



Playing & Living Joyfully

About this Faith Practice

In today's world people of all ages need to give themselves permission to play. We believe God seeks to awaken a playful spirit among us. We invite God into this process as we seek recreation and re-creation. While it can lead us into other things, play is inherently its own reward; the experience of playing and living joyfully is – in its essence – pure hope, delight, celebration and song. Playing and living joyfully moves beyond prescribed forms and places. It includes ways of doing justice and moves us outside ourselves into sharing one with another. Joy is contagious; come and play!

Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

1 Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

Note: If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen

3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- 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.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.

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- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

Tip: Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

- 4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters () if using art (see “Ordering Posters,” below).

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Playing and Living Joyfully and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

“Allerheiligen” (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

“Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

“Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources1>)

From AllPosters.com:

“Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>)

“Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>)

“Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>)

Music

Three music selections are used with Playing and Living Joyfully. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You, Tune: Hymn to Joy (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>)

Say it Sing it, (Sing! Prayer and Praise! #188) (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong11>)

Over My Head, Tune: African-American traditional

(Lyrics: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> YouTube: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a>)

Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Playing and Living Joyfully, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	1 John 1:1 – 2:2	Psalm 30
Scripture	Mark: 9:30-37	Philippians 2:1-13
Discipleship	Galatians 4:4-7	Revelation 7:9-17
Christian Tradition	Isaiah 11:1-10	Song of Solomon 2:8-13
Context and Mission	John 12:20-36	Luke 1:39-56
Future and Vision	Mark 16:1-8	Psalm 112

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Many older youth are hampered by the notion that they have already been there, done that. This Exploration is about dragging them out of their rut and showing them a brand new view of something they have seen before—"making all things new"—and giving them a fresh look at some very old ideas.

About this Exploration

Playing and living joyfully is a legitimate expression of our connection with the divine. Living in joy does not require a particular time or place. It requires a willingness to divest ourselves of the expectations society has imposed upon us. To uncover holy joy in our lives, we must find a place of centering and spontaneity. We allow ourselves to return to what has been present in us since birth: the innate wonder, abandon, and delight of life in relationship with God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 30
1 John 1:1-2:2

Leader Preparation

Loosen up! This is supposed to be fun. Don't be afraid if a discussion or a game suddenly veers off in another direction. Sometimes God takes the experience where it will do the most good.

Prayer: God, let me feel your presence, even when I feel like I'm out here in a boat being tossed by the waves. I know you are with me. Hold my hand. Show me the way. Teach me to enjoy the ride. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1. Bang (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: If you have any old tape recorders hanging around the church supply closet, dig those out. It not, group learners together by whoever has a voice memo component and speaker mode on their cell phone.

Supplies:

- tape decks or cell phones

Talk for a moment about the size of creation. In one moment we went from absolute nothingness to absolutely everything—an entire universe in a blink of an eye. Send participants out into the building in pairs or trios and have them record the sound of that moment. Encourage them to be as creative as possible. (NOTE: Be sure to remind them they are not to disturb other meetings.)

Examples:

- pots and pans hitting the floor
- someone yelling "BANG" in a room with echoing acoustics
- someone playing "Ta-daaaaa" on the piano

Gather everyone together and listen to what they came up with. Ask: What kind of sounds might have accompanied the creation? If you were to create the world, what sounds might you make?

2 And It Was

Leader preparation: Find supplies. Take apart flashlights and place pieces in individual bags.

Supplies:

- flashlights (cheap ones from the dollar store, or have participants bring some)
- batteries
- a dark room or blindfolds
- small plastic bags or paper lunch bags

Give each participant a bag full of flashlight parts. Say something like: Not liking to work in the dark, God created light. That's what we are going to do. Turn out the lights in the room and see which participant can be the first to assemble the flashlight and turn it on. (If budget or supplies are limited, use one flashlight and time each participant to see who has the fastest time.) Ask what it takes to "make" light. Can any of them explain what happens when we turn on the wall switch? How would they describe light to a person who has been blind since birth? Jesus himself said he was the "light." What did he mean by that? Metaphorically speaking, how do we as a church "make" that kind of light in our community and in our world?

3 Word Up

Leader preparation: Gather supplies.

Supplies:

- washable markers (bright colors if possible)
- paper

Invite everyone to make individual lists of powerful words. What are the top ten most powerful individual words they can think of? (They are allowed to use two-word phrases if they want.) Give the example “Stop.” One word can make cars come to a halt at an intersection. It’s one word that if shouted by Mom can bring a room of kids to a standstill. How about the word “Free”? You can put the word “free” in front of a sign that says “goat poop” and people will still come and get some. Why? Because it’s free. (Other examples of powerful words: eviction, report cards, why?)

The book of Genesis says that God *spoke* the universe into existence. The gospel of John says in the beginning was the “Word.” Ask group members what that *word* might have been. What word could be used to speak the universe into existence? Give them a few minutes to ponder, and then have them write the word on their palm with one of the markers. They can be as decorative as they want. Have them keep their hand closed and one at a time share the word. Then, they are to leave the word on their palm until it wears off. If anyone at school asks about it, they can share the idea and start a discussion of their own. (Some may wish to use permanent markers—do so at your own risk!)

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Come a Little Bit Closer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Write words from Psalm 30 and/or 1 John 1:1-2:2 on individual sheets of paper. (Choose words you think are important.)

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper

Take the group outside and stand far enough away from them for the words to be unreadable. Hold the words out in front of you and begin walking toward the group. As soon as someone recognizes the word, have them shout it out. (You can play this as a team game and score one point for each correct answer.) If you have space issues, you can play this game in a dark room and slowly illuminate the room with a flashlight and get the same effect). Talk together about how we make God’s word clearer. How do we focus our attention so that we can understand it? In what ways do we make God’s word more confusing to one another?

5 Which Is Which?

Leader preparation: Buy chips and crackers and M&Ms.

Supplies:

- bags of chips, crackers, and M&Ms
- blindfolds

Keep the bag of M&Ms hidden until later. Bring out the chips and crackers and one by one give participants a cracker or chip in each hand. Have them eat the cracker or chips one at a time and then guess what flavor they have just tasted. (If you want to really play this up, have them see if they can tell the difference between a name-brand chip and a store-brand chip). After several rounds of this, bring out the M&Ms. (Peanut ones work better, but have others on hand in case of allergies.) Give blindfolded youth a different color in each hand and see if they can tell the difference. (Undoubtedly someone may try and start a discussion about the properties of green M&Ms. Don't shy away from this; go ahead and discuss it. Since the 1970s rumors have abounded that green M&Ms are an aphrodisiac. The makers of M&Ms have been clear in pointing out this was a story started by consumers, not the company. They have also coyly stated they cannot explain any special properties attributed to any color of M&Ms.) Ask the group about how easy is it to know what God wants of us. Sometimes it can be easy, while other times it's very hard to tell. You can also make this a discussion about sin and how we can justify our actions because sometimes the line between right and wrong is like trying to tell the difference in flavor among M&M colors.

6 The Least Complicated

Leader preparation: Take your group on a field trip to the local market. If this is not a possibility, simply raid the church pantry for items. Yet another option is to bring some packaged food items, and ask the youth to guess which have the most and/or least ingredients.

Supplies:

- food items
- transportation (if taking a field trip)
- Bible

Before going to the market, ask participants to think of the product that has the least ingredients and the product that has the most ingredients. Send them into the store with instructions to find those products. Set a time and place to meet back together. It's okay to do this with a partner. Read the lists together and see who wins. (At this point you can put the items back or, if you have the funds, purchase these items for the local food bank.) If someone comes back with an apple or a tomato, have them grab a can of the same off the shelf and check those ingredients by comparison. When you are back together talk together about the ways we complicate God. Read what John says about what the message really was. Even Psalm 30 tries to keep it as simple as possible. How do we complicate our lives the same way as we complicate a can of beans? If we say simply "God is love," what are some of the additives and preservatives? What are the extra flavors or combination platters we create? Why do you think "God is love" is not enough for some people?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Take Note (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- markers
- sticky notes

Write on a sticky note one or two words that are kind and specific to each person (for example: great singer, athletic, good listener). Gather the group, and give everyone an individual pack of sticky notes. Have them place one note on every other person in the room. (They may not copy something that has already been posted, and remind them to be kind.) Tell them their assignment for the week is to take the remaining notes in their pack to school and begin sticking them to their friends, their friend's books or lockers. See if they can be sneaky and not let anyone know it's them leaving the notes. Remind them to return to the next meeting and share stories about what happened.

8 I'm in the Dark Here!

Leader preparation: Obtain supplies.

Supplies:

- flashlights
- individual mirrors

Turn out the lights in the room if possible. Invite a participant to shine the flashlight at the ceiling. Next see if you can shine the light at a mirror and reflect it to the same spot. Now use a number of mirrors to achieve the same goal. Eventually see if you can shine the light to a place that doesn't normally get light (for example: a closet or the underside of a table). Make sure everyone has a mirror and chance to participate. Talk together about how we must reflect the light of God into places that don't normally get that. These places can include missions that your church supports around the world or even into the lives of friends who are going through hard times.

9 Wash and Run

Leader preparation: Obtain supplies. Some advance planning may need to be done with your pastor but, if possible, keep this as much of a surprise as possible. Be prepared to teach or sing the song. You can find the lyrics at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>.

Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

Supplies:

- car wash supplies: buckets of water, soap, sponges, glass cleaner, paper towels
- words (and music if necessary) to the song "Over My Head," <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> and <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a>

Play or sing the song "Over My Head" as an opening. During discussion time, bring up the notion that being "in over your head" is usually a bad situation, but this song seems to make it something joyous. Ask what it means to be "over your head" when it comes to service and love.

Tell your group you are going on a secret mission: Operation Kindness! You are going to sneak into the parking lot and wash the pastor's car as secretly as possible. (Again, use your own judgment about letting your pastor know this is happening.) Play up this activity as much as possible. Assign code names, have one youth be the look-out, and make sure they never mention this to the pastor later on.

When the car is clean, hide the supplies and gather up the group. Talk about what it was like. Talk about the fun of simply giving their time and talent away. Remind them that the act of kindness is about the kindness. It's kindness for kindness sake, no reward necessary.

Reflect

Jesus made it all very easy: love God, love one another. Five words to sum up everything God wants from us. We are the ones who make it complicated. When you pray this week, ask God for simplicity, clarity, and love. Offer these to the world and the world will reflect them back at you.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

It is often difficult to try and teach someone who already believes they have all the answers. The key of this Exploration is to try and return older youth to the sense of wonder they had when they were small, to surprise them with new ideas or show them that this ancient wisdom truly does have place in their lives today, as they explore the scriptures.

About this Exploration

The history of our faith, recorded in scripture, is a tale of human beings who, like us, wrestled with doubt, oppression, and sorrow. Yet this story is rooted in a creation that God proclaimed good, and undergirded with the joy that comes from the assurance of God's faithfulness, forgiveness, and healing. This story, which is our story of salvation, invites us to creative imagination and to finding our own part in the "play."

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 9:30–37
Philippians 2:1–13

Leader Preparation

This age learner is doing all he or she can to take that childlike voice inside and shove it into a closet. These activities are designed to help you encourage your learners to open that door and let the child out to play.

Prayer: God, help me understand that the child calling me into the street for a round of kickball is you. Just for this moment, there is no homework, no chores, no being grounded. There is only the joy we get from being with you. Help me share that, God. 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.

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Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Step Lightly (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You will need to adjust this category based on the number of people in your group. You can also play this game with the cushions from the couches in the youth room.

Supplies:

- poster board

Lay the poster board out in a row in a hallway. (Again—depending on the size of the group—the cushions are really fun.) Try to have about half as many poster boards/mats as you do participants.

When everyone is sharing a board with someone else, tell them they are not allowed to step on the floor, only on the poster board. Start calling the youth by name and tell them to switch places. (Savannah, switch places with Donald; Cory, switch places with Misha.) After a few rounds and some giggles, call four names at once.

Later, talk about what they think it means for the last to be first and the first to be last. Talk about how God chose to “switch places” and become one of us. (Depending on the theological leanings of your church, you can also talk about how Christ “switched places” with us and allowed himself to be crucified.)

2 Tough Ship

Leader preparation: Download some pictures from the Internet of ship figureheads. Print these out, or show them on a computer screen. Flickr.com is a great website for photos of all kinds. Try this for photos of ship mastheads:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/28ttgh9>.

Supplies:

- pictures of ship figureheads
- markers
- paper

Talk to the group about the figureheads. Show them the pictures and explain that figureheads were not always of women. Snakes, elephants, bulls, lions, eagles, and even politicians’ faces have been used. Egyptians and Chinese sailors carved eyes into the front of the boat. It wasn’t until 1770 that ship builders started carving human forms. Distribute the paper and markers and tell participants they are to draw a figurehead of their own personal boat. The ship is named “_____” (name they supply) and it is headed into the uncharted waters of life. What do they want on the front of the boat and why?

3 Icon Believe It

Leader preparation: Obtain supplies. Print out various icons from a computer home screen and blank out the words so you can show the group just the icon itself.

Supplies:

- print-out of computer screen icons
- paper
- markers
- Bible

Show the printed icons one at a time. (Note: You can also make this a fun game by printing all the icons on one sheet of paper and see if the group can name them all.) As you show the icons ask: Where will this take me? After talking about the icons, have the learners design their own. Ask them to create an icon for “love,” “hope,” “mercy,” and “kindness.” (Check what words are used in your translation of Philippians 2:1–13 and change this list accordingly.) Ask them for one more icon with their name. Ask questions like: What will it do when I click on it? How often does it get updated? What happens if it crashes?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Do You Have? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Create a list of questions in advance. Some questions can be generic while others can be specific to your church or setting..

Supplies:

- list of questions
- chairs
- Bible

Invite your group to sit in a circle and then begin asking questions. Each time a participant hears a question that applies to him or her, that person moves one seat to the left. Start with questions that will make everyone move. When you get into harder questions people who are moving must sit on top of each other. It’s okay to stack them up.

- Do you have two eyes?
- Do you have hair on your head?
- Do you have a really hard test this week at school?
- Do you have shoes on?
- Does the church give you strength?
- Do you have hope for the future?
- Has anyone ever shown you mercy?
- Have you shown kindness to someone today?
- Do you think you know what pleases God?

Read Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. What happens when there is no winner or loser in a game? What would happen if a baseball player rotated to the other team after scoring? Do you think our culture focuses too much or too little on who wins and who loses? How competitive are you?

5 Super Collider

Leader preparation: Find supplies and a location.

Supplies:

- large sheet of paper
- washable paint (two different colors)
- cheap Nerf-type balls
- paint cover-ups such as large men's shirts
- Bible

This activity should be done outside. Hang the sheet of paper on a wall, or lay it out on the parking lot. Provide paint cover-ups to minimized paint damage to clothing. Have someone dip the sponge ball in one color of paint and toss it toward the paper. The next person must dip a sponge ball in the other color and try to hit the splat made by the first person. (Note: With some advance notice you can have group members bring in blank T-shirts and lay them out on the parking lot like a quilt. Use fabric paint with this version.) After everyone has played, allow time for clean up and then gather the group together. Talk about how one color is God and one color is the earth. How do we try and bring these together? How often do we miss the mark when trying to live the way God wants us to live? How can we live in the orange (if you are using red and yellow paint; otherwise adjust accordingly)? What does it feel like when we hit the mark exactly? Read Philippians 2:1–13. It seems that how we should live is pretty well spelled out here. If the Philippians passage was a “score sheet” of sorts, whom do you know who would score pretty high? How close are you to being on target?

6 Hear Me

Leader preparation: This one requires a lot of preparation, but it's worth it. Set up an obstacle course in the parking lot or in a large room. You can use chairs or coat racks or whatever is available in your building.

Supplies:

- items for an obstacle course
- blindfold
- Bible

Once you have the course set up, blindfold one person at a time and have him or her walk the course. They may not remove the blindfold at any time. The rest of the group is to shout out instructions to the person walking the course. After several rounds tell the group that the shouters can choose to yell out incorrect instructions. (Note: Make sure the activity remains safe!) Afterward, gather the group and ask them what it was like. Ask how they listened. How did they tune out the noise of shouting voices and decide which instructions were correct? Ask if they have ever been led astray. Who leads them down the wrong path? Do you have a friend who would think it was funny to lead you into a wall? Why are you friends with that person? Who did you listen to as a child? Read Mark 9:30–37. How does this apply? How would the disciples do on life's obstacle course? How are you doing so far?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Do North (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers
- a compass

Ask everyone to mark down the letters on a compass:

N
E
S
W

Then ask them to write down the letters that would come between those:

NE
SE
SW
NW

Explain they are to use those letters as the first letter of a word (or two word phrase) that creates a way to serve God in their community. (This could include their own household.) Share answers. When everyone has shared, ask them to choose two of all the answers shared and implement them as best they can this week.

8 Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy

Leader preparation: This activity requires a field trip and some cash.

Supplies:

- poster: "Shotgun, Third Ward #1" by John Biggers
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- cash
- transportation

Take your entire group to the nearest fast food restaurant that offers kids' meals. (Note: If you have a large group you may want to call the manager in advance and let them know you are coming; they may even give you a price break.) Tell the group members they must order children's meals, but they cannot open the prize. After everyone has eaten, invite them to select a child or children in the restaurant and give the prizes away on the way out. Offer no explanation, just give away the toys. When you gather up again talk about what it felt like to give the toys to the child. Ask if some gifts mean more when they are unexpected. In what ways do we receive gifts from God that we never know are coming? Give specific examples from your own life and ask the youth for examples from theirs.

Option: Hang up the poster "Shotgun, Third Ward #" by John Biggers,
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>.

After the activity invite the group to look at the poster. What do they see? Talk about how children perceive the world around them. At what point do we stop believing in magic and rain dances?

9 Like Children

Leader preparation: If possible, raid your Sunday school supply cabinet for a picture of Jesus hanging out with children. You can also find one at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2485jsc>.

Look for “Christ among the Children” by Nolde, <http://www.tinyurl.com/294c4sj>. Plan in advance with the nursery coordinator at your church.

Supplies:

- finger paints
- paper
- Bible

Ask the nursery school coordinator if your group can come in to help on a given Sunday. Tell your group they are not just finger-paint helpers, but they are there to study the way the children behave and react to one another and to the older youth.

When your participants gather for their own time, talk about what they learned. What do they think Jesus teaching meant?

Option: Show the picture of Jesus and the children and invite the participants to create their own version in finger paint. Have the group work together to write a prayer based on Mark 9:30–37. Give a copy of the prayer to the nursery and see if you can have it printed in the church bulletin.

Reflect

Take time this week and think back to when you were a child. What made you happy: cartoons? tea parties? riding your bike? Think about that child. What would you say to that child today? If he or she invited you to play, would you still go along? For a child, joy is a natural state of being. Spend some time with that child, who still lives inside you, and play this week.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

This is where it gets hard. Following Jesus is not easy. Older youth still are often still clutching on to the Jesus in the Sunday school coloring pages. Jesus had hands, feet, bad breath, an infectious laugh, and a huge heart. He also taught lessons that were contradictory to the status quo of the time. It is this rebellious Jesus that we lead older youth into knowing. This Exploration introduces the “hard” Jesus, the one who will take the youth into the next phase of their lives.

About this Exploration

In the Exploration of discipleship we focus on play as an experience of taking turns, learning every position on the field—from goalie to coach, from forward to cheering fan. In discipleship there are no bench warmers. In Christian community all experience the amazing joy of Special Olympics, as each participant is embraced at the finish line by Jesus Christ.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Galatians 4:4-7
Revelation 7:9-17

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Be open. Yes, these are plans and activities and lists . . . but be open. Don't get so caught up in the planning that you miss the opportunity that falls in your lap. Open yourself up to improvise; it's kind of a requirement with this age group anyway. Trust yourself enough as a leader to go with the flow of the session.

Prayer: God, being a disciple does not mean I am perfect, only that I'm trying really, really hard to follow you. Help me up when I fall. Let me feel your reassuring hand on my shoulder. Open my eyes and ears so I can hear your voice and see your path. Amen.

Session Development

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

 **1 List Shifting (Easy Preparation)**
Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens or markers
- Bibles

Invite everyone to make a list of ten or more things their parents or caregivers were responsible for when each group member was a very young child, such as giving a bath, brushing teeth, choosing clothes, fixing snacks, and so forth. Now ask each youth to make a new list with his or her name at the top. Ask them to pull things out of the parent/caregiver list and put them into their list. These should be things for which they have now taken responsibility. Ask if there are any spiritual items that could be on the list. How did they first understand the concept of God? Who taught it to them? Who is in charge of their knowing who or what God is now?

Read Galatians 4:4–7. The word "Abba" in this passage is the informal word for Father—essentially, "Daddy." As we mature, does it seem like our relationship with God becomes more informal? Why or why not? What does it mean to be spiritually mature?

2 First Star I've Seen Tonight
Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers

Have the participants draw a Star of David (6-pointed star) in the center of a piece of paper. At each point of the star write the name of a major life influence. These can be people, books, songs, or whatever each person feels has been a life-guide. Discuss these. What are some of the shared influences? Draw another Star of David. This time at each point of the star write the name of someone for whom you have been an influence. As you compare the two stars, what do you think of your responsibility as a disciple?

3 Heavenly Rainment
Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- newsprint or butcher paper
- tape
- markers

- 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.

Divide your group into teams. Invite each team to choose someone to be a “child of God” and then use the paper and tape to create a “heavenly raiment.” No scissors may be used. Give the group 15–20 minutes to design and create. Invite the pastor, or someone else in the congregation, to be the judge. Talk about what the group believes happens after we die. What were they taught by their parents? What ideas did they come up with on their own? What ideas have they seen in movies or TV? Do they buy into the whole floating on clouds and playing the harp idea, or is heaven something beyond our understanding?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Following Directions (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You will need to raid the church school supply closet and grab all the games that are missing pieces, but were never thrown away. Every church has a supply of stuff that gets kept for no reason. Be creative. Use game boards, spinners, dice, game pieces, whatever you can get your hands on.

Supplies:

- game pieces from a wide variety of board games

Divide your group into teams and give each team a bag of pieces. Give them 15 minutes to create a brand new game. When they are finished, have them explain the rules to the whole group. Ask: Who makes the rules about following Jesus? Does it feel like the rules change or like the goalposts get moved? How so? If you are choosing to become a disciple, how do you know if you won or lost? Should it matter? What, in your own opinion, is the hardest rule to follow about following Christ?

5 Instruction

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers
- Bible

Make a list of the words in Revelation 7:12. Depending on the Bible translation you use, you may find these words different, but you should come up with these or similar words: wisdom, power, glory, strength, honor, thanks.

Ask participants to take each word and write a sentence or two about how each word currently applies to their walk with God. Circle the word that seems to sum up that relationship at this moment.

6 Hot Hands

Leader preparation: Make ice.

Supplies:

- ice cubes

Have ice cubes in a bucket ready to go. Explain that Revelation 7:9–17 talks about the sun not scorching and the heat not burning. We could probably get into trouble if we used real flames, so we are going to use ice. Give everyone an ice cube and have them close their fist tightly. The winner is the person who can melt the ice cube fastest without switching hands or giving up. This was a not-so-serious way of exploring and celebrating a scripture passage. What are not-so-serious ways we can face dangers? When it feels like something might scorch us, what can we do?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 News of the Lost (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies. Obtain a copy of the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>.

Supplies:

- poster: “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>.
- newspapers
- markers
- masking tape

Start out by showing the poster. Talk about how children perceive the world around them. If you don’t know how the rest of the world lives, if this is all you’ve ever known, would you find a way to be happy? Is that just “childish-ness?” Is that “inner joy” something anyone can find?

Distribute sections of the newspaper. Invite group members to circle any person in an article who seems lost or displaced—literally or figuratively. When they are done, hang the papers on the wall like a quilt. Take a marker and connect the circles with one long line. Have the group write or simply improvise a prayer for those individuals.

8 Go The Distance

Leader preparation: You will need permanent markers and some cash in coins and bills. You might ask the church treasurer to borrow some with the promise that you will bring it back. You could also raid your piggy bank.

Supplies:

- coins and bills
- markers

Invite group members to empty their pockets of change and bills. Provide some bills or coins to those who have none. (Depending on the availability of money, you might decide in advance just to use coins). It is illegal to write on coins or bills, so just imagine you are marking each coin with a cross and each bill with “Galatians 4:4–7” (not the whole passage, just the reference). Talk about where the money could end up. Come up with some outlandish scenarios like a soda pop machine at a rest stop in Pittsburgh. What would you do if you received such a bill or a coin? What do you think someone else might do?

9 Angels' Calling Cards

Leader preparation: If you don't have access to blank postcards, cut pieces of card stock in half, or cut cards from a piece of poster board.

Supplies:

- blank postcards
- colored markers
- a list of church members and friends who are homebound or in hospital
- Bibles

Distribute the postcards and have the group draw angels on one side of the card. These can be as creative or as simple as they wish. On the opposite side have them write one verse from either Galatians 4:4–7 or Revelation 7:9–17. Address and stamp the cards. Mail them during the week.

Reflect

Don't forget about your own soul. As you lead these practices and work with young people, remember that you have a soul as well. Feed it this week. Use music, or movies, or Ben & Jerry's ice cream, or time alone with your spouse or with a friend. Do something this week that recharges you.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

This Exploration is less about who we are and more about why we are: where we came from, why we do what we do, and so on. It is both an explanation of our identity and an invitation to our identity. The tradition Exploration brings the past into focus and gives participants a sense of place and history.

About this Exploration

Christian tradition comes from many places and cultures throughout the world. We learn to play and live joyfully from the traditions of communities who have lived through persecution: Christians in the catacombs, the early reformers, Africans who were enslaved, people in same-gender loving relationships, immigrant-based faith groups, and others. We learn in new ways—to party, to dance, to eat, to sing, to talk, and to celebrate with our whole being.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 11:1–10
Song of Solomon
2:8–13

Leader Preparation

Let yourself laugh. Let your group members laugh. Instead of approaching these activities with a lets-learn-something attitude, come at them with a lets-have-some-fun frame of mind. Lighten up. Focus your thoughts and prayers on the journey rather than the destination. Road trips are about the trip. Take your group on a journey.

Prayer: God, I understand there is a difference between tradition and doing things the way they have always been done. Tradition comes from respect. Doing things the way they always have been done comes from fear. Open my heart and mind to a new challenge, God. I will respect your ways. I will also make a new path. 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 Spoons (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- two water buckets
- spoons (number depends on the number of teams you create, which depends on the number of youth in your group)
- a measuring cup

This activity is a relay race. Divide your group into teams. Place two buckets thirty to forty feet apart. Fill one bucket with water. Give each team a spoon. On “go” a team member must run to the filled water bucket and bring back a teaspoon of water and drop it in the empty bucket before passing the spoon to the next person. Play for about 5 minutes. At the finish of the game, use the measuring cup to see which team brought back the most water. Gather your group together. Talk to them about how the teaspoon hardly makes a dent in the amount of water in the filled bucket. Tell them to imagine this bucket is like the ocean. Read Isaiah 11:1–10. All that we are in life is nothing compared to the eternity we will spend with God. Our lives are no more than a blink of God’s eye or a spoon of water from the ocean. Does this idea make you feel small or important? Can you come up with two opposing ideas that will combine when we become what God wants us to become? Come up with some of your own imagery and share with the group.

2 Tastes Like Chicken

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- large bag or box of animal crackers
- Bible

Gather your group together and show them the container of animal crackers. Allow them the chance to look at the pictures on the side of the box. Then one by one have them close their eyes and put a cracker in their mouth. See if they can guess the animal they are holding there before chewing. Don’t eat them all! After several rounds, read the scripture passage from Isaiah 11:1–10. This passage from the prophet was to signal a time of renewal. The old ways are ending and a new way is beginning. When was there a time in your life that was significant in this way? Choose one of the animals in the cookie box to signify an “old way” and another cookie to signify a “new way.”

3 Fold ‘Em

Leader preparation: Get supplies. You can find maps at most department stores and supermarkets, often near the cash register. A local travel agent or automobile association may give you some maps for free.

Supplies:

- maps

Playing and Living Joyfully

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.

Unfold several maps and lay them out on a table. On the word “go” participants must accurately refold the map to its original state. You can try this activity as a relay race or as a one-on-one competition.

Ask these questions with the group:

- Does it make you crazy when your map gets folded wrong?
- Do you like shortcuts?
- Do you think most roads lead out of or into a city?
- What’s the best rest stop you’ve ever stopped at?
- Is the journey the most important thing to you, or is it the destination?
- Who is your favorite person to travel with?
- Would you rather take extra time and make frequent stops at tourist attractions, or do you want to get where you are going as quickly as possible?

Then say something like: Let’s imagine we are talking about life’s highway, and ask the same questions again.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 What about the Unicorn? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- markers

Read Isaiah 11:1–10 and pay close attention to the list of animals. Divide your group into teams and have them write lists of “natural predators” that will eventually come together. Be creative. Include high school stereotypes and politicians. Give them five minutes and then compare lists. If any of the pairs match they must be removed from the lists. Look at your lists and see if there is any way for there to be “peace in the valley” so to speak. How do these sides come together? How easy is it for you to put aside differences? How much time is wasted on conflicts that serve no purpose? If God isn’t going to show up again until “the infant plays near the cobra hole,” how long do you think we’ll be waiting?

5 Tra-dish-un

Leader preparation: Get supplies. If possible, arrange for a computer with Internet access and plan to show the video clip of “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” from *Sister Act 2* (at <http://tinyurl.com/d4dfqu>), or rent the video and cue it to this scene.

Supplies:

- video clip of “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” from *Sister Act 2*
- paper
- pencils
- yarn or string

Divide your group into pairs or teams. Tie them together loosely at the wrist. Have the groups wander around the church building (inside and outside) and

write down traditions of the church that seem to have no scriptural basis whatsoever. (Example: If every year the Sunday school kids make paper sheep and there are those who might be upset if there were no paper sheep for the Christmas pageant, write that down.) Gather your groups together to compare lists. Ask if it would have been easier if they were not tied together. Talk about traditions that tie us down rather than set us free.

The hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” is a music tradition in many denominations. How does your congregation sing this song? What would happen if you changed it up? Look at the song as performed in the movie *Sister Act 2*. Look at the words. Choose one line from one of the verses that you think sums up your church’s beliefs.

6 Beige Faith

Leader preparation: You will need to do some shopping and cooking.

Supplies:

- bland foods: cream of wheat, white bread with mayonnaise, unsalted mashed potatoes, unflavored gelatin and so forth

Gather your group together and have them try all the prepared foods. Talk about the distinct lack of flavor. Ask if any of them see their lives this way. Ask: At what point does the “way we’ve always done it” become a recipe for blandness? Have them make a list of ten things that are beige, either literally or figuratively. Ask about deeply held family traditions in their homes and what would happen if one or more of these suddenly changed. What are their favorite family traditions? What are they going to change when they are out and on their own? As a group, come up with a working definition of a beige faith. How could this beige faith be injected with color?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Wish You Were Here (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You will need a collection of “wish you were here” type postcards. You can probably buy these at your nearest tourist attraction. Alternatively, print some on card stock, or simply used blank postcards and let the participants design their own scenes.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- postcards
- markers
- a list of addresses for pastors, board members, teachers, and other church leaders

Have individuals copy a verse from either Isaiah 11:1–10 or Song of Solomon 2:8–13 (or they may choose one of their own they feel is more appropriate) onto the back of the postcard. Send these out as an encouraging note to all those in your church who give of their time and talent behind the scenes.

8 The Legend Continues

Leader preparation: Obtain supplies. Prior to the meeting cut a map into squares and hide these around the meeting room.

Option: If you have the opportunity, hide the map pieces around the entire building and give the group 15 minutes to find as many as possible. Hide them in such a way that they can be readily found without disturbing others.

Supplies:

- map
- scissors
- tape

Tell the group that as we try and find our way in life (both literally and figuratively) we need directions. The problem is we cannot always get the right directions and we cannot always get our directions from the same place at the same time. Divide your group into teams, and send them off into the church building or individually in the meeting room to find pieces of the maps. The team that returns with the most pieces wins. After teams have returned, tape the map back together. Talk about the things that have provided major “life directions” for them so far. Who or what was it? How far did it get you? Talk about a time when you received bad directions or simply went off the map for one reason or another.

9 I Could Use a Belt

Leader preparation: Get supplies. The number of supplies will vary, based on the size of your group. You will need a belt and two water pistols. You can also use Nerf guns. If you cannot obtain any, you can simply let the youth use their fingers. Write the words “goodness” and “fairness” on the pistols (yes, even if you are using fingers!). These words can vary by translation of the scriptures. Check to see which translation you have available and adjust accordingly.

Supplies:

- belt
- two water pistols or Nerf guns
- markers

Set up a quick-draw competition. Have two youth face each other wearing the belt with the pistols tucked in. Count down: 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . draw. The player that draws first is the winner and may face another player.

Play until there is only one “Quick Draw” champion. Talk about how we tend to keep “goodness” and “fairness” to ourselves. Why do we demand these from others, but are reluctant to use them ourselves? What are some ways we can “shoot” goodness and fairness into our community or even into our own families?

Reflect

Focus on the fun this week. Don't get hung up in the details, in the session, or in your life. Laugh like no one is watching. There will always be people who find fault no matter what you do. Use this note as permission to ignore them. Life is too short. Giggle in church. Allow the laughing Holy Spirit in all of us to be your driving force.

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

In working with older youth we often find we are dealing with minds, hearts, and lives that have not yet experienced the world, and they are hungry for it. They see the one puzzle piece they have in their hand and the world tells them this is it, this is all there is. Yet God calls them to see the bigger picture. This Exploration's goal is to be an awakening of sorts, a chance to see the world beyond their current viewpoint.

About this Exploration

Whoever we are and wherever we are, God invites us to play and live joyfully. God calls us to trust self-learning and self-discovery, even though the experience may at times feel awkward. As we become more aware of truth, joy, and tears, and let go of that which is hurting and binding us, we gain a willingness to take discerning risks and find different ways of enjoying God's creation and life's daily journey. We release ourselves to the rhythm of the Spirit. In partnership with God and others, we open ourselves to new ways to practice faith in our community and world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 12:20–36

Luke 1:39–56

Leader Preparation

These activities are about the distance—not “going the distance,” but about the distant spot where you want to end up. Other Explorations are about the joys of wandering, but these are not. Help your group focus on the goal in the distance. In Drawing Class 101 this is called a vanishing point. For these activities, let’s call it a becoming point. Settle in. Choose the driving tune wisely. Don’t forget snacks.

Prayer: God, clear my mind of distractions and my path of obstacles. I’m in this for the long haul, God. Ride with me. You can pick the tunes. Let’s roll the windows down, you and me, and see this through together. Amen.

Session Development

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

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Follow Me . . . Where? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Plan your route carefully. Be sensitive to any mobility concerns among the participants.

Supplies: None

Tell the group you are going to play an old fashioned game of Follow the Leader. They must follow you and do what you do. Start out by simply walking around the church building, but then begin to include things such as crawling under pews, copying your face on the copy machine, stopping by the kitchen and swiping a cookie. Be as creative as you can in your own building. (Do you have a roof? Can you climb to it safely?) Return to your meeting space and talk about the hardest part of the game. Expand to talk about following in real life. What are the hardest rules to follow? What rules did Jesus lay out that are hard to follow? Do you think Jesus makes it difficult on purpose? Are Jesus’ rules the same as the church’s rules? Remember “Love God” and “Treat your neighbor as yourself.” Which one is harder?

2 Life’s Snack Time

Leader preparation: Obtain supplies and prepare a tray prior to the meeting.

Supplies:

- the densest, grainiest bread you can find
- stone ground (grainy) mustard
- generic white bread
- mayonnaise

Prepare small whole grain and mustard sandwiches as well as some white bread and mayonnaise sandwiches. (You can also let the youth make their own.) Talk about the difference between the two. How are they like the lives we choose to lead? Ask participants for an example of where they choose the more difficult road knowing it was the more difficult choice.

3 Hearing Voices

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the way a GPS system works. Prepare a list of basic GPS instructions (“turn left,” “make a U-turn,” “drive 500 miles,” and so on).

Supplies:

- GPS unit
- paper and pens

Gather your group together and bring out the GPS unit. Let them hear the different voices and instructions. Divide your group into teams and have them create “GPS instructions we’d like to hear.” They are to create five funny instructions and five “life-instructions.” Gather them together and have the teams read the lists in their best GPS voices.

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

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Traffic Warning (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with how a GPS unit works. Alternatively, find an Internet website for your area (such as one run by the state department of transportation) that shows traffic patterns and updates.

Supplies:

- a GPS unit (optional)
- paper
- pens
- Bible

Explain to the group that one of the benefits of a GPS unit is that it can warn you of upcoming traffic hazards. (If you have found a website, you can show it or make reference to it.) Invite the group to write what they think is their eventual “destination” in life. Then give them this list of traffic hazards and have them come up with a real life equivalent. Example: Heavy traffic = way too much to do in any given day.

- slow traffic
- road construction
- rest stop
- flat tire
- loss of satellite connection
- roadside food stand
- DUI
- interior distractions (radio, cell, passenger noise)

Read Luke 1:39–56. What if, right in the middle of your life, you suddenly found out that you were pregnant (or that your girlfriend was pregnant)? What would be a “traffic hazard” for that?

Look at the list of distractions in your life. If God called you to be a servant in some way, is that a hazard or simply a new road? Look at the list of hazards you wrote. Most of the time we can get around these. Sometimes it may require us to stop and repair or even call someone for help. Sometimes it just requires patience. How do you deal with each hazard that you wrote? How did Mary deal with hers? How easily could you say, “God, whatever way you want me to go, I will go.”

5 Shower the People You Love

Leader preparation: Try a quick visit to your local party store for the cheapest, most generic baby-shower invitations you can find. If you don’t have a party store nearby, purchase card stock and make your own blank shower invitations.

Supplies:

- Bible
- baby shower invitations
- pens

Look at the passage from Luke 1:39–56 and have each youth create an invitation to a baby shower for Mary’s child. These can be as silly or as serious as they desire. While they are creating, talk about what Mary must have gone through. Do the participants really believe she was so celebratory about it? Would your parents believe you if you went home and said, “Okay, there was this angel . . .”

6 Where Are They Now?

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with how a GPS unit works. You can also use Google Maps.

Supplies:

- GPS unit
- computer with Internet connection
- paper
- pens

Using a real GPS, see if youth can guess the number of Starbuck’s or McDonald’s within a 20-mile radius of the spot where they are standing. They can also play “who lives the farthest away” and “guess how many miles to the pastor’s house.” Then check to see the number of shelters and hospitals. Talk about how we decide where we are in life. Do they use landmarks or follow street signs? Would you rather follow directions from someone who has been there, a GPS, Google maps, or something else? What do you do when you get lost?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Howard Be Thy Name (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Do a minimal Internet research for the various names of God.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

Mary says the name of God will be set apart from all others. Have the group write down as many different names of God as they can come up with. Here are some:

El—God (“mighty, strong, prominent”), used 250 times in the Bible

Elohim—God, occurs 2,570 times in the Bible

El Shaddai—God Almighty or God All Sufficient

Adonai—Lord in English Bibles

Yahweh (sometimes spelled “Jehovah”)—LORD in our English Bibles (all capitals)

Yahweh-Jireh—The Lord will Provide

Yahweh-Rophe—The Lord Who Heals

Yahweh-Nissi—The Lord Our Banner

Yahweh-M’kaddesh—The Lord Who Sanctifies

Yahweh-Shalom—The Lord Our Peace

Yahweh-Elohim—LORD God

Yahweh-Tsidkenu—The Lord Our Righteousness

Yahwe-Rohi—The Lord Our Shepherd

El Elyon—Most High
El Roi—God of Seeing
Kanni—Jealous
Palet—Deliverer
Gaol—Redeemer
Magen—Shield
Eyaluth—Strength
Tzaddiq—Righteous One
El-Olam—Everlasting God

There are also: Master, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Bishop and Guardian of our Souls, Daystar, Deliverer, Advocate, Second Adam, Ancient of Days, Branch, Chief Cornerstone, Immanuel (Emmanuel), First Born, Head of the Body, Physician, Rock, Root of Jesse, Stone, Potentate, Chief Apostle.

In one of his most despairing moments Jesus called God “Abba,” which basically means “Daddy.” Perhaps the oldest known name of God is YHWH. Sometimes we pronounce this Yahweh (Ya-Way). It is also often spelled “Jehovah” because that is the German way of spelling Yahweh.

Write down the letters YHWH vertically. Use each letter as the first letter in a word or phrase that means God to you or a way that you can share God with someone else this week.

8 Can't Keep a Good Person Down

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- balloons
- small birthday candles
- a water faucet
- Bible

Give each youth a balloon and a birthday candle. Have them drop the candle into the balloon and then fill the balloon with water (not too full). Carefully blow air into the balloon so that it is half full with the candle floating on the top. Tie off the balloon. Ask the youth to see if they can shake, push, or somehow sink the candle inside the balloon. Have a volunteer read aloud the scripture from Luke 1:46–56. This passage is so wonderfully uplifting. How is Mary’s soul like the candle in the balloon? What lifts your soul this way?

9 Is That Darth Vader?

Leader preparation: Optional: Download the trailer for *Bruce Almighty*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/cald73>. You can hear James Earl Jones recite the alphabet here: <http://www.tinyurl.com/553g7x>. You can also check out the classic movie *The Ten Commandments* at <http://www.tinyurl.com/23lns4t>.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- Bible

Play the trailer from *Bruce Almighty* and/or make a list of some different actors that you can think of who have played God in movies or on TV. What actor (or even someone you know) has the perfect voice to play God? Read the scripture passage from John 12:20–36. The passage says that God’s voice “thundered.” Take turns and read God’s “line” from this passage in your best God-like voice. Have you ever wanted to hear God, to really hear God’s voice? Do you imagine it sounding angry or kind? What would it take to make you believe it really was God talking to you?

Reflect

God, sometimes we go to great effort to close ourselves off. We shut the doors of our minds and close the windows of our souls and pull the shades down over our eyes and ears, and we believe we are safe. Open us up, God. We are only safe when we are open to your word, your love, your spirit. Throw open the doors and windows. Put up the shades and let us be aware of your presence. In knowing you, may we know ourselves. Amen.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

Some fear the future, some gaze at the future, some run headlong into the future—either way older youth have an overwhelming sense that it is there. For some older youth other people are planning for their future—what they should do after high school, what college or trade school they should attend, what employment they should have. Some youth are even making their own plans for their future. But the future is looming. This Exploration is meant to be reassuring, to spark discussion that will serve as preparation, to install a sense of joyful anticipation and put aside the vision of a coming storm.

About this Exploration

We understand from Jesus that the heart of a child invites us into the realm of God. Living and playing joyfully propels Christian congregations, families, and individuals to respond to this invitation with imagination, creativity, spontaneity, wonder, delight, and hope. Thus equipped we enjoy God's creation—of which we are a part—and confront adversity, scarcity, and fear. Our joyful living leads us to acts of compassion and social justice; our joyful playing makes space for peace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 112
Mark 16:1-8

Leader Preparation

Focus on the “we” aspect of these activities. This is less about “you are followers of God” and more about “we are followers of God.” God is group work. Encourage group members to be a part of the bigger picture, the body of Christ, the church as a whole. There is more going on here than they realize.

Prayer: God, help me understand that this is seed planting. Like putting apple seeds in the ground, I will not be here to make pie, but others will. Help me understand this is all about the pie. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Close Enough (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens
- Bibles in several translations

Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 112. If possible, read it from several translations. Feel free to read it backward, line by line. Have a group of participants read it together, each of them picking a verse randomly. Then give everyone a Bible and ten minutes of private time and ask them to write the qualities that God looks for in a person. Ask the youth to explain what each quality looks like from a distance and from up close. How can we make these qualities real in a global sense and to those sitting around us right now?

2 C Me

Leader preparation: Using poster board or PowerPoint projector, create an eye chart like you would find in an optometrist’s office. Hide the letters to spell out “Jesus loves me,” but do not make it too obvious. Here is an example:

E
J O U
F B L J
E S U S L
O V E S M
E J R T Y W
D N B P K L Q

Or

E
J O U
E B M J
S L E M
U O G Q W
S V U Q E B
Q E Z S X C P
M S U O W Z X N

Be sure when you draw it out on your own the letters get progressively smaller.

Supplies:

- “Jesus loves me” eye chart

Invite group members to try to read the eye chart just as if they were in a doctor's office. Those who wear glasses or contacts can try reading with and without them. Those who don't wear glasses can try reading wearing someone else's glasses. Try it with one eye covered. For fun see if anyone can read the chart standing backward and looking in a mirror. Eventually, point out the hidden phrases and talk about how sometimes things are right in front of us and we don't see them. Ask: What gets in the way of you seeing the obvious? What was the last big thing you missed in life because the answer was right in front of you and you didn't see it?

Beep

Leader preparation: You will need to raid the old supply cabinet in your church and find a film strip projector or slide projector (any sort of projector with a focus knob will do). In a pinch you can use a digital camera set on manual focus.

Supplies:

- projectors of some kind with film, or data projector and computer

Load a film onto the projector (or turn on computer and data projector) and purposely keep the picture out of focus. Slowly turn the focus knob until someone can identify the picture. Use this to launch a discussion on what we do in life that keeps God's will out of focus for us. Mention that sometimes we just need to step back or get a new perspective on the problem. How do we make things clear? How do we bring God's will into focus in our lives?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 One (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- pens
- paper
- Bibles
- blank bumper stickers, temporary tattoo, or other unique places to write and display words (optional)

You can adjust the sizes of your groups according to the number of participants you have. You will need five groups to begin. These groups can be broken down even smaller for multiple variations, but whether you are working with five individuals or five groups of three, five groups is your starting point.

Give the first group verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 112. Group 2 gets verses 3 and 4 and so on. Have the groups sum up the two verses into one sentence. Remind them they are not going for a word-by-word translation, but to take the meaning of the two verses and make one sentence. You now have five groups, each with one individual sentence. Combine groups so that the first three sentences may be summed up together and the last two sentences may be grouped together. You now have two groups with one sentence each. Bring everyone together and see if you can create one sentence and then sum it up even further into one or two words.

Take these two words and write them like this “112 _____” (fill in the blank with your one or two words). You can write this on postcards, bumper stickers, or even on temporary tattoos. In the next few days, use this telescoped psalm to help you focus on what God wants of you in your life.

You-Neek

Leader preparation: You will need permission to use the church copier.

Supplies:

- paper
- ink pad or washable marker

Give every participant a sheet of paper and have them place their thumb on the ink pad and press in the center of the paper leaving a clear finger print. Set the copier on maximum enlarge and copy the print. Keeping the copier on maximum enlarge, copy the copy until you have a large finger print. Have the youth compare prints and study how each one is completely unique the way God intended all of us to be.

Far Away

Leader preparation: You will need access to your church roof or an open field. This activity works best at night, but can be done in the daytime and without the telescope. You will also need a copy of the poster “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>.

Supplies:

- telescope or binoculars
- poster: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Gather your group outside and ask: What is the farthest point you can see? Hand them the telescope and point to the horizon. Few, if any, will think to look up.

After gathering them together again, show the poster “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard. What do you think these girls are staring at? Without knowing anything about these two girls, which one best represents you? Your church?

Sending & Serving Activities

Do U C Gzuz?

Leader preparation: Gather some newspapers.

Supplies:

- newspapers
- markers

Mary went to the tomb to see Jesus. Talk with your group about how we see Jesus today (Remember, “When you have done to the least of these” or “Wherever two or three of you are gathered in my name”). Pass out the newspapers and have the youth tear out articles where they see Jesus. Be sure to look in the classified and

the comics. Tack these to the bulletin board in your learning area, and ask the youth to bring in other Jesus sightings they find during the coming week.

8 Hubble, Bubble, Toil, and . . . Well, You Know

Leader preparation: Look up on the Internet photos taken by the Hubble telescope. Print these, along with the distance they are from the earth, onto postcards.

Supplies:

- Hubble telescope photos
- postcards
- pens
- Bibles

Distribute the postcards to the group and invite them to select the one that interests them the most. Then have them read Psalm 112 and Mark 16:1–8 and choose a verse that speaks to them personally. Have them write this verse on the back of the postcard and mail it this week to someone they feel needs “vision.” (Recipients can be school teachers, sick friends or family, board members, or local politicians.)

9 Play Bigger



Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>.

Supplies:

- poster: Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>

Study the photograph of the children playing. Write down what you think their names might be. What game are they are playing? Does it need a name? Thinking more abstractly, give the children names such as Hope, Joy, Renewal, or other terms of this nature. Where are those children playing? What game are they playing? If the children’s names mean something like Hope, Joy, or Renewal, what might be the name of the ball?

Reflect

Spend this week calling God “Mommy” or “Daddy.” When you pray—be it around the dinner table or alone in your own thoughts—call God one of these names. Watch children you see at church or on your way to work. How do they respond to parents? Think about your mother’s or father’s arms. Could anything go wrong there? Was that the place that made all things better? God is waiting for your hug. Open your arms. Open your heart. Open your soul to the possibility that God simply misses you sometimes.

Thinking smaller, imagine that each of these children is an aspect of your own life. What are their names now? Where are they playing? What is the name of the game? In this context, what might be the name of the ball? In all cases, who wins?