



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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Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Participants of this age are seeking a new place (some literally and some metaphorically). This opens all sorts of doors . . . not for teaching, but for discovering. By this time many young adults have had their minds opened and information crammed in. This is why discovery is so important with this age group. The stories must be presented so they seem new. The old ideas must become relevant. Young adults learn best when they uncover what is being presented rather than having information thrown at them.

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:
1 John 1:1–2:2
Psalm 30

Leader Preparation

These activities are designed to help make God real. Thinking in the abstract is hard sometimes. Little children can see the picture of God in the coloring book, and, while that is only one attribute or characteristic of God, that's real enough for them. These activities are about helping young adults accept that none of this is concrete, but it's all very, very real. We must learn to rethink the words "light" and "illumination" in this context. It's more than visual; light encompasses all the senses. It is emotional. It is spiritual. It is a realization that can come all at once or come slowly up on us like the rising sun on a cloudy day.

Prayer: God, lead me beyond my senses, beyond taking my hand, beyond hearing your voice, beyond feeling you lead me by the hand. Let me know without knowing. Let me believe without evidence. Help me not just to feel your presence, but to be wholly in it. 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 Shuffled Psalm (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles in a variety of translations
- index cards
- markers
- large sheet of butcher paper or newsprint

Explain to the group that you are going to create a new version of Psalm 30. Read the psalm through a few times; use a variety of translations. Write the words, imagery, and phrases that are negative on one stack of index cards and the positive words, imagery, and phrases on another set. They can also create some of their own "positive" and "negative" words or phrases. On the large sheet of butcher paper or newsprint write the words "Oh God" at the top and "Amen" at the bottom. Alternate your cards from the top of the sheet to the bottom. When you are finished, read your psalm aloud as a group.

2 Glow

Leader preparation: You will need access to a dark room (that's dark as in can't-see-your-hand-in-front-of-your-face).

Supplies:

- at least one cell phone
- Bibles

Take your group into the dark room and close the door. Do not tell them in advance what is happening. Stand in the dark for a few moments, and then ask the group to contemplate the idea of "nothing." Ask: What was before the creation of the universe? Explain that they are going to create as much light as possible with just what they have on them. Some may have a video games, iPod, iPod touch (which has a nifty glow stick app), or cell phone. Talk to the group (there in the light they created) about not just how they make light, but how they live light. How do you live as a light in the darkness? How do we make that light brighter? Have you ever been lost in the dark? Who or what was your light? Choose a volunteer and have the group create enough light for the volunteer to read the creation story from Genesis 1.

3 Working Definitions

Leader preparation: Get supplies. You will need to provide access to the Internet via laptops, iPod touch, or cell phones.

Supplies:

- dictionaries, thesaurus, and other word books
- paper
- pens
- Bibles

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.

Sometimes we are too hung up on a single word. We allow centuries of misuse to cloud our understanding. Divide the group into two teams. Explain that each team is going to invent a brand new word to replace an existing concept. The two words are “sin” and “pure.” Assign one word to each team. Invite them to look up its origins, usage, translations, or whatever can be found. Then have them create a brand new word (something that can be said phonetically) and demonstrate the word’s meaning (for example: “sinnnn” spoken like a televangelist might say it). Encourage the group to be able to explain their understanding of the word and whether or not that understanding has changed since before they began their research. Gather and present your new words. Read 1 John 1:1–2:2 with the new words inserted. Talk about how you feel this changes (or does not change) the meaning of the verse.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 The “Nth” Degree (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You will need to prepare a list of “sins” in advance of the meeting.

Supplies:

- list of sins

Invite members of your group to do their best impression of a screaming television evangelist. Say something like: The object of this activity is to “rate the sin” based on how bad you think it is, and let us know with the number of “N”s on the end of the word “sin”. So if I say “drinking” and you feel that’s not too bad a sin, you say ‘sinn.’ If, however, you think it’s not a good thing, you might say sinnnnnnnnnn.

Here are some ideas:

- smoking
- drinking
- skipping church
- sex outside of marriage
- lying to your partner
- lying to the minister
- lying to the government

Explain that the word the Bible uses most for “sin” comes from the Greek word *hamartia*, an archery term meaning “to miss the mark.” Talk with the group about where their ideas about sin come from. If we all have “missed the mark,” do we have any right to judge someone else’s “misses”?

5 Making Sense

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Write down all the senses accept for sight: taste, touch, smell, and hearing.

Invite the group to imagine using those senses to comprehend light (literal or metaphorical). Share these with one another as a group and talk about how they can use any of the answers as a means to reach into someone else's darkness in the coming week.

6 Shine On

Leader preparation: Get a copy of the poster and arrange to show it to the group.

Supplies:

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

Show the poster to the group. What do they see? You may need to point out to the group that this is not a black and white photograph. Rather, it is color; it's just that there is very little color in the scene. If you were there, would you find yourself able to play ball? Notice the sense of desolation—yet, contrast this with the fact that there is an enormous amount of light in the image. How can play bring light into darkened situations?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Dancing for Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Bring copies of the hymn "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (tune: Ode to Joy). This can be found in virtually any hymnal. You can also hear the tune and read the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSONG12>.

Supplies:

- song: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (tune: Ode to Joy)

Gauge how you will do this activity depending on numbers. For example, with a very small group you might use only one or two verses of the hymn. With a larger group, you might divide into four groups (pairs, triads) and assign one verse to each group.

However you choose to do this, invite the group to create liturgical movement or dance to the words of their verse(s). They can be as literal or as free in their interpretation as they wish. Afterward, invite them to perform their dances for the rest of the group. Discuss: What was it like to create the movement? What might happen to your mood as you dance a hymn such as this one?

8 Light Up

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- newspapers
- phone books
- computers with Internet access (optional)

Using all the various sources, how many “light” words or phrases can you find? (Things such as light bulb, light up, light show, light source, black light, and street-light). Make a list of all these words and talk about which words work as an analogy for their own personal faith, and/or for that of your church, or your country.

Switch

Leader preparation: Buy a light switch at a local store. They should be available at a hardware, home improvement, or even drug store. Alternatively, find one in a junk drawer.

Supplies:

- light switch

Gather your group in a circle (or several circles depending on the size of your group). Give someone the light switch (or choose to go first yourself) and ask these questions: What is something that I wish I could switch off in my life, and what is something I wish I could switch on? For each answer have participants actually flip the switch in their hand before passing it on. Pay attention to the responses and ask further questions based on their responses.

Reflect

You know that feeling you get when a package arrives in the mail, especially when you weren't expecting a package? Make an effort to think about God that way this week. God is this wonderful surprise, this unexpected present that can lift your day. Too often we treat God as if God were a “bill.” Faith is not an obligation; faith is a gift. Open yourself up to this sending and receiving, signing, opening, enjoying God.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The parables of Jesus are not just children's stories. There is so much to the scriptures that can never make it as a coloring page. This Exploration reaches out to young adults and asks, "You want to hear what else David did besides kill the giant? Do you want to know how to look at this story you've heard a thousand times and see it from a brand new angle?" The scriptures for this age group become a place to dig for treasure; this Exploration is the shovel.

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

These activities are here to let you work on your serious face. Yes, they are lighthearted and mostly fun, but make sure the participants see your passion. Let them see your faith, your doubts, your struggles, and your belief in the miraculous. Help them understand that what they get out of the process is exactly what they are willing to put into it. Sounds like life, doesn't it?

Prayer: God, open the road so we can explore. Let us toss the map and unplug the GPS. Let us go where the wind takes us. Be that wind, God. Breathe and let us follow the breeze. Give us the chance to see all things new. We are ready to go. 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 Where in the World (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Go online and choose nine or ten destinations such as a faraway city, the pastor's house, a local pizza parlor, and so on. Find and print out the directions from a site such as Google Maps or MapQuest. Be sure to delete the destination.

Supplies:

- printed directions to various destinations
- poster: "Sisters in the Wind" by Ethan Hubbard, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Hang the directions on the wall and see if participants can guess where the directions would take them. Use this to launch a discussion on "Where are you going? How do you know? How will you know when you get there? What's the hardest part about leaving? Where/how might God be with you on your journey?"

Show the poster to the group. What might be calling the girls in this image? Where might they be drawn? Imagine you are one of the children. What are you hearing? What is calling/leading you? Now become the other child, and ask yourself the same questions.

2 Act Like Christ

Leader preparation: Prior to the meeting you will need to draw a picture of Jesus' head, just a simple picture of Jesus' smiling face. You need not be an artist or craft wizard; a quick search on the Internet can produce an example you can download or copy. Use a full sheet. Keep it hidden for the first part of the activity. Also, use poster board or butcher paper and cut out a full figure of a human being. Do not decorate. Hang this on the wall.

Supplies:

- picture of Jesus' head
- full figure of a human being cut from poster board, butcher paper, or newsprint

Gather the group together and let them see the paper figure. Ask them to consider how they best connect with God. If they feel they are good listeners or that they feel God's presence when they are listening to music, have those individuals write their names on the paper figure's ear. If they feel they best connect with God's presence when they are working a mission project, they might choose to write their names on the hands. Got the idea? When everyone has written her or his name on the paper figure, bring out the Jesus head and tape it in place. Talk to your group about how we are God's presence here on earth and that it is through being like Jesus that we connect ourselves to our Creator.

3 Guides

Leader preparation: You will need to do some Internet research and printing. Locate maps of some tourist attractions. Select a few from your nearest park, or download maps of national parks at <http://www.tinyurl.com/yz4mtwa>. You can also get a map of each of the Disney parks at <http://www.tinyurl.com/45v8t3>.

Supplies:

- maps of tourist attractions

Look at the maps. Study the icons on the park maps. What do they do? What do they tell us? How do they communicate? Which one is the most important on the map you are reading? Now create five or more new icons for a map that is called “[your name]’s Life.” What areas do you not want tourists to miss? What icons have you not explored yet? Does the cross or some other religious symbol belong in your park? Where? Where do your icons lead people?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Honor (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens
- Bibles

Divide your group into pairs and give each pair paper and pens. Have them walk around the church building for about 15 minutes and write the answer to this question: Whom or what do we honor? There can be many answers to this. Does your church have one of those “sacred” rooms that no one can go to? Does your church hang pictures of previous pastors? Is there a cross at the front of the church? Is there a Bible on the altar? Is there dust on the hymnals? After some exploration, gather up your group and discuss your answers.

Read Philippians 2:6–11. How might your church honor Christ? How do you share the same mind and attitude of Christ? How do the items adorning your church building help to honor Christ? How might they dishonor Christ?



5 Joyful Score

Leader preparation: Get supplies. Get a copy of the poster Joyful Dance by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>.

Supplies:

- pens
- paper
- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- Bibles

Invite everyone to look at the poster of the people dancing. Ask them to write down, very quickly, ten to fifteen things that make them “joyful.” Don’t allow them to overthink or ponder too much. Just write down as many things as they can as quickly as they can. Invite participants to read their own personal lists out loud, if they wish. If their “joy” appears on anyone else’s list they score one point for themselves and one point for each person with a matching list item.

Afterward, read Philippians 2:1–13. Ask how easy it was to agree with one another on things that make us joyful? Is any of it worth arguing over if we disagree? Does it seem like there is way too much arguing on TV these days? How do we all “score” when we agree with one another?

Be It Ever So Humble

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers

The Bible focus passage Mark 9:30–37 includes one of those verses that can just slip by if you aren’t paying attention. Verse 33 (in *The Message* translation) says “When he was safe at home.” (Your translation may vary slightly.) Where do you think Jesus was living? Did he have his own place? It would not have been unusual at that time to have several members of the extended family living under one roof. As a group (or divide into smaller groups if your group is large), design and draw Jesus’ house. They can draw Jesus’ house then, or imagine what his place would look like now. What furniture would he need? How much space should there be? Would he have a swinging bachelor pad or an apartment in the worst part of town?

Does “home” equate with “safe” to you? How many homes have you had? What makes you feel safe, generally? How important is safety? What risks do you take in your life?

Sending & Serving Activities

Empty (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Some advanced communication with the person in charge of church maintenance is in order.

Supplies:

- garbage bags
- Bibles

You can vary this part of the activity depending on the size of your group. Divide your group into pairs and send them into the church building to collect trash from every room and corner. Gather around the dumpster or wherever your church disposes of refuse. Say something like: We are going to learn a new word: “kenosis.” It means “to empty.” In fact, Philippians 2:1–13 is often referred to as “the emptying.” Start with verse 8 and read the passage in reverse order. Read verses 8–6. What did Jesus do? Read verse 5. How is this motivation for us? Read 4–1. What can we do to empty ourselves? Dispose of the trash that was collected. Ask: What from your life would you add to this, to empty from your life?

8 Nit-Pickers

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- M&M candies

Gather your group together and give everyone a handful of M&Ms. Adjust this according to the size of your group. Make sure everyone has a small number of M&M's in front of them. Tell them they may not eat the candy. On the word "go" everyone is to attempt to peel the candy shell from an M&M. (This is incredibly difficult.) Declare someone to be the winner, and then allow them all to eat. Talk with the group about the ways we get to know Jesus. Who are the nitpickers in Jesus' time, the ones who are fastidious, like someone who might try to peel their M&Ms? What are some ways today that we allow nit-picking to get in front of our ability to simply embrace Christ? (Be sure to share M&Ms during your conversation!)

9 And the Winner Is . . .

Leader preparation: You'll need to do some brief Internet research, as this activity will change year to year.

Supplies:

- paper
- pencils

Give everyone a sheet of paper and invite them to number their papers down the side from 1 to 10. Ask the following questions. (Don't give a lot of time between questions.)

1. Who won the Super Bowl last year?
2. Who won the Indianapolis 500 last year?
3. Who won an Oscar for best actress last year?
4. Who won an Oscar for best movie last year?
5. Who won video of the year at the MTV awards last year?
6. Who got you through a hard test last year?
7. What was the name of your driving instructor?
8. Name one person who was helped by the missions of our church.
9. What was your favorite song sung in church last year?
10. (Think of a similar question specific to your church or community.)

Reflect

You have to want this bad. This whole following-the-carpenter bit is not easy. Those who make it look easy—the ones who say it's all happy-happy-joy-joy—are either lying or selling something. Faith takes work. More importantly, faith takes group work. Don't be afraid to reach out to others when you feel like you are running dry. Don't ignore the hand that's reaching out to you. Hold hands. Stay together. We're all part of the same team.

You may wish you were like [favorite movie star], but what has he or she done for you lately? Who is the greatest "servant" that you know personally? Of that greatest servant and the movie star, which seems more fulfilled?

Read Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. What do these verses say about being first or being number one? You may not remember Oscar winners, but you will remember the people who "served" you. You remember the people that you "serve." Living in this kind of "service life" is living the scriptures. Have you ever heard of the *Living Bible* or the *New Living Translation* of the Bible? What if the "living" part of both of those titles refers to you?

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Becoming a disciple begs the question “of what?” Young adults are experiencing freedom like they never had before. The choices of who to follow, what to follow, how closely to follow are all up for debate. This Exploration is meant to be both a gentle push and sometimes, perhaps, a loving dope slap to those who have an amazing array of opportunities in front of them and are waiting to take the first step.

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

Leader Preparation

Accept that, by your very presence in these activities, you are now part of something bigger than yourself. Let your learners know this too. You are plugging in. You are tuning your guitar. All of these activities and readings . . . these are all about preparing for something wonderful.

Prayer: *God, I am ready. I am ready to go where I am sent, say what you want me to say, hear what you want me to hear. I am ready. Open my learners' hearts so they can find answers or at least appreciate the questions. We are one large band, the speakers are humming, and when you say "play" . . . we will play. 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 Motherfather! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

Write down all the words you can think of that mean mother or father. When do you use these? Does your choice of word depend on the situation? Why? Give an example. Which one is closest to how you see God and why? Do you think God words should be gender-neutral? Would a person who was abused by his or her father want to see God as father?

No image will teach us all there is to know about God. The Bible includes multiple images for God, such as: light, rock, gardener, architect, cloud, water, fire, potter, shepherd, judge, king. It is way too limiting to think of God only as Father, or even as Mother. In the Bible, a shepherd tending sheep may see God as a great shepherd. A desert dweller sees God as a huge rock where one can take refuge from the blazing sun. What images would you choose to mean "God"? How do you perceive God in your life? Write a prayer (just a few lines) and address God with your choice of words.

2 This Way, Please

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- sticker paper (from local office supply or craft store), or regular paper and scotch tape
- markers

Distribute the paper and provide markers of all colors to participants. Tell them they are going to make a tour guide badge for the museum of their own lives. They can design the logo and put their own name on the badge. Stick the badge to their shirt front. Everyone should have a chance to stand up in front of the group and give the "welcome speech" to tourists. The others are invited to ask questions of their guide. Here are a few questions to get things going:

- What is the most important artifact in the museum?
- What happens when I push that button?
- Why is this section roped off to the public?

3 Nice

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

You are going to make three top ten lists. (Note: Do not give the list titles all at once.) First, make a top ten list of the things that you would like someone do for you. Second, make a top ten list of the nicest things you have ever done for someone else. Finally, make a top ten list of things you could do for someone that you have never met and probably never will.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Getting Air (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- large sheets of poster board, newsprint, or butcher paper
- tape
- markers
- Bible

It's time to be as silly, serious, or as creative as you can be. Read Revelation 7:9–17 and try to picture the scene as if it were the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Use the large sheets of paper and design a float or giant Macy's-type balloon that will be in heaven's parade.

5 Wavy (palm branches) Gravy

Leader preparation: You will need some advanced communication with your group. You will also need to gather supplies and ensure a safe place to use them. Let participants know in advance that they will be tie-dyeing in reverse. Tell them to wear old clothes and to bring a dark t-shirt.

Supplies:

- bleach (in empty, clearly marked water bottles with squirt tops)
- a bucket of water or a nearby hose
- plastic gloves
- dark t-shirts
- rubber bands

Set up this activity outside if possible, preferably near a water source. Give everyone some time to twist or rubber band their t-shirts and then (wearing gloves) squirt bleach into the folds of the fabric. Squeeze tightly to insure saturation. Then immediately wash with water. (If left on its own the bleach will likely eat a hole in the fabric.) Explain that this is a concrete example of something a little more metaphorical. Read Revelation 7:9–17 and discuss what they think the author meant by "white robes washed in the blood of the lamb." Why do some people make the idea of being washed in the blood so central to their faith? How important is that to you?

6 Over My Head

Leader preparation: Find out if someone plays guitar or piano in your group and give them the music ahead of time. You can read the lyrics at

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

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

Supplies:

- copies of the song “Over My Head” (traditional African American), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> and <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a>

Take a look at the song “Over My Head.” Just read the words first. Do you think this is a happy song or a sad one? Over my head could mean several things: covered and protected, suffocating, or confusing. Which one strikes you the most? With which verse do you identify? Try writing your own verse based on something you are going through right now. Invite a volunteer to sing the song as if he or she were leading Vacation Bible School. Ask someone to sing the song as if he or she were on death row. Have you ever questioned if there was “a God somewhere”? What proves it for you?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Regifting (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens
- a wrapped gift box

Prior to the meeting, wrap a box in the prettiest wrapping paper you can find. Don't forget the bow. Place this somewhere obvious in the room. Don't mention it out loud, and don't let anyone touch it. Distribute pens and paper and invite the group to make a list of all the things that could be in the box. What things could actually fit? What sort of thing might the leader actually wrap up? Open the box and show them that it's empty. Then have a discussion about gifts that are intangible.

- What was the best gift (real) that you have ever received? Who gave it to you? What was the occasion?
- What was the one gift you always wanted for Christmas, but never received?
- Do you like to give gifts, or is it more of an obligation to you?
- What intangible gifts have you received from Mom and Dad? (eye color? blood type? work ethic? morals?)
- If God is the ultimate parent, what gifts have we received from God?
- Let's say you spend hours hunting for the perfect teddy bear to give to your nephew. When it's unwrapped his mother says, “Say thank you” and the child parrots back a “Thaaaaaank youuuuu.” Would you feel thanked? Now imagine you peep in at the child later that night and you see him in bed whispering secrets to the bear and giggling. Finally, he hugs and kisses the bear and snuggles down to sleep. Now do you feel thanked? What's the difference? How is this like the way we thank God? Do you think God feels thanked?

Using paper and pen, make a list of five “gifts” that God has given just to you. Now choose one of those gifts and write how you can use it this week to show God how thankful you are.

8 Wiping Away Tears (and other things)

Leader preparation: Gather some boxes of facial tissue. Alternatively, invite group members to bring some. You might also want to discuss this activity with a caring team or ministry in your church and determine how best to coordinate giving the tissues to folks in need.

Supplies:

- boxes of facial tissue
- markers

Bring as many boxes of facial tissue as you can. Invite group members to write Revelation 7:17 on the side of each box, and to decorate the boxes with markers. Discuss how you might distribute these to people who are hurting, lonely, wondering, and so on.

9 The Linguistic Raptor

Leader preparation: Arrange for Internet access (optional).

Supplies:

- thesaurus
- paper
- pens
- Internet access (optional)

Using an online or book thesaurus, look up the words found in Revelation 7:12. These may vary slightly depending on your translation, but should be words along the lines of: wisdom, power, glory, thanks, honor, strength, and praise. Make a list of the words you find in the thesaurus; you may begin to see some words overlap each other. Repeat this with all the words until you have one or two that seem to jump out at you. Make a new list of ten ways you can incorporate that final word into your daily living this week.

Reflect

When Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as “a companion,” there was no time limit on the visit. The first few sentences of the creation story tell us about the presence of the Holy Spirit. In these gatherings, no matter what age, open yourself up to the presence of the Spirit. Don’t get so caught up in the details that you miss an opportunity. Treat these lessons like you are surfing. Be ready to take an entirely different tactic if the wave breaks in a new direction.

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Younger adults see “connection” as part of identity. With whom am I connected, at this moment, twenty-four hours a day? Our job as leaders of this age group is to create “connection” using history, ritual, ceremony. We make our traditions the tools of connectivity to something larger than ourselves: our families, our church, and our Creator.

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

Focus on your own state of mind as you lead these activities. You cannot be mentally clenched. Think of leading as driving down by the beach with the windows open. Think of sharing these ideas as reaching the top of a long mountain hike. These are more invitations than activities; you are inviting the learners to come with you.

Prayer: *God, let us explore. Take our faces out of the maps, and put our eyes on the horizon. Let us be open to the wind and the stars, and take these activities where you want them to go. Amen.*

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 A Drop in the Bucket (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies. You will need to hold this activity in the kitchen or outside.

Supplies:

- two buckets or large containers, one filled with water
- an eyedropper, or a very small measuring spoon

Gather your group around the two buckets. Explain that they are to take the smallest drop they can from the full bucket to the empty bucket. Between each drop tell them “a million years pass, and then . . .” When everyone has dropped water into the empty bucket ask how long it would take to empty the full bucket, especially with a million years between drops. Explain that even this is no more than a blink of an eye to God. Compared to eternity our lives are not even a blip. This profound joy is what we will feel forever and ever in the truest sense of those words.

2 And I’m Feelin’ Good

Leader preparation: Get supplies. If possible, play a recording of the song “I’m Feelin’ Good,” written by Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse. There are multiple recordings of this wonderful song. The easiest to find is probably on Michael Buble’s disc *It’s Time*. One of the best versions ever is by Nina Simone, <http://www.tinyurl.com/y8uo5j9>.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers
- sticker paper, easily found at your local office supply store or just about any craft store (optional)
- song: “I’m Feelin’ Good,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/y8uo5j9>.

Draw a circle. In the circle create a logo or symbol for one of the worst days you have ever had. Stick this symbol to your mirror or put it in your wallet—someplace where you will see it every day. Whenever you look at this symbol make a conscious effort to say to yourself, “And I’m still here.” Say it to your reflection if possible.

Emphasize to the learners that their worst day did not kill them. They are still here, still breathing, still learning, still loving. Read both focus scripture passages: Isaiah 11:1–10 and Song of Solomon 2:8–13. Listen to the song “I’m Feelin’ Good.” How can we relate these passages to the lyrics of the song?”

How can we recognize the lyrics as prayer? (Option: If you have a gifted, or even not so gifted, singer in your group, ask her or him to take on the scripture passages and sing them as if she or he were Nina Simone. You may first have to explain who Nina Simone is!)

3 Pour

Leader preparation: Get supplies. If a cement block is unavailable, use a sponge that has been dipped in water and then allowed to dry completely. (Option: You can also take your group outside and use a squirt gun for this activity.)

Supplies:

- Bible
- water
- a cement block

Bring in the water in a cup and gather around the cement block. Pour the water on the block and ask the learners to explain how the water penetrates the block. Ask them to imagine how a flood works (some may have firsthand knowledge). Is there any part of the stone that would remain dry if we dropped it in a pool? Is there any situation in which water would not win if there was enough of it? Read Isaiah 11:9. Why do you think the author chose water for this analogy, and not fire? How can we get God’s love and wisdom into all the little cracks in our world?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Timelines (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- pens
- paper
- Bible

Draw a line from one end of your paper to the other. On the left side write the day you were born. On the right side write today’s date. Create a timeline by year or month between the two dates. Below the line write the five to ten worst moments in your life. The worse the moment, the lower the mark. Go back and repeat the process for the five to ten best moments in your life.

Look at your timeline and circle the moments where it seems you grew the most or became a stronger person. Some people may not find comfort in this verse, do you? Are you one of those people who must have a challenge or conflict in order to be happy? Would you actually be disappointed if heaven had not challenge or conflict? Take a look at Isaiah 11:1–10. Are you happy when all things are as they should be? Do you enjoy the journey or the destination? Do you think Christians, in general, appreciate the top of the hill if they didn’t have the long hard climb to get there?

5 Faces

Leader preparation: Use an Internet site such as <http://www.flickr.com> to download and print (or make a slide show) of 25-50 faces.

Supplies: None

- Bible—preferably several, in different translations
- photos of faces
- computer (and possibly) projector and screen if you made a slide show

Show the faces to your group and ask them to tell very quickly as much as they can about the person in the photo. Ask how they think others would judge them if they had only a brief glimpse of their face to go by. Take a close look at Isaiah 11:1–10. Read it in a couple of different translations. How does God see us? How could this make some people uncomfortable? Have you ever been judged by someone who did not know you?

6 Dear _____

Leader preparation: In preparation for this session, communicate with the participants and ask them to bring an early photo of themselves, portraying them as young as possible.

Supplies:

- photos of the participants when they were children
- pens
- paper

Hang the participants’ photos on the wall and talk about the children in the pictures. What was going on in their lives when this was taken? What did that kid want to be when she or he graduated? Hand out paper and pens and ask each participant to write a letter to the child in the picture. If they are comfortable doing so, they can share their letter with the group when all are done.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Lost? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies. Before the meeting try and think of some ways you have felt “lost” in your life. Think about what it feels like to be in the middle of a crowd and still feel disconnected and lonely. Many of your group members may be feeling this way all the time. On a macro level this activity is about praying for those who have lost their way in the world, and on a micro level it’s about praying for ourselves and one another when we feel we have “lost our way in the world.”

Supplies:

- map of your community, campus, county, city, state, country, world (these could be easily downloaded from the Internet)
- candles
- pens
- paper
- quiet meditative music (optional)

Lay out the maps in a circle large enough that the group members can stand in it. Give each one a candle. Light the candles and have the participants begin walking in a circle. Carefully tilt the candles so drops of wax drip onto the maps. You can play a quiet meditative piece of music here. After a few “laps” around the circle, blow out the candles and collect the maps. Divide your group into teams, and give each team a map. Have them write a prayer or blessing for the people beneath the wax drops. To spark conversation and wondering about the people, ask questions such as: Where might they be going? What can you see (as God does) that they cannot? What is it like to lose your “sense of direction”? What guides you when you are “lost”?

8 Phone Book

Leader preparation: You will need to download or purchase a recording of pretty much any Barry White song. You can get a sixty-second clip at amazon.com, <http://www.tinyurl.com/247zvyf>, or YouTube, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bc6ugy>. (Note: This activity deals with “young love,” and the focus passage is from Song of Solomon. It’s not a “sex ed” class, but one about being young and alive.)

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Barry White recording

It has been said that Barry White could read the phone book and make it sound sexy. Play some Barry White music. Ask for volunteers to read Song of Solomon 2:8–13 in their most “Barry White–like” voice. Talk about how the Song of Solomon has been treated over the centuries. Some scholars claim it was a representation of God’s love for the church. (Given the sexual nature of parts of the book, this seems unlikely.)

What does the phrase “Youth is wasted on the young” mean? Do you think a married couple in their eighties still feel the same passion they did when they were twenty?

How is it possible that Christians have such an “uptight” reputation, and yet this is part of our mostly sacred and holy book? Song of Solomon is a celebration of love and life. It is a dialogue between two people who can’t seem to keep their hands off each other. Try to define “passion” without speaking about sex. How do we live passionately?



9 I’m a Pew

Leader preparation: Get supplies. If you have not done so already, learn some facts about your church building. When was it built? How many pastors have there been? How many rooms are there? How about memorial plaques? You and your group are going to make correlations between the physical church and the “church,” as in the congregation at large.

Supplies:

- pen
- paper
- “I’m a Pew,” Attachment: Activity 9

Reflect

Have you grown up in church? Are you one of those people who knows every nook and cranny of that building? Are you new to all this? Is this your first time teaching? What’s amazing about this kind of service is that people just like you were doing this long before Columbus set sail and people just like you will be doing this long after your grandchildren’s grandchildren have shuffled off this mortal coil. This is bigger than you can imagine. Welcome.

Send the group into the building as individuals. Invite them to uncover some of the same facts as you have learned. This is not a relay race or a scavenger hunt, but a quiet and meditative activity. After they have studied the building for ten or fifteen minutes, instruct them to find a quiet place and answer the questions on “I’m a Pew,” Attachment: Activity 9, filling in the blanks with parts of the church building.

When finished, gather the group in a spot where you would not normally meet (the roof, the furnace room, the nursery) and share answers to the questions.

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Attachment: Activity 9

I'm a Pew

After you have looked around your church building, find a quiet place and complete the following sentences.

Example: *Right now my relationship with God is like the balcony because for me it's all about the view.*

- The part of the building that just seems to represent prayer for me is . . .
- Right now my relationship with God is like . . .
- The people who are like . . . annoy me because . . .
- The people who are like . . . inspire me because . . .
- The room in the building that I most identify with is the . . . because . . .
- This congregation needs more . . . and fewer . . .
- As I look at my life outside of the church, I really think I could use a . . . because . . .

Add questions of your own that are specific to your church building.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Young adults who have spent years seeking and searching for ways they can connect with the greater cause are finding themselves with many open doors. This Exploration is created to help provide some guidance in choosing a door, or at the very least, deciding what to take with them on the journey.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Sometimes you can't put your toe in the shallow end to test the waters; sometimes you just have to cannonball off the high dive. Go all out on these activities. Trust your abilities and add as much to them as you feel like. Be overwhelming with your group. We're not looking for the gentle breeze blowing through their hair . . . be a hurricane.

Prayer: God, you are present in Jesus the Christ, and Jesus the Christ is present in us. Therefore, you are here because we are here. We are your hands, feet, eyes, ears, and heart. Help us to show you to the world. 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.



1 Best Picture (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

Invite the group to sit in a circle. Take turns going around the circle. Each person, in turn, says the title of a movie, but replaces one of the words in the title with the word "Jesus." Some titles may seem a stretch to others; however, try to make them work. For example, "Jesus with the Wind" may not make sense at first glance. However, if you think of "wind" as a euphemism for God's Spirit, it certainly does work. After everyone has named a film, talk about what some of them might be like. Next, talk about various portrayals of Christ in the movies or television. Which have been your favorites? Which have been lame?



2 "Allerheiligen"

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the poster "Allerheiligen" (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>.

Supplies

- poster: "Allerheiligen" (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- Bibles

Provide copies of the painting or hang one poster where everyone can see it. Mentally divide the painting into equal quarters with a cross in the middle of the picture. (Note: if you print out copies for each participant, you can actually cut the picture.) Look at each quarter individually. Select a verse or phrase from either of the two scripture passages (John 12:20–36 or Luke 1:39–56) that fits that section of the piece. Do this individually or in pairs. Compare thoughts afterward. In German the word *allerheiligen* means "all saints." Does this change the way you view the picture?

3 Saber Rattling

Leader preparation: You will need to rent or download the movie *Star Wars Episode 4: A New Hope*.

Supplies:

- DVD or download of *Star Wars*. (The clip in question is available on YouTube: <http://www.tinyurl.com/66vxv7>)

Show the clip from the end of the original *Star Wars* movie where Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader are fighting. Kenobi says "If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than you can possibly imagine." Can you think of something that was "struck down" and then came back with a vengeance? In your own life, what have you seen "end" only to have it turn only to be the beginning?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Hymns and Hers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- index cards
- pens
- hymnals (optional)

Off the top of your head, how many Christmas hymns can you name? Make a list. How many of these can you connect to Luke 1:39–56? How many can you connect to John 12:20–36 (this is harder)? You might provide hymnals so participants can look up Christmas hymns and review the verses. Choose a line or phrase from one of the hymns and write it on an index card. Keep that card in your wallet or purse this week. Or tape it to your mirror so you see it when you get ready in the morning. Talk next week about how many times you thought of that verse because of something that happened during your day.

5 A Place for My Stuff

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

Write down (in a few words or less) one of your long-time goals or dreams. Next, write a list of the top ten most prized possessions you own. Check off all the things you would be willing to simply give up if it got you, even a little, closer to that dream.

Read John 12:20–36. Do you think Jesus wants us to be willing to die? What purpose would that serve? What if giving up our lives means we have to be willing to give up on being selfish or even to take what we have been given by God and use it for God’s purposes? What did Mary (Jesus’ mother) “give up”? What did Mary Magdalene sacrifice? What did the other disciples put aside in order to follow Jesus?

6 Deluge

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

Give your group three minutes to write down every possible alternative they can think of to the word “rain.” Afterward, mention that in the Middle East, during Jesus’ time, there was no word for “bad rain.” Pair up, compare lists, and create one long list. Now gather as a group and create another long list of words (both good and bad) for rain. Now examine the list and choose one word that best describes your relationship with God at this moment.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Awards (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- sticker paper (from any office or craft store), or regular paper and tape
- markers

Read Luke 1:39–56. Use the markers and sticky paper to create a medal of honor, and cut it out. Make sure that somewhere on the medal there is a target. Talk about how Mary was not a princess or a famous theologian; she was not a scientist or a singer—she was a girl in a small town, just like any other girl in any small town. God chose this perfectly ordinary young woman to do something extraordinary. Give your medal to someone in your life who is perfectly ordinary, yet has done something wonderful for you. Tell them you will be praying that God continues to use them in amazing ways.

8 Dear Mom

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- blank postcards
- pens

Imagine that you have no familiarity with the Christian faith whatsoever. Imagine that somehow we as a civilization have managed to make it this far on our own. Imagine that after you graduated from college you toured far-off countries for a year. Today, you saw a preacher. He was speaking outdoors and huge crowds were coming to see him. Read John 12:20–36 and put yourself in the shoes of someone in the crowd. Write a letter home about what you experienced. Invite the group to share their letters if they wish.

9 Symbols

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pens
- permanent markers

Reflect

Here is a thought from Rev. Run (formerly of the rap group Run DMC): “My plumber is a Christian, but he’s not going to use the Bible to fix my sink.” For all our praise and worship we have to remember that God gave us two hands. If we are Christ’s presence here on earth, then we have the hands of Jesus, and perhaps we don’t have to ask what Jesus would do with them. Feed. Help. Reassure. Heal. Take time this week to be the hands of Christ. Help heal someone, feed someone, hold someone’s hand when he or she is lonely, write a letter of reassurance to someone. Do something with your hands besides folding them in prayer.

The two most common symbols of our faith are the cross and the fish. What if these did not exist? What if this whole Christianity thing was just beginning? Imagine you have been asked to create a symbol for this new faith. All you have been given is the text from Luke 1:39–56. Create a symbol for this new faith. (Remember, the beauty of the cross and the fish is their simplicity—both of them are accomplished in just two lines.) Write the new symbol on your book bag, your shoe, jeans, or some other place where it will be displayed prominently. Don’t be afraid to talk about it when people ask.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

While for older youth the future may be out “there” somewhere, young adults see the future as being right here. The question becomes: Is it a door or a waterfall? Some plan for the future, and some have it thrust upon them. This Exploration helps bring some focus, some preparation for what is to come.

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:

Mark 16:1–8

Psalms 112

Leader Preparation

Think about the number of doors that you open or are opened for you in a given week. Now think about that within a spiritual context. God is opening doors to the members of your group—including you—all the time. The activities are opening doors. Your voice, your actions, your conversation should all be about the invitation to come through. Remember Jesus did not sit in the boat and say “Go.” Jesus stood out on the water and said “Come.”

Prayer: God, let these activities and the time I’m putting into this be like a warm hand wiping the fog away from a window on a cool morning. Let me make all this just a little clearer for this energetic group so they can get even a small idea of where to go next. 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 Song (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pens

Talk to your group about how often the psalms can be misunderstood. We may think of them as something closer to Shakespeare’s sonnets rather than song lyrics. We might picture David as a ruler on a throne writing fluffy poetry. Give your group a mental picture of David as the blind blues player in a smokey New Orleans bar, or as the lead singer in an Emo band. Have them rewrite Psalm 112 as if it were one of these types of music.

2 Lather; Rinse; Repeat

Leader preparation: You will need to bring some products, or raid the janitor’s closet and kitchen (you’ll need ten to twenty products). Make a list, writing down one of the instructions from the “how to use” section of each label.

Supplies:

- products with “how to use” instructions on the label
- pens
- paper
- some silly prizes (optional)
- Bibles

Distribute the pens and paper. Tell the group this is a quiz. Read an instruction from the list you made and ask the group members to identify the product from which they think the instruction came. Afterward, read the correct answers (and offer a prize to the winners if you’d like). Talk about how important, or unimportant, these instructions are. Why do we have warning labels like “Do not use near open flame” or “Do not open this door during flight”? Have you ever noticed items that say, on the bottom of the package, “Do not turn over”?

Read Psalm 112. Give special emphasis to verse 1. How do we “take delight” in God’s commands? How do we ignore them? What commands from the scriptures do you question? Are there some in which you take no delight whatsoever? Imagine that this psalm was written specifically for you, not to a group of people who lived long ago, but to you personally. Share your thoughts on what it means.

3 You Win

Leader preparation: Check your church school supply closet for some board games, or do an Internet research and print out the “how to win” instructions on various board games.

Supplies:

- instructions from various board games
- Bibles

Playing and Living Joyfully

- 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.

Read the instructions aloud and see if anyone can guess the game these instructions came from. Separate your group into pairs or trios. Using the suggested scripture passage (either Mark 16:1–8 or Psalm 112), ask the group to create a “how to win the game of life” set of instructions. Gather together again and share these aloud.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Stoned (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- markers
- index cards
- Bibles

Have each participant draw a giant stone on an index card. Give them a few minutes to think of one thing that stands between them and any major life goal. (They should be able to describe that obstacle in one word.) Write that word on the stone. Take turns reading aloud Mark 16:1–8 and inserting their word in place of the word stone.

5 Ran Off with the Spoon

Leader preparation: Print out a list of the “last lines” of well known nursery rhymes.

Examples:

- The dish ran away with the spoon. (“Hey Diddle Diddle”)
- One for the little boy who lives down the lane. (“Baa Baa Black Sheep”)
- The lamb was sure to go. (“Mary Had a Little Lamb”)
- Went up the spout again. (“Eensy Weensy Spider”)

Supplies:

- list of last lines
- Bible

Divide your group into teams and read aloud the “last lines.” The first team to identify the nursery rhyme gets one point.

Have someone in the group read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Invite someone else to read verses 9 and 10. Explain to the group that verses 9–10 do not appear in most of the best and oldest Greek manuscripts of this gospel. Talk with the group about why they think an early “Bible committee” felt the need to add verses 9 and 10. Is this like having the wise men show up at the stable when the scriptures tell us it was years later? What if every Gospel simply ended with the empty tomb? How would that affect your personal faith? How would that affect Christianity as we know it?

6 Would You Rather

Leader preparation: Create a list of “would you rather” questions based on fears.

Examples:

- Would you rather speak in front of your church or ride a roller coaster with no lap-bar?
- Would you rather hold a snake or allow a spider to crawl around on your head?
- Would you rather sit completely alone in the dark for 24 hours or jump out of an airplane?
- Would you rather correct the professor in the middle of a lecture or break wind loudly in the middle of church?
- Would you rather walk barefoot and blindfolded across a room full of mousetraps or get pulled over for speeding?

(Continue with your own list based on the group members or your community.)

Supplies:

- “would you rather” list
- Bible

Ask the questions from your list. Note: depending on the size of your group you can print out the list and cut it into strips. Put the questions into a bowl, and let participants draw them out randomly.

Read Mark 16:1 –8 and Psalm 112. Both of the scriptures have a lot to do with fear and strength. Many of the questions are just “fluff” questions, but what truly frightens you? Where does your strength come from? What part of being a Christian scares you? How much is fear a part of faith? Should it be?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 A-cross-tics (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Get supplies.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens

There are a number of psalms in the Bible that are written as acrostics. (Each verse begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.) Some translations—such as the *New Jerusalem Bible*—preserve the acrostic form in English. If you have access to such a version, show it to the group. Psalms 25, 111, 112, and 145 are examples.

Tell your group they are to choose ten consecutive letters of the English alphabet starting with any letter they want, and write the letters vertically on their paper. For each letter choose one thing they can do this week to help someone feel less afraid about life and faith.

8 Rolling Stones

Leader preparation: Obtain blank postcards from a local office supply store, or cut up poster board into postcard-sized pieces.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- postcards
- markers
- a list of your church's homebound or hospitalized members and friends

Invite the group to draw pictures of the empty tomb on the postcard. Copy Mark 16:4 onto every card. Sign these from the group and send them to the members on the list.

9 But the Earth and Sky

Leader preparation: You will need a variety of snack foods that you can purchase at your local store, or simply take your group into the church pantry or food bank.

Supplies:

- food packages that have an expiration date
- Bibles

Bring out the food items and place them in the center of the table or discussion circle. Play a guessing game to see if participants can guess the expiration or sell by date on the package. When you played the game with all the available food, ask for expiration dates of other things, such as: humans, buildings, DVD's, mountains, slang expressions, fashion.

Read Psalm 112. Ask questions such as: What would happen if you knew your own expiration date? What traditions or expressions have been around in your family for years? What makes some things last? What lasts forever according to the psalmist? What counts for nothing in the end?

Reflect

Give yourself some time to breathe. You are doing good things. Think about Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, ministers, and others. You are joining their ranks. You are a fisher of people. Allow yourself to appreciate the view from the boat. May God bless you for what you are doing.