

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

We are people of the Story. Scripture provides the foundation of our faith and leads us to deeper understanding and discipleship. When we delve deeply into a text, we discover the story behind the story, occasionally a story of intrigue, sometimes scandal, and most often of justice in the working.

Not all the stories are pleasant or celebratory. Many are disheartening and painful, giving each individual an opportunity to discover how faith works, even in adversity, to reveal the holiness of the human story. This Exploration is meant to help the participants journey into the stories of our faith as they also explore their own personal stories.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in encountering scripture in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice encountering the scripture in a safe environment so that when venturing out in the world there will be greater comfort with the story of faith as lived in one's life. The activities for the workplace and community are meant to open you up to experiencing the stories of others and being comfortable sharing your own story of faith.



About this Exploration

Scripture tells the story of God’s relationship with human beings. It is a gift of God for the people of God. Scripture is accessible to all—those who have been reading the Bible for years and those opening it for the first time. Wherever we are on life’s journey, the Bible can connect with our experience. We encounter scripture as an ancient text, but also one that is living, breathing, and alive to contemporary pilgrims. It comforts and challenges, heals and holds accountable. Scripture expands worldviews and limits selfishness, offers forgiveness and embraces those who are on the margins. As we engage with scripture, we discover God and we discover a new world through ancient words. We join with others, the great diversity of God’s people, to ask questions, connect with the text, pray, and discern together God’s continuing word for us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Proverbs 2:1–8
John 21:1–20

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Bible Stories Aren’t Just for Church

Supplies:

- Bible

Many families have a difficult time getting everyone together for dinner. Plan a meal with your family and ask everyone to clear their calendars for that meal. While eating dinner go around the table and ask each family member to talk about one highlight of his or her day. Once everyone has shared, ask everyone about one low point of their day. Read together John 21:1–8. Talk about what it might have been like for the disciples to have caught no fish. Then think how they must have felt when they caught more than they could possibly handle. Thinking about the low points of the day, what might have happened in those times if folks had “put their nets on the other side of the boat”? In other words, what might have happened if they had approached the situation differently? Brainstorm lots of different possibilities, even if they seem ridiculous. God often speaks to us in the absurd. Encountering scripture is finding ways that the scripture informs the decisions we make in everyday life. Look at the text, and look at the stories of your lives. What do you have in common? Where are the places that scripture informs your life? The next time you encounter a difficult situation come back to this text and think about what it might mean for you to cast your net on the other side of the boat.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 The Stories of our Faith

Supplies: None

This activity will work best with multiple generations present if possible. Gather together as a family and talk about what you know about your family’s story. Are they native to this country, or did someone immigrate to this place? How much do you know about your ancestors? What do you know about particular stories that have been told over the years about one person or another? What was the faith tradition of those who immigrated? Does your family still follow that same



tradition, or have you found new ways of expressing your faith? Think about a family story from the Bible with which you are at least a little familiar. Did those of later generations practice the faith similarly or differently from their ancestors? Talk about how we keep our faith alive by sharing our stories with others. When we encounter scripture we find ourselves in the midst of the family stories of our spiritual ancestors. When we share those stories with future generations, we help them to encounter the scripture in new and relevant ways.

Sending & Serving Activity



③ How Deep Do We Go?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hidden Depths,” <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=416482&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>
- Bible

Look at the artwork “Hidden Depths.” Think about being in a boat on the water and not knowing what lies beneath the surface. This is, of course, what happened with the Titanic. They didn’t think the iceberg was as large as it was, and the ship sank. When we encounter scripture we must always look deep beneath the surface to see what the text has to say to us. Read Proverbs 2:1–8. The book of Proverbs contains what we call Wisdom literature. Wisdom, unlike knowledge, only comes with years of experience. Someone can know a lot of “stuff,” but he or she may not possess wisdom. Some very wise people never had the opportunity to get a formal education. Encountering scripture is not about memorizing a verse and spitting it back verbatim; encountering scripture is about treasuring the text in our hearts so that our lives are moved by the meaning behind the words. Any time we are deeply moved by the text, we are truly encountering scripture. Spend more time with the artwork and the passage from Proverbs. As a family, talk about how deeply you want to have the text permeate your lives over this period of practicing your faith.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ Crying Out for Insight

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal or notebook
- pen or pencil

Read Proverbs 2:1–8. Make a note of those words, phrases, and images that make an impression on you. Focus on verse 3, “If you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding” (NRSV). Think about those situations where having insight and understanding would have made how you dealt with the situation easier. Think about things you may face in the near future where insight and understanding would allow you to respond better to the situation. Carry these words with you over the next few days, and journal each time you are able



to pause and ask God for insight or understanding. Encountering scripture is not just about reading the Bible or memorizing certain texts; it is how we carry that scripture with us into the everydayness of our lives. Journaling along the way helps us reflect on the practice and continue it daily.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 What Am I Feeding?

Supplies:

- Bible

Read John 21:1–20, revisiting verses 15–18 where Jesus repeatedly asks Peter if he loves him. Find a comfortable place to write your thoughts about what you are and are not feeding. Often we struggle to do all that we know is healthy and life-giving in our day-to-day functions of our homes. We can feed unhealthy habits through paralysis, lethargy, and/or procrastination—even nagging ourselves about why we won’t do a particular thing that is good for us. Make a list of those places in your life where you would like to be healthier. This can be anything from taking up exercise to healing a broken relationship. It may be one item; it may be many. But give yourself time to make an honest assessment. Review the list, and choose one item that looms the largest. Consider how you would be affected if you could transform this particular item for the positive.

Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” What if Jesus asked you the same question with regard to this issue? The question is not to elicit obligation or guilt, but to evoke the sensation of loving relationship. How would it feel to approach the list with the love, approval, and longing of God to be present with you?

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Lectio Divina

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen/pencil, or a journal

Lectio Divina is a method of scripture reading that allows for silence and contemplation. Open your Bible to Psalm 23. This psalm is familiar to most people who grew up in the church. Read the psalm quietly to yourself. Sit for a few minutes and think about what you read. What stands out for you? What images strike you that may not have seemed as powerful in other readings? Read the psalm again, this time out loud, but pause after every verse for about a minute to allow that one verse to penetrate your being. After you have read the entire psalm, sit quietly for 10 minutes. Set the timer so you can meditate and not worry about the time. After 10 minutes, read the psalm one more time. Make notes in your journal about what you heard, experienced, or thought during this activity. This is a wonderful way to encounter scripture that can be done with any text or with the same text over and over. As you walk through your week, think about the Lord being your shepherd and what that means for your life.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Fill Your Net with Abundance

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen/pencil

Read John 21:1–20 and meditate on verses 3–6. Consider all that goes into operating a business in an environment where profit is valued above all else, and the ethics that come with that goal. Cultivating clients/customers/consumers, developing the right partnerships, seizing timely opportunities can often cause us to reexamine our Christian ethics. Consider the company or organization where you work, or one that is a major player in your community. What are its goals for success?

Write one question per page:

- What are some practices within your work that are consistent with Christian ethics?
- Which practices result in reaping a bountiful harvest?
- How do you see yourself contributing to the success of your work?
- What are some ways your work environment could improve its practices to embrace more Christian ethics?

How does your encounter with scripture affect your answers? How does your faith play a part in your workplace? What makes it difficult to be a person of faith in your workplace? What scriptures do you carry with you to help you through those difficult times?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Feeding the Masses

Supplies:

- Bible

Read John 21:1–19. This isn't the first time we come across a story in the Bible that has Jesus feeding people with fish and bread. In fact, there are many parables that have to do with hospitality and offering food to those who are hungry. In this story the disciples are out all night fishing, not catching anything until the morning. It can be presumed that they are tired and hungry at this point. When they finally get to shore with their nets, Jesus is preparing a meal for them over the fire, and then Jesus feeds them. This is just one example of servanthood in the Bible. How do we encounter this scripture in the living of our lives? Who in your community are tired and need to be fed? Think about organizing co-workers to volunteer at a local soup kitchen for one meal or initiating a food drive at work, the proceeds of which can be donated to a local food pantry. If anyone asks you why you thought to do this, let them know you got the idea from studying scripture and following Jesus's example.



Sending & Serving Activity

9 Rejoice Every Chance You Get!!!

Supplies:

- video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNakIQLNuR4>
- Bible
- sense of joy

Read Philippians 4:4–7, Psalm 9:1–2, Psalm 27:1, and Psalm 150. These are just a few texts that remind us to be joyful and celebrate God’s love. Watch the YouTube video of the Original Patch Adams giving a speech about living joyfully. If you haven’t ever done so, try to watch the entire movie about Patch Adams. Follow the advice of Patch Adams at the end of the video. Be joyful for an entire month. When you begin to wonder why you are doing this, reread the texts listed or others in the Bible that remind you of what a gift you have in your faith. If we seriously encounter these scriptures or others like them, the way we approach life and those around us changes. Remember to celebrate the love of God at work in the community, yes, even in the grocery store.

Reflect

Families and communities, however related (by blood or common story), provide depth and meaning to our lives and deepen our understanding of our faith. When we share our stories we not only let others into a deeper understanding of who we are, but we get to know ourselves better. Listening intently to the story of another brings us into deeper and more meaningful relationship. As you encountered scripture through these activities what was an “aha!” moment for you? How has this Exploration deepened your understanding of the place of story in your life?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

It seems redundant to talk about the faith practice of encountering scripture from the vantage point of scripture. How else would one do this? Through the study of scripture we are able to see how the story of our faith is alive in our lives on a day-to-day basis. It is also helpful to understand that the Bible is not the only scripture we read in our lives. There are many sacred texts. For some it is poetry, for others it is works of fiction or historical accounts. Although we will focus on the scripture of the Holy Bible, we will also consider other “scriptures” in our life so that we can see how they impact how the story of faith is affected in our daily living.

About this Exploration

The Gospel of John gives us an image of God as creative Word living among us. God is not remote or far off; God is present in the world with us. The divine lover, “the Word become flesh,” is intimately involved in our human experience. Encountering scripture invites us into dialogue with God, who dwells with us. Such encounters may heal or challenge, delight or disrupt, comfort or transform. When we hear scripture as a community, we discern its life-giving word for us. We reconcile the ways it has been misused and distorted with its power to create new life.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

2 Kings 2: 1-14**John 1: 1-14**

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① At the Theater

Supplies:

- movie of choice
- paper/journal
- pen

When we really have made scripture a part of our being, we see it wherever we go. Choose a favorite old movie or one you've been wanting to see. As you watch the movie, look for biblical themes and write them in your journal. Scripture references are everywhere; sometimes we just need to be aware of them. If you can't decide on a movie, some options are: *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, *Lion King*, *Pay It Forward*, *Saved*, *Wallee*, *Narnia*, or any of the James Bond movies. As a family, discuss the movie and talk about the themes you each noticed. Think about having a movie night once a month when you all look for biblical themes in the movies you choose.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



② Layers of Faith

Supplies:

- artwork: "No-Traveller's Borne" by Jess, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- Bible

Gather together as a family around the artwork "No-Traveller's Borne." The artist takes old objects and recreates them with layers of paint. Notice, even though you may be looking at a flat painting, that the layers of paint can be seen. Our faith is much like this. In some areas of our faith we may experience great depth and so there are layers of understanding. In other areas we may not have had the same depth of experience, so we have only one thin layer. Think about the scripture stories you know. Choose one story as a family and read it together. Talk about the different layers of understanding you collectively have of this text. How can you continue to encounter this story together as a family? Where can this story lead you? If you have trouble choosing a text, read Genesis 1 or Luke 2. Either of these may be familiar.



Sending & Serving Activities

③ Round the Way People

Supplies:

- Bible

As a family bedtime activity, read aloud John 1:1–14. Reread verse 14 about Jesus walking among us as the light. Ask each family member to reflect on his or her day. Name examples of when someone’s light shone in their life. Encourage each to tell the story of how the person’s actions were Christ-like. For example, perhaps the convenience store cashier was pleasant to everybody. Continue sharing until enthusiasm subsides. In closing, offer that the gospels are accounts of Jesus as experienced in community. Invite each family member to close with prayer, allowing each to contribute a word of gratitude for what he or she appreciated about the day and how to be the light in the life of others tomorrow.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



④ Passing on the Story

Supplies:

- artwork: “Two Women and a Child” by Diego Rivera, <http://shop.famsf.org/do/product/PostersAndPrintsDeYoungPosters/RIVERA--TWO-WOMEN-AND-A-CHILD-POSTER-R1200>
- Bible
- journal
- pen

Read 2 Kings 2:1–14. Think about the relationship between Elijah and Elisha. How much time did Elijah take to make sure Elisha was prepared to carry on his yoke? What were their conversations like? Who has been inspirational to you in your faith journey? Who have you touched by sharing your story? Look at the artwork of the two women and the child. Imagine the conversation the child is overhearing between the two women. At what stage in life does the child go from overhearing the conversation to participating in it? Think about ways you can be moved by those around you by encountering their stories and becoming a part of them. For the next week note in your journal every time someone else’s story somehow becomes a part of your own. When that happens think back to the story of Elisha and Elijah. How is that story becoming a part of your own?



Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Light in the Darkness

Supplies:

- Bible
- candle
- matches
- a space that can be darkened

Find a comfortable spot in a room that can be made very dark. Read John 1:1–14. Jesus is often referred to as the light of the world. Light the candle and turn off the lights. Study the flame. Candles are especially intriguing when they are lit in pure darkness. Think about your life. Where are the dark places in your life? How can you help the light of Christ shine in your life? Search the light of the candle and ask for Christ's presence and healing in that place of your life that is most in need. We hear these words every year in Advent and at Christmas time. These sacred words remind us that Jesus was not born to wealth and comfort during a time of relative ease, but rather he was born to the poor in a time of great need and Roman occupation (according to Luke). To truly encounter this text is to embrace the light of Christ in your life.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Celebrating our Elders

Supplies:

- blank greeting cards or blank paper
- pens/pencils
- crayons or colored pencils (if using blank paper)
- Bible

Think about the people in your family who have made a significant impact on your life. How do/did you feel when you are in their presence? What makes them so special? What's the most important or most cherished thing they have taught you or given you in life? How has/is their story affecting your story? Read 2 Kings 2:1–14 together. Think about the relationship between Elijah and Elisha. How is it the same or different from your own relationship with your elder family member? Decide how you want to give thanks for your relationship with your family member and the way that person has allowed you to encounter her or his story. Think about sending a card or to show appreciation for this person. Make sure to emphasize how you have encountered the story and how it has made a difference for you.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 What's Your Story?

Supplies: None

Think about the people you encounter on a daily basis, whether at work or through community activities. Is there someone you've been meaning to get to know, but haven't quite figured out how to approach? Set a goal for yourself to either sit by this person at lunch (if possible) or invite this person to lunch. During your meeting be intentional about getting to know this person's story, as much as he or she is willing to share. Be attentive to actions and feelings. Don't hurry to tell your story, but if it feels like you're getting too intimate for a first meeting, be prepared to share your story. However, if the other person is willing to spend the time talking about him- or herself, then allow that to happen. Afterward, reflect on how it felt to spend time listening to the story of another. What did you learn about the other person? What did you learn about yourself? How does encountering another's story affect us and our story?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Passing on the Light

Supplies: None

Light is a central theme of the Christian faith. Jesus is the light of our lives and we, being called and sent by Jesus, are to spread that light to others. For the next week, find a way to pass the light of Christ to someone at work or in the community. Maybe it is the person who checks you out at the grocery store, or a neighbor who is feeling blue. How you spread that light will be up to you, but keep track of what you do and remember to give thanks that before you ever thought to spread the light to others Jesus was the light in your life.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 With What Shall I Come?

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Micah 6:6–8. This is probably one of the best-known prophetic texts from the Bible. What does the Lord require but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God? Spend time with verses 6 and 7. What are the equivalents of thousands of rams, rivers of oil, burnt offerings, or year-old calves? What are the "things" in your life that you value? How do those "things" compare to justice, kindness, and humility? Think about the place you spend most of your waking hours. What can you give in that setting that reflects the values Micah sets before



us? How would your days be different if each morning you decided to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God? As you go through the next week, carry this text on your heart and try to live accordingly.

Reflect

Even the greatest theologians spend their whole lives trying to faithfully encounter scripture. How has your day-to-day life changed as a result of this Exploration? In what way does scripture play a more prominent role in your daily encounters? How do you see the world differently? What are some other ways that you can encounter scripture?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

A faithful disciple is one willing to learn from the example and teaching of another. In this manner of speaking, we are all disciples. Each and every time we dare to encounter scripture we put ourselves in a position to learn something new and to have our lives changed because of it. Whether we are following the story of Ruth, who was faithful to her mother-in-law, Naomi, or listening to Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, we put ourselves into the midst of the lives of disciples who have gone before us and allow them to teach us as modern day disciples.

About this Exploration

For the Christian, discipleship includes servant leadership, listening for God's voice, responding to scripture, learning the practices of our faith, mentoring others, passing on the stories of our faith, and learning how to live with compassion and love. When we hear scripture, we must discern how to live into its teaching. As Christians, we believe that scripture makes a difference in our living. Encountering scripture is one way we discover how to live in Christ's way.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ruth 1:1–22
Acts 8:26–40

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



① Encountering Scripture, Encountering Baptism

Supplies:

- artwork: “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- Bible

Read Acts 8:26–40 together as a family. What is so significant about this story is that the eunuch was in many ways an oddity, an outcast of sorts, even though he was a court official. He was obviously a person of faith, as he was reading Isaiah when Philip arrived, but he was struggling with what the words meant. Philip helped him to encounter the text in a whole new way.

Look at the artwork “Baptism of Jesus.” Think about the Ethiopian eunuch asking to be baptized. What did this mean to him? Look closely at the picture. What do you see? Spend several minutes studying the artwork. Tell stories of baptisms from your own family. Compare and contrast them with the story of the eunuch and the artwork. When we encounter scripture, or anything for that matter, we allow the story to seep into our lives in such a way that it becomes a part of us. Baptism is a powerful sacrament in the church. Allow these stories of baptism to interact with your own.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



② Do I Stay, or Do I Go?

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab” by William Blake, <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=1590989&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>

Read Ruth 1 together. Begin the conversation by talking together about whether you think it is strange that Orpah left Naomi or that Ruth stayed with her. What about the story strikes you as odd? What similarities are there in this story to any stories in your own family? Study the artwork of Naomi entreating Orpah and Ruth to leave her. Talk about the colors used, the expressions on their faces, and their posture. Discuss anything else you notice about this painting. It is not uncommon to have rifts in family relationships. Many families have at least one family member with whom they haven’t spoken for years. Although the “rift” between Naomi and Orpah was not over a disagreement, it is still a rift, and they will most likely never see one another again. What does it feel like to be estranged from a family member, even if for a short period of time? How can you encounter the story of Naomi and Orpah and Ruth in such a way that it can make a difference in your own family relationships? Consider displaying the artwork in a prominent place to remind you of the importance of family and perhaps as a nudge to heal any hurts that may be present in your own family.



Sending & Serving Activity

③ Follow Me

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Matthew 4:18–22. Notice how the disciples left everything behind to follow Jesus. As a family, talk about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. What, as a family, do you need to give up in order to be more faithful disciples? Decide as a family on one thing you are willing to give up for the next four weeks so that you can spend more time being faithful disciples. What will take the place of the activity you are giving up? Allow everyone to be part of the conversation so that all have a vested interest in the final outcome.

Individual and Personal Life Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ A Long Journey Home

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Ruth 1. Ruth and Naomi took a long journey together to get back to Naomi's homeland. Decide on a place where you can go to take a nice long walk in nature. Leave behind the cell phone, the iPod, and any other handheld device and go for a long walk. On your walk think about your life and all the "places" you have been. Although you may think of the different places you've lived or traveled, don't limit those "places" to physical locations. Think about the places you have been spiritually and emotionally throughout your lifetime. When has your faith carried you through difficult times? When have you felt a lack of faith? Where are you now on your journey? As you knit together the different pieces of your story, think of how God fits into your story. If your story is particularly filled with pain and hardship, remember Naomi and all she endured. If you are feeling bitter, remember that Naomi also felt bitterness. Whenever you are feeling alone and lost in the wilderness, reread the story of Ruth and Naomi and remember that you are not alone on your journey. Also during those darker times, get out and take a walk. Exercise and fresh air have an amazing way of clearing the path for us once again.



Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Daily Encounter

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal
- pen/pencil

This activity takes place over the period of an entire week. Choose a time each day to spend 30 minutes with your Bible. Find a quiet place where you can get comfortable and have time to meditate. This can be done with any text, but if you don't feel comfortable picking one on your own, choose either of the texts from this Exploration. The important thing is to use the same text every day. Read the text and allow it to speak to you. If one word or phrase jumps out at you, write it in your journal. If you are doing this exercise in the morning, carry that word or phrase with you throughout the day and allow it to continue to speak to you. If you choose to do this activity at the end of your day, write down the word or phrase and try to remember to look at it before you begin your day tomorrow. Do this each and every day and see how the text speaks differently to you depending on your mood, what is occurring on a particular day, or on experiences you are having. Write your experiences in your journal, and reread them as the week goes on. Try doing this exercise for a season, perhaps as an Advent or Lenten discipline. See how it shapes your life and your being. How does it inform your discipleship?

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Taking Stock

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Mark 10:17–22. In the Gospels Jesus repeatedly asks us to give away our possessions and to give to the poor. After reading this text, choose a closet, a drawer, or a room to go through and clean out. What do you no longer need? What are you hanging on to that clutters your life both physically and literally? What could you be giving to others who are in need? What do you have an abundance of that can be shared with others? We are true disciples when we allow the scripture not only to permeate our minds, but to affect our actions and possessions as well. This is also an activity that can be repeated for all the cluttered spaces of our lives.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Random Act of Baptism

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Acts 8:26–40. In many ways this story is a random act of baptism. Philip appeared, he and the eunuch conversed, and the next thing you knew there was a baptism. Think about the many responses Philip could have had to the eunuch. He could have ignored him or he could have made an excuse not to baptize him for whatever reason; but instead he embraced the encounter and the eunuch was brought to greater faith. Think about the people you encounter in the next week. Clearly you won't be baptizing anyone on the street or at work, but what can you do to make an encounter especially meaningful for someone else you meet? Think beyond opening a door, or a simple greeting, but rather think of a way you can make someone feel like he or she matters enough for you to stop along the way for the encounter. When we truly encounter scripture, our lives are not only changed, but our actions also change the lives of others.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Serving Servants

Supplies:

- Hershey's Kisses or Hugs
- plastic wrap
- ribbon
- small pieces of paper
- paper punch

Jesus asks us to be mindful of the "forgotten" ones in our community. Think about the workers at the gas station or fast food restaurant. How often do we let them know how much we appreciate their service to us? Is it enough to be polite to them, or would it be nice to do something "just a little extra" once in awhile?

Write a message of gratitude on the small piece of paper. It can be as simple as "Thank you for your service," or you can add more to it. Punch a hole in the corner of the paper. Wrap a few of the candies in the plastic wrap, and tie it closed with the ribbon. Tie the ribbon through the hole in the note. Carry these little gifts with you on your errands, and randomly give them to people who are in service positions. If you are at work, think about the mailroom person, the receptionist, the custodian, or people who you normally don't really notice in the course of the day. Afterward, reflect on how Jesus reached out to the "least of these" and how your small act may have not only positively affected the lives of those receiving the gifts, but your life as well.



Sending & Serving Activity

⑨ Compassionate Presence

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Ruth 1. Think about how Naomi must have felt, having lost her husband and both of her sons, and having no grandchildren. Think of how lonely and desperate she must have felt knowing that all property and self-worth were tied up in male relatives and all she had was two daughters-in-law. Who do you know who is grieving the loss of a loved one? Who do you know who has lost a spouse or child? Think of something you can do to be present with that person in the next week. Many people show up at the time of death or bring food to the bereaved, but what about when weeks, months, or even years have passed? They still need someone just to stop in and visit. They may need someone with whom they can share their story, even if you've heard it already. What can you do to provide a meaningful encounter for someone who is lonely? Being a faithful disciple calls us to go where our ancestors in the faith would lead us. Follow the path of Ruth and take an unexpected journey to someone in need.

Reflect

We never perfect faith practices. Rather they are just that, a practice. We continue to practice allowing scripture to enter our lives; we continue to practice being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. How have these activities helped you in your practice? Where do you see yourself going from here? Is there a particular activity you want to continue doing? Where is this journey leading you on your road to discipleship?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

Christian tradition is filled with examples of how scripture can and has been interpreted. We have story upon story of people who have taken scripture literally and those who have read it more figuratively. Either way, people have made drastic changes in their personal lives because they encountered scripture. From creation narratives to the Apocrypha, the stories the Bible are life giving and life changing. Be prepared to enter into a rich tradition that can transform how you encounter scripture in your daily practice.

About this Exploration

Encounters with God through scripture take many forms. Christian tradition offers a rich treasury of practices for personal, family, and community engagement with the Word. Over the centuries, scripture story has been read aloud in worship, sung through the Psalms, or enacted in medieval mystery plays. Scripture has been shared through mosaics, painting, dance, architecture, and sermons. Families have anchored their days in the sharing of scripture. Bold souls immersed in God's word have sparked social change movements. Memorized passages have given courage to those who struggle. Our Reform tradition reminds us that all Christians have the privilege and responsibility to wrestle with God's word and to give it new voice in our own lives.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 96
2 Timothy 1:1-14

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① Sing a New Song

Supplies:

- Bible
- hymn: “Guide My Feet” (tune: Guide My Feet, 8.8.8.10.) <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>

The psalms were originally written as songs to be sung in the faith community. Christian tradition is filled with songs that help us interpret the Christian story. Read Psalm 96 as a family, and then read or sing “Guide My Feet.” What relationship do you see between the song and the psalm, if any? Think of other favorite hymns you know from church or Sunday school. What are their primary messages? Sometimes we can hear a scripture text over and over, but when we hear it put to song, it suddenly comes alive for us. When it comes alive, then we are able to truly encounter the text.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Sharing the Tradition

Supplies:

- Bible
- lectionary texts found at <http://www.textweek.com/>
- song: “We are Dancing Sarah’s Circle” (tune: Jacob’s Ladder, 8.8.8.5.) <http://www.theinterpretersfriend.org/songs/w-r-dncg-srh%27s-crcl.html>

Read or sing the song “Sarah’s Circle.” Stop after verses 2, 3, and 4 and talk about your history as a family. How did you get your names? Is there familial significance to them? Talk about a tradition that has been in your family for multiple generations. Maybe it’s a certain food you eat at Christmas or for birthdays, or a certain gift given for specific occasions. How did the tradition start? What about that tradition is important to the family? Why? From the beginning of time people of faith have passed on the faith story from generation to generation—sometimes through the retelling of story, other times through art, and often through song. How did you first hear about what it means to be a Christian? What new tradition would you like to begin as a family that helps you to continue to share the story of faith within your family? Using the link to the lectionary included above, find the texts for this week. Chose one of the texts and read it together as a family. What does this story have to say to you? How does this story intersect in your life? What does it tell you about the tradition of our faith? For the rest of the week find ways to continue sharing this story with one another. What would happen if you, as a family, decided to repeat this exercise every week together?



Sending & Serving Activity

③ Celebrating the story

Supplies:

- Bible

Communal reading of scriptures goes back as far as the written word. People of faith have gathered together for centuries to hear the sacred story read. Reading scripture aloud in the presence of others allows the text to take on a life of its own. Each hearer has an opportunity to encounter the text in his or her own unique way.

Open your Bible to Psalm 96. Invite all family members to take turns reading the psalm, trying to use as much expression as possible. Even the youngest family member can participate in this activity. If you have pre-readers, have someone read a verse and the others make a response such as, "Thanks be to God!" Allow the text to speak to you. If you feel called to add motions or to shout, do it. This is a joyful psalm and should be read and encountered joyfully.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ The Scripture Around Us

Supplies:

- a place to sit and observe the messages in society
- Bible
- journal
- pen/pencil

Go to a public place such as an airport, train station, or shopping mall, or watch commercials on TV for 30 minutes. Look around at all the messages being conveyed in society. What product will make you feel better, look skinnier, or feel sexier? What do you need to buy, eat, or drink to be all you want to be? What is being sold as the latest "god" to worship? Psalm 96:5 states, "For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens." Before we can fully encounter the scripture of the Bible, we first need to acknowledge the other scriptures of our lives and prepare ourselves to rid ourselves of the gods that get in the way of us hearing the word of the God of Abraham and Jacob, the God who made the heavens and the earth.

In your journal acknowledge the gods that vie for your attention and even your loyalty. What must you do to change your allegiance to the God of Jesus Christ? As you go about your tasks this week, be mindful of the alternative scripture that seeps into your life and tries to lure you away from hearing the scripture of our faith tradition.



Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 Whose Tradition Is It Anyway?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pen

Much of what we claim as Christian tradition isn't actually what we read in the scriptures. Think about what you believe to be true about the creation story. Write down from your memory what you remember of that story. After you have written what you remember, read Genesis 1 and 2. Do your stories match up? Are there differences? Why do you think you remember differently? What do you think the tradition was trying to teach? This same exercise works well with the birth narratives of Jesus. After writing down what you remember, read Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 2. What has the tradition been teaching, and what is really in the scripture? It is important for us to go back to familiar stories repeatedly because each time we encounter them, we find something new and remind ourselves that we need to unlearn some things that the tradition has been teaching us.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 And God Said It Was Good

Supplies:

- Bible
- nature

Read Genesis 1 two times. Take a long walk in nature and think about the creation as it is told in Genesis and how, each time God finished a day of creation, God said it was good. If walking is difficult, find a place to sit outdoors where you can see some wildlife and plants. Even the Bible gives us more than one account of how the world was created. What is important in both of these stories? Why are they so different? As you look around in creation, is it enough to know God created without knowing exactly how God created? As you smell some flowers or watch some animals scurry around, is it enough to know God said it was good rather than to know which came first and on which day or even which year? When we encounter scripture, we allow ourselves to delve into its deeper meaning without letting the words get in the way of our understanding.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 The Least of These

Supplies:

- Bible
- Amnesty International information, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/index.html>

Christianity has a long tradition of caring for the poor and oppressed among us. A well-known text calling us to this ministry is Matthew 25:31–46. Jesus repeatedly calls us to minister to the “least of these” throughout the gospels. Amnesty International is one organization that does just this. They fight for the rights of women, people unfairly incarcerated, and many people who are at risk throughout the world. Read Matthew 25:31–46. Visit the website at <http://www.amnesty-usa.org/index.html> and consider your own community. How can you make a difference in your community? What cause can you find on the Amnesty International website that you could encourage people at your workplace to join in on? Can that lead to something being done in or through your workplace for people at risk in your community? Commit to finding at least one way you can bring the Matthew 25 text alive in your interactions with others this coming week.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Shameful Admission or Omission

Supplies:

- Bible

Read 2 Timothy 1:1–14. In this letter Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him in his ministry and discipleship. Notice how Paul acknowledges that Timothy’s “sincere faith” was handed down from his mother and grandmother. They shared a passion with him for their tradition of faith. In our current culture, it is difficult to know when it is appropriate to share our faith and when it is inappropriate. How do we faithfully share our story while still being open and respectful of others’ stories? Is there someone in your workplace who might benefit by encountering a piece of scripture? Which text? How can you find a way to share it with that person without feeling like you are forcing your faith onto someone else? Are you ashamed or afraid to share your faith with someone at work? Why or why not? Is our omission unfaithful to who we are called to be as Christians? Think about this exercise. If you aren’t ready to share your faith story with someone else, write in your journal about why that is. Repeat this activity for several days or even weeks and see what kind of progress you make.



Sending & Serving Activity

9 What If?

Supplies:

- jugs
- book: *On That Day, Everyone Ate* by Margaret Trost
- What If? Foundation information, <http://whatiffoundation.org/>

When we think of scripture we often think only of the Bible, but there are other “texts” in our lives. Reading books sometimes can inspire us as much as if not more than reading the Bible. Consider the book by Margaret Trost in which she writes about her experience of feeding people in Haiti. Consider starting a book club with this or another book being your first choice. Place jugs (gallon milk jugs will do) around your workplace to participate in loose change donations for the What If? Foundation or for a food pantry in your area. If you are able to get a book group together to read this book, consider how the biblical text and the text of this story (or others) intersect. Sometimes scripture leads us in different directions, and other times it is the stuff of our everyday lives that leads us back to the scripture.

Reflect

It is comforting to know that there are ways of being that have been beneficial enough to result in tradition. Tradition provides a “container” for our lives, allowing us to engage our creativity to further expand our experience in this realm. What new tradition will your family begin to observe as a result of this practice? What age-old traditions do you want to embrace?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

Mission is at the heart of the Christian faith. The more we read scripture, the more we encounter being called to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the unfairly incarcerated, and the downcast and ostracized. Some of these activities may seem similar to others in these Explorations, but mission is so much a part of what the scripture calls us to, it is difficult to separate it from the other Explorations. Open your Bible, and read with an open mind and open heart. God calls us to follow where God leads.

About this Exploration

Jesus offered an image of God's realm as a tiny seed planted and flourishing. God's word can be like a seed in our lives and in our world. Individually and collectively, we encounter scripture with the hope of better understanding our own context—the place, time, and circumstances in which we live. Scripture invites us into a more intimate knowledge of God and community. It guides and challenges us to discern our mission to our faith community, our neighborhood, and our world. The tiniest of seeds can produce a rich harvest of peace, justice, and restoration.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 4:26–34
Esther 4:1–17

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Planting the Seed

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pencils
- weekly calendar (see example below)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
12 noon	6:00 pm	6:00 pm	4:00 pm	6:00 pm	4:00 pm	10:00 am
Read Mark 4 together.	Tell a story about how Mark 4 affected my day.	Reread Mark 4 together.	Decide on a place where we can “plant a seed.”	Make a plan to actually “plant the seed.”	Read Mark 4 again.	Seed planting day

As a family, read Mark 4:26–34. The analogy of the mustard seed may be familiar. In many ways faith practices are like a mustard seed. We start out small, 10–15 minutes a day, and after days, weeks, even months of the practice we find that we have grown considerably. Think how much more this will have an effect on your life if you are able to do this practice as a family. Make a weekly calendar. It can be as simple as a listing of the days of the week. For each day write a discipline you want to do as a family for one whole week. See the example. Feel free to be creative, but keep in mind schedules to work around so the plan is doable for your family.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Gathering at the Table

Supplies:

- song: “As We Gather at Your Table” (tune: Beach Spring, 8.7.8.7.D.) <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/a/a366.html>; tune: <http://www.ccel.org/cceh/0001/x000147.htm>

Read or sing together “As We Gather at Your Table.” Examine each verse. What does it mean to be nourished with sacred story? How can our worship be turned into witness? Who are the “last and least” that need to be welcomed to the table? Within your community what organizations serve the last and least? Is there a food pantry? A soup kitchen? Homeless shelter? Are there services for families whose loved ones are suffering from a terminal illness? As a family decide on one mission in your community that you want to serve, and schedule a time to work at the mission together. Afterward spend time as a family talking about your experience.



Sending & Serving Activity

3 Family Ties

Supplies:

- Bible

Read the story of Esther from Esther 4:1–17. Look at all the different aspects of the story. Esther was willing to risk her life in order to save her people from genocide. She was well aware of the risk she was taking, but Mordecai convinced her that her status as queen had been something provided by God for “such a time as this.” As Christians we are called to see all people as our family members. All over the world we have family members who are suffering under very difficult circumstances. There is a multitude of ways to help others. As a family, decide on a way you can help other families who are in dire need. What would you need to sacrifice or give up in order to help others?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

4 Get Movin’

Supplies:

- walking shoes
- Bible

We can’t begin to think about how we can be active in mission if we aren’t first taking care of ourselves. Has it been a while since you’ve got your body moving? Do you seem to always have more important things to do than take care of yourself? Our physical bodies and spiritual bodies are closely connected; when one is out of shape, the other isn’t far behind. The psalms are a great place for inspiration, and many are short enough to remember as you are walking. Read a psalm (8, 23, 24, 119:105–112, 121, 150 are all good places to start, but any will do). Get your walking shoes on and go outdoors for a walk. On your walk allow the psalm to play over in your head. Don’t worry about getting the words just right; allow the meaning and tone of the psalm to inspire your soul as your soles get a workout. Often when we keep a portion of scripture on our heart and in our heads while our body is getting a workout, we find new meaning to it, and it can inspire our ministry and mission beyond ourselves. Make a commitment to yourself to do this at least three to four times a week and see where the text takes you. It is especially gratifying to do this with the same text for an entire week. Who knows where God is calling you to be in mission and ministry!



Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Planting a Seed of Action

Supplies:

- monthly calendar
- pen/pencil

Read Mark 4:26–34. Think about your life. Where have you sown seeds and been able to see them grow? Use the calendar from Activity 1 or the one you use to organize your life. Decide what kind of seeds you would like to sow and where you would like to sow them. Is there a need in your community that you could help address? Is there a struggling mission or organization that reaches out to others that you could help revive? Are there children who could use some tutoring, or elders who need a companion? Be creative and flexible in your thinking. Write down one thing you will do each day (one small seed you will plant) to make this idea come alive. Chart your successes and challenges. When you start to feel discouraged, go back to the text, allow it to speak to you and give you inspiration for your good work.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 Playing It Safe: At What Cost?

Supplies:

- Bible

Many missionaries, when they itinerate after a stay overseas, will be asked, “How can you do that? I could NEVER do what you do.” Missionaries are really quite ordinary people who hear a call to ministry and respond. Read Esther 4:1–17. Certainly some would think that Esther was extraordinary, but as she was making her decision to go see the king uninvited, we can be quite sure she was feeling very ordinary. Where in your life have you played it safe? When have there been times you have heard or sensed a call to do something that felt extraordinary, but decided not to answer that call? Missionaries are people who work for justice whether they are in a foreign country or in their native land. Look for a place or situation where you can be a missionary: in your hometown, or somewhere nearby. Do you hear a call to go to an unfamiliar place . . . keeping in mind that unfamiliar place could be your neighbor’s home? Decide just for one day not to play it safe and see where the Spirit guides you. Read and reread Esther to give you encouragement for the journey you are about to take.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease

Supplies:

- Bible
- website: “Child Health Site,” <http://childhealthsite.com/clickToGive/home.faces?siteId=5>

Read Esther 4:1–17. In this story Esther is motivated to action because Mordecai sits at the gate and wails. It was his demonstration that made her curious and then sent her into action. Many people suffer around the world because their voice is squelched or they don’t have a means to let their voice be heard by the global community. Become a voice for the voiceless. Visit “Child Health Site”. Notice that there are a number of ways to participate and a number of causes to support. If you click on the side tab “Take Action!” you can be a voice for the voiceless. What would happen if you shared this site with your co-workers? Maybe you and your co-workers can find a way to make your voices heard on behalf of the many exploited children in our world. If Mordecai hadn’t been crying at the gate, Esther would have never known about the plight of her people. Make sure others know about the plight of children, the hungry, women, and others around the world by sharing this information with colleagues.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



8 The Tip of the Iceberg

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hidden Depths,” <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=416482&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>

Study the artwork “Hidden Depths.” What would it be like to come across the tip of this iceberg without knowing what else lies beneath the surface? Many of the things we do for charity are really just the tip of the iceberg; the real cause of the problem is a bigger social issue. We give to food pantries, but that does not solve the problem of hunger in our community. We donate to UNICEF, but do we address the root of the cause of childhood malnourishment, HIV AIDS, or other issues? Choose one issue or cause. Dig as deeply as you can as to the root cause of the problem. Invite your co-workers to join you in fighting for those affected by the issue. You may need to write letters to Congress, or educate people about the root of the issue you have chosen. This is risky; some people will not want to hear what you have to say, but remember many of our ancestors in the faith—Esther, Job, the Prophets, Jesus, and Paul to name a few. They have paved the way for us. Now it is our turn to follow their lead.



Sending & Serving Activities



9 Let the Children Come

Supplies:

- artwork: “Christ Among the Children” by Emil Nolde, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- Bible

Read 2 Timothy 1:1–14. Study the artwork “Christ Among the Children.” Pay special attention to the expressions on the faces of the children, and compare their expressions to those of the disciples behind Jesus. Are there places in your community where children aren’t particularly welcome? Are there children in your community who are forgotten or neglected? As you think about how Paul took Timothy under his wing and how mentors play such an important role for many young people, how might you be a mentor to a youth who may be at risk? What programs for mentors are there in your community, or is this something that you might feel compelled to start? When we engage scripture, whether through the written text or art that represents it, we are called to make a response relevant in our own community and culture. Where do these texts call you to make a response?

Reflect

How has your life been affected by this Exploration? Do you have a deeper sense of mission? Has the scripture spoken to you in ways you hadn’t experienced before? As you continue to read the Bible, keep your eyes, ears, heart, and soul open to hearing how that scripture speaks to you throughout your daily activities. There will be times of great discomfort, but be assured that you are not alone. At the end of the day, consider how your encounter with the sacred text enriched your life.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Taking a walk in the fog can be risky and yet exhilarating. You can see a path in front of you, but not what lies more than a few yards ahead. Will a car suddenly come upon you, or will there be wildlife lurking in the murkiness of the next few steps? When we don't let the fog stop us from our daily walking routine, we come out at the end gratified (and a little soggy) that we continued on our path. Looking into the future of our faith lives can be a lot like walking in a fog. We can often see what lies directly in front of us, but not much further down the road than that. So we move forward trusting God to guide us. At the end of the day, we bask in the glory of having taken another step on the path, not letting our fear of the unknown thwart our attempt to once again be in touch with the Holy.

About this Exploration

As we look toward a shared future as a community of faith, our encounter with scripture restores our sense of hope, renews the multilayered meanings of the texts, and opens our imaginations. We reclaim the stories that shape us and discover possibilities for change and transformation. Encountering scripture fills us with new vision, opening our hearts to Christ, who invites us to proclaim and celebrate God's realm. Our engagement with the Bible moves our faith community from generation to generation.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 30:15–20
Hebrews 11:1–16

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Living by Faith

Supplies:

- Bible
- family history (if available)

Read Hebrews 11:1–16. If your ancestors immigrated to the country where you are currently living, talk about what their lives were like in the early years of settlement. What did they bring with them? What did it take for them to leave their homeland to come here and rebuild their lives? What was it like for them to have to build not only their homes, but schools and places of worship as well? What sacrifices did they make? What kind of faith did they have to have to make such a move? Talk about your family and how it is living in the relative comfort of all that has been established by those who have gone before you. How does your life compare to that of your ancestors? What do you take for granted for which they had to struggle (something as ordinary as running water perhaps)?

If your ancestors were native to your country, talk about some of the same things listed above, but keep in mind that there were different struggles and hardships. Many of them were the victims of newcomers and had to deal with displacement and even loss of loved ones. How has their history intersected with where you are now? How does it inform your future?

Hebrews offers a litany of our spiritual ancestors, nomads and pilgrims, who faced considerable hardship along the way. There was loss of life, loss of land, and sometimes faltering faith. As a family, relive the stories of faith and family that have been handed down over the generations. Was Christianity imposed on your family so there are remnants of other traditions still alive or to which you would like to give new birth?

No matter where we have come from, we cannot fully embrace the future if we are not somehow connected to our past. Continue the conversation over the next weeks as a family about where you have been—not just physically, but more importantly, spiritually. Talk about how that will impact your future and the generations that will follow.



Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Dancing into the Future

Supplies:

- song: “We are Dancing Sarah’s Circle” (tune: Jacob’s Ladder, 8.8.8.5.)
<http://www.theinterpretersfriend.org/songs/w-r-dncg-srh%27s-crcl.html>
- rice and/or beans
- empty plastic containers (like whipped nondairy topping or sour cream containers)
- packaging tape
- stapler
- streamers
- small bells
- crayons, paints, or craft supplies

Gather together as a family and sing the song “We are Dancing Sarah’s Circle.” This song brings alive the history of a family as tradition and story are passed down through the generations. After you have sung it once, talk about your family and where you would like your history to take you in these next weeks, months, five years, or even into the next generation. Write down any dreams you have, and try to make them fit into the words of the song (for instance, “We are growing in our faith”). You can have this conversation while you make simple musical instruments by placing the beans or rice in the containers and then taping them shut (to avoid any mishaps). For extra flare, staple the streamers onto the lids and tie small bells to the end of the streamers. Feel free to decorate them in any way. When the musical instruments are finished and you have a few new verses to your song, sing it together as a family and feel free to add some rhythm and dance to it. If you have young children in your family, you may be surprised at how they take this on and continue to add to the song for days, if not weeks, to come. Allow the words you create to become the scripture of your lives as you live into the future.

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Life and Death

Supplies:

- Bible
- book: *Holes* by Louis Sachar (available at Amazon.com)

As a family, either read the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar, or watch the movie of the same name. Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20. For young children it may be difficult to understand why God would offer death and adversity. Life is full of ups and downs, and each action we take has a consequence. Sometimes those consequences are good, and sometimes not. Healthy parenting involves offering appropriate consequences for the actions of our children. Sometimes, as parents, our reaction to a child’s action is out of fear for their safety, such as yelling at a child for running into the street. An onlooker might think the parent is being too harsh, but the parent wants to impress upon the child not to put him- or herself in danger. In Deuteronomy God offers the Israelites a new life and prosperity. The forty years of wandering are coming to an end, and the promised land is in sight.



But, if the Israelites choose to follow a path other than the one set before them by God, there will be consequences, harsh consequences.

Talk about the book/movie *Holes*. How did the actions of the various ancestors affect the current characters and their lives? Think about your family as you are right now. How will your choices and actions affect future generations? Sit together as a family and talk about what you want for future generations and how the choices you make today will impact those who will come after you. Spend time intentionally each week or month as a family reviewing where you have been, what you have done, and what that means for tomorrow (meaning not only the next day, but the next generation.)

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

4 What If

Supplies:

- journal
- pen/pencil
- Bible

Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20. Moses is at the end of his journey and is about to hand over his leadership role to Joshua. The people of Israel are about to end forty years of wandering in the desert to enter the promised land. This story is replete with “what ifs.” What if the Israelites hadn’t followed Moses? What if Moses had decided to walk away from his role as leader? What if the promised land isn’t what the Israelites expected? What if . . . What are the “what ifs” of your life? What if you had followed a different career path, what if you had moved to a different city, what if you had gone to a different school? The list is endless. Use this text as a tool to evaluate your life. Make a list of all the “what ifs” in your life and the possible outcomes that could have been. After you have done that and are able to move on, make a new list of “what ifs” that will affect your future. How can you live your life into the future to make at least one of your “what ifs” a possibility? How can you use this text to lead you to your own promised land?

Discerning & Deciding Activity



5 Uncharted Territory

Supplies:

- paper
- paints
- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401

What is it like to be the first one to travel a new road or path? For those familiar with a fresh snow, think about making the first path in that new-fallen snow, especially when it is more than just a few inches deep. With GPS, travelers can find



themselves on roads not yet in the system and all of a sudden it appears as if they are off-roading. Study the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne” and think about any time in our history when people traveled to unknown or yet undiscovered areas. What about your own life? What path has yet to be traveled by you? Use the paper and paints to create a picture of your future. Don’t worry about whether you like to paint or feel you are good at it; just use the colors that speak to you, and let the brush fall on the canvas. This isn’t meant to be a work of art you share with the world, unless of course you are inclined to do so. This is meant to be a work of art that speaks to you and your life and gives you an opportunity to think about your future in ways to which you hadn’t yet given voice. Art in and of itself is a scripture we encounter with different senses and points of view. Allow yourself to encounter both the work by Jess and your own piece of work so that they can inform your journey and your future.

Sending & Serving Activity

⑥ Play It Again Sam

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pen/pencil/markers
- (optional) computer and printer

When learning to play a song for the first time, it often doesn’t go very well. However, the more we practice the better we usually get. Too many young learners will play a song over and over from start to finish rather than focusing on the most difficult part, and so they never really learn to play it well. Faith practices are exactly like that. We have to keep working over and over again, not to reach perfection, but to reach deeper understanding and a yearning to continue doing the practice even when we “don’t have enough time.” It’s a lot like anything that requires repetition: the more we do it, the more we want to do it, and the more we get out of it. So pick up your Bible and read, read, read. Choose a familiar verse, or open it and randomly pick something. But don’t be satisfied with reading it just one time; read the same passage daily until it becomes a part of you. Of course, there are those difficult passages. Don’t feel bad if a passage never speaks to you. There’s plenty of material; you will surely find one that fits. If you find a passage that is particularly meaningful, write it down or print it out on your computer and put it where you will see it every day: your bedroom closet, on the refrigerator, anywhere. Let the scripture speak to you every day.



Workplace and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Gather Together

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pen/marker

Gather a group of co-workers, friends, or church members for a Bible study in your home. Choose one of the focus passages for this Exploration, and spend time together studying and exploring what this text says to you as a group. Talk about the future you see for your church, community, state, and world. What do the stories of our ancestors in the faith have to say to us about where we are now and where we may find ourselves in the future? Make a list of the thoughts/ideas you come up with about how these texts can impact your action for a healthier church, community, and world. After you feel you have exhausted all the possibilities, covenant with one another to put one idea into action. Be specific and create a plan with specific dates and places for doing what you choose to do. As you go through the process of seeing your plan into a reality, revisit the text and allow it to continue to offer you insight and hope.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Random Gratitude

Supplies:

- Bible

In Deuteronomy we read the story of Moses spending forty years in the wilderness leading the Israelites to the promised land. In the end, Moses never gets to enter into the promised land because he dies before they actually enter it. Some may feel this is an injustice to Moses, but anyone who has worked with elderly people who are tired and ready to enter eternal life can also see that Moses got a glimpse of what all his hard work had accomplished and was ready to rest. Is there an elderly person in your community who has voiced that he or she is ready to die? What would it mean to them to know that their life made a difference for others? How would they feel to receive a card or a visit focused on thanking them for their contribution, friendship, and history? Many nursing facilities receive more than their share of carolers at Christmas time, but what about the rest of the year? If you can't think of anything to sing but Christmas carols, gather co-workers, friends, or church members to go caroling in August or February or some other random time of the year. There were plenty of times when the Israelites thought that Moses was crazy, so why not be a little crazy yourselves and see what a difference you can make in the lives of others? In many ways this is a way of celebrating the past of others, but you might be surprised at how it affects your future and theirs.



Sending & Serving Activity

9 For unto Us a Child Is Born

Supplies:

- Bible
- video: Handel's "Messiah," performance at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76RrdwElnTU>

Isaiah 9 is such a beloved text, most likely because of how we hear it sung as part of Handel's "Messiah." But how often have you noticed that the verb Isaiah uses to tell of the birth of a Messiah is not future, but past tense? Isaiah does not say, "For unto us a child will be born," but rather "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us" (NRSV). The promise of a messiah is so real and immediate that Isaiah writes in the past tense.

Sometimes in life if we say things in the future tense, they get put so far ahead in our minds that we have a difficult time realizing them. Think about a dream or vision you have had that hasn't come to realization for you. What would happen if you would start phrasing it in the present tense as if it is happening at this time or in the past tense as if it already happened? Share this idea with a group in your community or workplace about a dream or vision the group has had for something. How does this language help you make your dream/vision come true? Is it possible that the new community center or day care or playground would come to be a reality if you started talking about it in the here and now? The next time you are part of a group planning for the future, think about this text and what it might mean to voice your plans in the present rather than the future. Who knows what the future might hold!

Reflect

When we encounter scripture we are often thinking about what happened in generations past. The Bible is full proclamation about the future. Each time we encounter it we read about what has been and are encouraged to think about what can be. As you reflect on your experience with this practice of faith think about how it can influence your future, and embrace it.