write one word on each stone. If you can bake the stones where you meet, do so. If not, send home the clay stones with baking instructions. While the participants work, ask them about times that having a word stone might come in handy. Would they keep the stones to themselves? Do they want to make one for a friend or family member? Sometimes, we need something tangible to connect us to a concept.

Option: Have the group make extra stones to keep in your activity space or to be given or sold as a group project.

Prayer: Remind me, Heavenly One, when I am feeling alone or separate or broken, that you are always with me, surrounding me with your love and grace. Amen

9 Thy Word

Leader preparation: Locate a recording of the song “Thy Word” by Michael W. Smith to be shared with the group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song: “Thy Word” by Michael W. Smith, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig8dO3VVayw&feature=related>
- brown craft paper or paper grocery bags
- markers

Read Psalm 119:105. We talk about life as a journey, a path, or a trip. What equipment do we use when we go on these trips? A GPS? Compass? Map? Trail guide? Sherpa?

Faith, too, is a path, a journey, a trip. Listen to the song “Thy Word,” by Michael W. Smith, and read the lyrics. What help do we use on our faith path: Jesus, the Bible, our pastor, our friends and family?

Have participants cut out a “map” from the brown craft paper or the grocery bag. They can make it look like old paper if they roll it over and over again in different directions. Have them start the map with the beginning of their faith journey. Was it their family? Were they baptized or dedicated as an infant? When did they start going to church or vacation Bible school or church camp or youth retreats? Then have them draw their own “paths” on the map. What were moments when they experienced the beauty of their faith? They can be big moments or small, intimate moments where they experienced the beauty of God’s creation in relationships or experiences. Have them include those.

The map can be designed like old-fashioned maps that had dragons and monsters along the way. Were there “dragons and monsters,” moments of brokenness that tested their faith? They can include those as well if they want.

Have them also mark out the path ahead. Are they going to being confirmed? Do they want to go on a mission trip? Do they want to create a work of art or volunteer as a coach for a basketball team? Encourage them to include ways they hope to experience God’s grace and beauty in the future, on the path ahead.

Prayer: Holy One, may I always rely on your words as a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Amen.

Reflect

What was the most awesome moment in this session for you? Where did you find beauty in working with the youth? In what ways did they challenge you to think about the future in a new way? Give thanks for their vision, their enthusiasm, and their beauty.