

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Encountering scripture as a faith practice may not be a high priority for many older youth. The Bible may seem like just another book. Or they may have had negative experiences with adults in a faith community, and those experiences taint their desire to open the Book. Once they open the Bible and read it, they experience the presence of God. Even the most jaded youth will admit that “there’s something” there. They may not want to give God full credit, but the door has been opened. The Bible is an organic, valuable, and powerful witness of God through the ages and a guide for how God may work in us today. Youth love that there are answers in the Bible, while there is still ambiguity. They can handle the tension between conflicting accounts, and they understand the need to discern God’s word carefully. Older youth are wonderful interpreters of the Bible because they are willing to allow God access to their heart and their honest questions. Older youth, rooted in scripture, are dynamic, boundless, creative energy sources of God’s love and God’s desire for fairness and social justice.

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 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

Leader Preparation

Encountering scripture in a variety of ways is a gift we can offer to every Christian or seeker. God meets us through scripture, the arts, nature, sports, daily life, through history, and through one another. God speaks to us today as God has spoken to people over the ages. Scripture is an opening into the heart of God. As you guide these pilgrims, select activities that engage you as well as the older youth. Read through all the Bible passages and activities so you have an idea of how you want this resource to serve you throughout this stage of your group's faith journey. Mostly, be joyous in your journey. You are a beloved child of God.

Prayer: May God continue being a gift to me. May Jesus be a favorite role model for me. May the Holy Spirit guide my thoughts and clarify my prayers. May all three work together through God's Word so my faith is always deepening in my heart and in my mind. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Brainstorming: Passages (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Scripture or Bible verses are sometimes called Bible passages. Explore the word "passage" in its various contexts. A passage is a pathway from one point to another point, an opening. Sometimes the transition from middle school to high school and the transition from high school to college are called passages. The passage may be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Scripture can be a passage allowing us to listen to and hear about God's involvement with God's people. Scripture can create a passage between the written word and every heart and mind.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Use your insights from the Leader preparation to introduce the activity. Then lead a brainstorming session with the word "passage." Record the answers on newsprint or a whiteboard. Use these or similar prompts.

- What are the various meanings of the word "passage"?
- List some physical passages.
- Record some mental passages. Consider times when you changed your opinion of yourself or others.
- Name some emotional passages. Consider times when you created different options for yourself or others through changing your response in a situation.
- Explore some spiritual passages. Consider times when your exposure to scripture or an interaction through a faith community's activities, such as a retreat or mission trip, broadened your faith experience.
- How might an awareness of "passages" help as you encounter scripture?

2 Proverbs Today

Leader preparation: Many youth will understand the concept of a proverb, but they may be unfamiliar with the word. When a proverb is said, we usually smile or wince, but we understand it. Here are twelve proverbs used in the early 21st century: "share and share alike"; "there are two sides to every question"; "crime doesn't pay"; "garbage in, garbage out"; "there's no such thing as a free lunch"; "when the going gets tough, the tough get going"; "better the foot slip than the tongue"; "you can't judge a book by its cover"; "beauty is only skin deep"; "a watched pot never boils"; "quit while you're ahead"; and "practice makes perfect." Review the activity and the link.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- video: "1 Minute Japanese: Proverbs about Foods," <http://tinyurl.com/3k24ryx>

Today, we seldom use the word "proverbs." We call them "sayings" or "catch phrases." A proverb is a short saying that has an element of truth or a moral. Show the video of three Japanese food proverbs. This is "out of the box" and will help the youth get in the swing of the activity. After the video ask: *What are some proverbs that you use or hear today?* Start with any of the proverbs included in the

Encountering Scripture

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.

Leader preparation. List these on newsprint or a whiteboard. Once you have written a few proverbs, the youth will think of others. While writing the proverb, ask what the proverb means. *Are any of the listed proverbs based on biblical texts, such as “for everything there is a season” from Ecclesiastes?*

③ Game: Books of the Bible

Leader preparation: When experiencing scripture and allowing it to influence our lives, it helps if we know the books of the Bible. The game in this activity is harder than it appears. Check for peanut or tree nut allergies prior to purchasing candy. Before the gathering time, decide how you want the First and Second books alphabetized. Do you want to alphabetize by the second word, so you have First Chronicles, then Second Chronicles? Or would you like to alphabetize by the first word, so you have First Chronicles, First Corinthians, First John, First Kings, and so on? Read and complete the activity. You may also add to this activity if you want the books categorized by letters, Gospel, the Law, Books of Wisdom, major and minor prophets, and so on.

Supplies:

- paper (lined is helpful but not required)
- pencils or pens
- Bibles
- bite-sized Snickers candy bars or Airheads or Milk Duds
- Hershey Kisses
- bite-sized Milky Way candy bars or Starburst
- stopwatch or stopwatch on a cell phone

Divide into teams. Give each team writing supplies. Each team also needs a Bible. The instructions are to list and alphabetize the books of the Bible using both the Bible or the team members’ memory. When you say “Go,” start the stopwatch. As youth work frantically, they will make mistakes. For mistakes and for teams that start arguing, hand out Snickers or Airheads or Milk Duds (make sure your youth can take a joke and gentle teasing). When you see a team whose members are listening to one another and working well, hand out Hershey Kisses. Be encouraging. When a team finishes, record the time on the stopwatch and wait for the remaining teams to finish. Check the results of the winning team. At the end, applaud the winning team enthusiastically, allowing team members to bow and bask in glory. Then, hand out Milky Ways or Starbursts to everyone, because all of our youth are “out of this world.”

Note: If you need a teambuilding exercise or your pilgrims have been experiencing entrenched thinking, adapt the ending slightly. After everyone is finished, congratulate them. Notice that although the whole group is divided into teams, the instructions never say that youth had to work in their teams. A more efficient way to alphabetize would have been to divide the sixty-six books among teams in some manner—such as A–H, I–M, and N–Z—combining teams’ results and trusting the work of “opposing” teams. By automatically assuming a competition, each group alphabetized every book and duplicated one another’s work. *How might we learn from this activity?* End by handing out the Milky Ways or Starbursts and reaffirming the youth.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Shields for God and Wisdom (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Scripture provides us with an abundance of God’s wisdom. Wisdom is a shield that, when followed, protects us from harm and helps us make good choices. Read the activity and reflect on the questions, so you have a few observations prepared. The last portion, where the shield is drawn, could also be an individual activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read aloud Proverbs 2:1–8. There are many “action” phrases in this passage: “accept my words,” “treasure up my commandments,” “seek it like silver,” “stores up sound wisdom,” and so on. As a group, identify the various action phrases and consider what they mean in the passage’s context. Record them on newsprint or a whiteboard, if desired.

In the New Revised Standard Version, verses 6–8 state: “For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones.” *What does God shield? How can Wisdom shield us from harm? When is a shield a protective tool? When is a shield an excuse or harmful? If God’s shield were an actual object, how might it appear? Work on the description as a group, listening to each person’s input. Ask a volunteer to draw the ideas on the newsprint.*

5 GPS: God Provides Scripture

Leader preparation: Geocaching, a popular global sport, is a hide-and-seek treasure hunt using a GPS device (global positioning satellite). A cache (waterproof container) is hidden outdoors with a log book inside. There are around 5 million caches registered worldwide. The longitude and latitude coordinates are registered online, and the hunt begins. A seeker chooses the general area to search, downloads the coordinates, and begins looking for the treasure. Once found, the cache is opened and the discoverer’s name is recorded in the log book. The geocaching honor code (or rule) is that if you take something from the cache, you must leave something, such as a trinket or sticker or other small item.

This activity can be adapted for either of the Bible Focus Passages, or you can divide the group and use both passages. Proverbs speaks of hidden treasure, and Jesus asks disciples to “follow me” in the John passage. Read through the activity and decide how you would like to use it. *Note:* If your youth are geocache enthusiasts, create a cache that brings people to your church (must be outdoors) and has a welcoming message on the inside.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Geocaching, <http://tinyurl.com/3k9nfqu>
- paper
- drawing supplies, including markers, colored pencils, crayons
- scissors

When we seek treasure or try to follow someone, what do we need? (We usually need a map or directions.) For Christians, scripture provides guidance. As the words fill our hearts and minds, we also discover hidden treasures that impact and enrich our lives. Ask the youth to read silently the chosen Bible passage. Then ask them to read it aloud either softly to themselves or as a group. *How did you find the scripture?* (book, chapter, and verse information) *How do these verses provide guidance? What is being asked of disciples?*

Geocaching is a popular sport among people of all ages. It's global and fun. Add information from the Leader preparation, from the *Geocaching* website, or from your personal experience. *What could "GPS" mean in a faith community?* (Examples: God Provides Scripture or God's People Serve.) Scripture gives us longitude and latitude through book, chapter, and verse numbers. The information does not change. What changes may be our understanding. Service expands our understanding of others and of ourselves. Christian service is grounded in scripture. *What treasures are hidden in scripture? What would you like others to find? Create a geocache-styled trinket or coin to place in your Bible as a reminder that God's Word is the most valuable cache. God's Word is readily available, but understanding how it applies to your life may take some treasure hunting and repeated visits to the same location.*

6 Reenactment: Follow Me

Leader preparation: Read John 21:1–20 a few times so you understand the sequence of events. Consider reenacting the John passage outdoors, weather permitting. If desired, add fish and bread, either from the church oven or cooked with a grill or open flame. The disciples would have eaten with their hands, so keep any meal simple.

Supplies:

- “Sea of Galilee,” <http://tinyurl.com/y94qnhhr>
- Bibles
- (optional) fish or fish sticks
- (optional) pita or bread
- water or other beverage

It helps to have visuals when the Bible gives us a location. Youth tend to think of Israel as all desert or arid. Locate and share images of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) from the Internet, library books, or images from folks who have traveled there. Read aloud John 21:1–20 as a group. Then give each person a few minutes to read it silently. They will need to know the sequence of events. This is Jesus' third post-Resurrection appearance. *What is happening at the Sea of Tiberias? Who's there? Where is Jesus in the action?* Note that with Jesus there is abundance—fish stretching the nets to maximum, plenty of food. Note also that Jesus is modeling a way for us to take care of one another. *What requests did Jesus make? Why might the requests have been so vague?* When the group understands the passage, divide into the various parts and reenact it using their own words. If you are serving a meal, include it as part of the reenactment.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer: Diagnose Connection Problem (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the activity and try a few of the options. As a reminder, e-mail the options suggested to the youth after the gathering time.

Supplies: None

Have you ever tried to connect to the Internet and received the message “Diagnose Connection Problem”? What do you do? (Listen for responses.) Sometimes our prayer life seems to have the same message. Is the connection problem between you and God or between God and you or some combination (404 Error—God not found)? What are our options when we keep forgetting to pray, or we think we are too busy, or we can’t seem to find God in our lives? Using your computer presents some easy options to remind yourself of God’s presence in your lives. Experiment with these ideas and decide which options work best for you. Create different ideas and share them with one another. Here are a some possibilities.

- Try changing your password. Use a faith word or phrase you would like to practice, like “forgiveness” or “patience” or “cheerful giver.”
- Change your password to an acronym, such as WGATAP for “With God all things are possible.”
- Change your password to remind you of a Bible verse, such as 2Proverbs6.8 for Proverbs 2:6–8.
- Change your desktop background to remind you of your faith. It may be a picture of a cross, but it could also be an image that reminds you of God, such as any nature image or a photo of loved ones. Maybe a certain color reminds you of your faith. Select choices that are inspirational to you.
- Which music downloads have your attention? The words and sounds that fill your head do just that—they fill your head. Be mindful what you choose.
- Which Web comics, articles, and media programming do you access? If you are feeling as if the world is falling apart and God is absent, you may want to evaluate what you are viewing. Reducing the viewing of crime shows, slasher movies, pornography, and violent images may be helpful. You chose what your eyes see on the computer.
- Note the words you use on social networking sites and when posting comments. Do your comments reflect a Christian understanding that everyone is a beloved child of God?
- Check your denominational website and learn whether there are daily or weekly devotionals that can be sent to you. Perhaps the website has a teen blog site or a page for prayer requests. If not, suggest it and help the denomination create a teen-friendly option.
- Your choice! This week add at least one additional idea.

8 Spiritual: Guide My Feet

Leader preparation: Learn this very singable hymn “Guide My Feet” and be prepared for the activity. Also be prepared for the fourth verse, which begins “I’m your child while I run this race.” This verse is sometimes difficult for youth in foster care or in difficult home situations. In both cases, older youth are close to “aging out” of the system or the home. The word “while” makes God’s love seem conditional. Be affirming that we are always children of God and we are always loved. If you are a new guide, ask your pastor if there are caring ministry concerns for your pilgrims that are important for you to know.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Guide My Feet” (tune: Guide My Feet, 8.8.8.10.), www.tinyurl.com/fp-feet
- (optional) someone or some way to play the music

Sing, clap, and dance the spiritual “Guide My Feet.” *What race are we running? Why would we not want to run this race in vain? What’s the prize in this race?* Create additional three-syllable verses, such as: Sit with me (while I run this race), or Heal my grief, or Give me strength. Sing some or all of the created verses. *During the week think of the ways God already guides your feet, as well as areas where you need God to guide your feet.*

9 Valuables: What Do You Seek?

Leader preparation: This activity can be adapted to any verse. A goal of Faith Practices is to introduce ways to encounter scripture that can be used for any verse. The practice *Encountering Scripture* focuses on twelve Bible passages, so there are many uncovered options.

Supplies:

- Bible

Encourage youth to read Proverbs 2:1–8 every day this week. *Read it at different times of the day, send yourself an e-mail or a reminder text or record the verses and listen with your favorite portable device. During the week pay attention to what you seek, what you treasure, and what’s important to you. Pay attention to how you respond if God is calling you versus a friend or family member calling you. Immerse yourself in this part of Proverbs, and listen to what God brings to the surface, to your attention.*

Reflect

“Jesus tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Bob, why are you resisting me?’ I said, ‘I’m not resisting you!’ He said, ‘You gonna follow me?’ I said, ‘I’ve never thought about that before!’ He said, ‘When you’re not following me, you’re resisting me.’” Bob Dylan (1941–) once said this on stage. When do you follow Christ? When do you resist Christ? How can you help your youth pilgrims be followers, disciples of Christ?

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About this Age Group

Many older youth purchase a Bible for the first time when they need it for a literature class. Many youth do not have a Bible in their home. Youth who attend our faith communities often read printed devotionals or listen to Christian music but do not open the Bible. Some youth leaders create programs where biblical themes are highlighted but where youth do not physically open a Bible and locate the reference(s). Our challenge is to create an excitement about the Bible and the guiding role of scripture in our lives. We need to literally and figuratively open the Book so they know how to access God's relationship with God's people throughout history. They need to know how much Jesus loves them and the covenants between God and us. Encountering scripture in a variety of ways will be a new practice for many, if not most, older youth. Being a Christian without reading the Bible is like a tree remaining upright without its roots—unstable and easily blown over.

About this Exploration

Christian scripture includes books from the Hebrew tradition as well as New Testament stories of Jesus and the early church. Some Christian traditions also include the Apocrypha. Through a divine and human process, scripture is gathered in the Bible. As Christians, we believe that scripture is the living word of God. It is central to our faith as individuals and as a community. In our encounter with scripture, God meets us and we meet God. Scripture is our family story, holding us together in Christian community. These sacred texts help us to listen in our diversity and to find common language amid

controversy. We actively engage with the Bible—sometimes we challenge and struggle with scripture and sometimes scripture challenges and unsettles us. Because the Bible has been used to judge, condemn, or hurt, we have a responsibility and a calling as God’s people to remove fear, distrust, and disempowerment and to move toward confidence, empowerment, and love.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1–41
Psalms 116

Leader Preparation

Read the activities and enjoy selecting choices that will engage your pilgrims. Helping youth develop a comfort level with scripture is important. You are using this Faith Practice resource to help them develop a lifelong interest in the Bible. Even if they don’t remember everything you said or every activity, they will remember that the Bible was important to you. They will remember that scripture has answers and guiding words for every stage of their life.

Prayer: *“O God, we hold this treasure from you, its source divine, a light that to all ages throughout the earth will shine; It is the chart and compass that all life’s voyage through, ‘mid mists and rocks and tempest, still guides, O God, to you.” Amen.*

—From “O Word of God Incarnate,” v. 2 (tune: Munich 7.6.7.6.D)

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Wrapped in God’s Love (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Scripture challenges, heals, and restores us. Page after page, book after book, God’s love is wrapped in scripture along with God’s desire for a relationship with us. If you have blankets or other textiles at home that are important to you, consider sharing them with the youth (such as a handkerchief from a wedding or funeral, a beautiful quilt, your favorite shirt from college). The extra textiles are optional.

Supplies:

- blanket

In the 2 Kings passage, Elijah’s mantle remained for Elisha. After Elijah departs, Elisha puts on Elijah’s mantle and begins a different stage of his ministry. The mantle reminded him of his roots with God, his roots with his mentor, and his call to ministry. *Which textiles or pieces of clothing are meaningful to you? Where in your faith community do textiles help tell the faith story?* (pastor’s robe and stole, wall hangings, altar cloth, napkin in communion basket) Bring the blanket forward, and remind the group that scripture is God’s word for us today and every day. God’s love for us is wrapped in scripture. Give one person the Bible to hold. Place the blanket around that person’s shoulders and say: “You are wrapped in God’s love every day.” That person hands the Bible to the next person, takes off the blanket, and wraps it around the next person, saying the same sentence. Continue around the group until everyone has held the Bible and has been wrapped in the blanket.

2 Bethlehem: The Word Became Flesh

Leader preparation: This activity is effective during any season. If you are unable to locate a manger, create one from tri-folded paper so that the paper remains upright. Add some grass or sand in front, and the youth can imagine the rest. If you have youth who are new to the Christian faith and who may not have a manger image to recall, print one or find the Christmas expert for your community who knows where everything is stored. You may place more than one manger around the room, so more than one person can “visit” Bethlehem.

Supplies:

- manger with baby Jesus or an empty manger
- chair

A manger is a trough for feeding livestock, such as pigs. In the John passage, “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” The Word became flesh, was wrapped in swaddling clothes by poor parents, and laid in a manger. Give the sojourners time to travel in their imagination to the manger and to sit with Jesus. *How do you adore this baby? What are your expectations of this baby? What can this baby expect from you? What gifts do you have to give to Jesus?*



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.



3 Marbling: In the beginning

Leader preparation: This activity is a contained mess that also smells wonderful. Read the through the activity and make a few marbled designs. The end designs may be used another time as cards for any occasion, or they may be sold as a youth-group fundraiser. People of all ages enjoy making and receiving these designs. Prepare the marbling area ahead of your gathering time, so the focus can be on the activity and not on set up. The shaving cream step will need to be done by the youth because fresh foam works the best. You will also need a flat drying space.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3
- “How to Paint Marbled Paper Using Shaving Cream,” <http://tinyurl.com/6xlwrm>
- shaving cream (the basic, no special additives kind)—one can per four youth
- table knife or squeegee
- liquid food coloring
- toothpicks
- card stock (must be smaller than the pan)
- trash cans with liners

Have youth view “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess while someone reads John 1:1–14. Ask another person to read the John passage again. *What parts of the passage speak to you today? What does this passage tell us about God? about Jesus? about the Word? about the world? about children of God? How could this image be an illustration for the John passage?*

In the beginning God was creating, celebrating, and reveling in the process. Following the directions from the website referenced in the Supplies list, make marbled cards using shaving cream and food coloring. After the card is placed on the swirled colors, youth should lift it carefully. There will be enough remaining color for two or three more cards. Make sure youth remove the excess shaving cream with a flat knife or squeegee and throw the excess in the trash. (You can use the excess as “paint,” but that’s an additional mess and the blended colors sometimes make the shaving cream murky.) Repeat as desired. Remind the youth that cleaning up is part of the creative process. While cleaning up, discuss how the designs could be used so your pilgrims can be a “light” shining in the darkness.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Sacred Metaphor: Children of God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on John 1:12–13. “Child of God” or “Children of God” is a phrase we hear frequently in worship and in everyday dialogue among believers. When parents or guardians complete school emergency medical forms, various registration forms or a passport for a child, they do not write “God” in the parental information section. “Child of God” is a metaphor describing our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us. For Christians, this relationship is sacred, real, and fundamental to our Christian beliefs. The metaphor is sacred. This metaphor is also sacred in other faith traditions.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint and markers

Read aloud John 1: 1–14. Read this aloud even if you have worked with the John passage in another activity. Hear it in this setting. In the New Revised Standard Version, John 1:12–13 reads: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. Eugene Peterson’s contemporary language version, *The Message*, reads: “But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, he made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten.” Use these or similar questions to prompt discussion.

- What are the criteria to be a child of God?
- How is “child of God” a metaphor? (You may want to add information from the Leader preparation.)
- How is this metaphor sacred?
- What other metaphors are in the John passage? Record each metaphor and note why that metaphor is sacred.)

Conclude by asking pilgrims to close their eyes as you read aloud John 1:1–14 (from your preferred translation).

5 Acting it Out: Elijah and Elisha

Leader preparation: Read through the activity and know the sequence of events in the 2 Kings passage. Consider your room logistics and where best to offer this activity. Make sure all adult guides participate. If you have a small group, adapt the activity for your group. Example: Use the same prophet in Bethel and Jericho, dressing plainly one place and adding a belt or sash in the other city. Use one horse and one person for the chariot. Or, double-team youth. Acting as a fiery chariot will look very different from acting as a prophet, so no one is going to be confused. Label index cards or small sheets of paper with one item per sheet: God, Elijah, Elisha, river (1 or 2 cards), horses (2–4 cards), fiery chariot (2–4 cards), whirlwind (1–2 cards), prophets at Bethel (any number of cards), prophets at Jericho (any number of cards). If you have a large group, add townspeople or business owners in Bethel and Jericho.

Supplies:

- Bible
- index cards or small sheets of paper
- yarn, ribbon, costumes, belts, or simple items that could be used to differentiate characters
- 1–2 pairs of scissors
- bag, basket, or hat from which to draw the cards
- road signs (labeled Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal)

Give everyone a Bible. Read aloud 2 Kings 2:1–14 (select a youth to read it, or more than one youth). Then, ask them to read the passage silently. It’s important that they know the sequence of events. Ask questions such as: *What happened between Gilgal and Bethel? What happened in Bethel? What should we remember about the travels from Bethel to Jericho? What happened at the Jordan River?* Fill in the gaps as needed. Then ask someone or a couple people to read the passage one more time.

Invite the group to participate in a silent skit. Place the parts for the skit in a bag. Make sure you have a part for every youth and every adult. Give the instructions for the skit: Each person is to draw a piece of paper from the bag. That is his or her part. Youth are not to show the paper to anyone else or say the part aloud. They also cannot text the part to anyone in the group. Finally, there is no trading of parts. The simple supplies are available for use, as desired. As the youth silently act out their parts, they are to find others with whom to form a group. When the groups have gathered, they need to silently determine where in the room their parts should be located. If the road signs are up or on a table, the youth will be able to figure this out. Once in groups and at the location, youth need to decide silently how to act together (how to be a whirlwind, how to be a river that can divide, how God is communicating to Elijah, and so on). You will probably also be the director, so you will need to motion the start of the silent skit.

6 Newspaper Blackout Poem: John Passage

Leader preparation: Read the John 1:1–14. Cut newspaper pages so they are individual pages, not the double pages. Try to not include pages that are mostly advertisements or have limited text, such as comics. Pages mixed with articles and ads will work well. Newspaper poems can be created with any kind of dark marker, but magazines need permanent markers. Create a “blackout poem” inspired by the Gospel text. *Note:* This activity can also be adapted to the 2 Kings passage.

Supplies:

- Bible
- dark markers, permanent or water-based
- newspaper or news magazines
- Austin Kleon’s photo gallery, <http://tinyurl.com/yb537ml>
- flashlight for reading (or enough light coming through a window)

In a darkened room, read aloud the John passage. Pause. Read it again, or ask someone else to read it. You may use different translations. (If you have someone afraid of the dark, consider reading by candlelight or having that person hold a flashlight.) Turn on the lights.

At a table, ask people to select any newspaper page. Tell them they are creating a poem, inspired by the John passage but using the words in front of them. Show your example, or show an example from Austin Kleon’s website. They are to select the words they want in their poem and then darken everything around it. The “light” of the poem emerges from the darkness.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Miracles: Striking the Water (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This is a memorable activity that can be reused when there are moments of celebration (college acceptance letters, leaving for the military, graduation) and in times of sadness (death, moving for a parent’s job, suicide, difficult diagnosis). If you use this activity occasionally, youth will remember that they want to “strike” the water before traversing the river.

Supplies:

- Bible
- two long, parallel rows of chairs

Explain that the rows of chairs represent the Jordan River. Read aloud the 2 Kings passage. Explain to the pilgrims that Elijah struck the water and it parted, then Elisha struck it and the river parted. The prophets knew that they needed to part the water, and they knew that God would be there to provide safe passage. We may not experience literally passing through a river, but all of us pass through rivers metaphorically. We get driver's licenses, graduate, join the military, go to college, or look for work. Some of us get married, and some of us will parent a child. We have relationships that may need mending. We may need to care for ourselves better. Regardless of the issue, we need to make decisions, and we need God's guidance as we journey through the river.

Before the youth "strike the river," they need to decide where they would like God's help. One by one, each person acts out striking the river. Then that person walks through the Jordan River and waits on the other side, prayerfully. After everyone has passed, say a prayer of thanks for safe passage. A possible prayer could be: *God, thank you for journeying with us. Thank you for keeping the walls of water, our fears, our tough decisions, and our concerns safely to the side so we could pray and think as we crossed the river. Thank you for this miracle. Amen.* You may end the activity here or continue.

When Elijah was whisked away, Elisha grieved. He tore his clothes and put on Elijah's mantle. He knew that Elijah was leaving and that the trip from Gilgal through the Jordan River would be their last walk and conversation. The walk coming over was a walk of letting go—letting go of personal contact, letting go of advice, letting go of depending on Elijah for instructions, letting go of having a friend to hang around with. Elisha's reality was changed, and he needed to move forward, trusting God. To make good decisions we may need to let go of preconceived notions, unrealistic expectations, peer pressure, parental pressure, self-pressure, a relationship. *You are a different person on this side of the river. What do you need God to help you change so you are ready to move forward on the other bank?* As they think about that question, strike and walk through the river, returning as you came. One by one, the youth do the same.

When everyone has passed, close with a prayer such as this: *God, we know you are always with us. We are passing through a lot of rivers these days. It seems every month has another big decision or daily decisions that impact future options. Keep us constantly aware that you are with us on this journey, pushing back the waters and creating safe passage. Remind us to strike the water so we invite you at the beginning and we are conscious of your presence on this journey. If we forget, make us mindful of your presence midway through the river and make us aware that, without asking, you already parted the waters. Amen.*

8 Bible Interpretation: Moral Imagination

Leader preparation: Our older-youth pilgrims will soon be moving away from high school and into a more independent life. They will meet other people who have different religious viewpoints from their own. Understanding differences in biblical interpretation, how scripture is understood, and how Christians can disagree respectfully is an important tool. If this activity will cause tension among your pilgrims, you may refer to the "respect" guidelines. The Bible has stood the test of time because Christians have been able to discern God's Word generation upon generation. The struggles with scripture are not limited to the 21st century. A brief history of Christianity highlights conflicts in scriptural interpretations.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

In his book *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2000), Eric H. F. Law, of the Kaleidoscope Institute, includes these RESPECT guidelines:

- R take responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E engage in empathetic listening
- S be sensitive to different communication styles
- P ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- E examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- C keep confidentiality
- T trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

You may read this, or create a variation: Peter Gomes in *The Good Book* (New York: Avon, 1996) writes a chapter about “The Bible and Race.” He uses it as an example of “an unchanged text with changed thinking.” His discussion is probably the most understandable brief history of race and religion. He notes that the Bible does not condemn slavery, neither the Hebrew scriptures nor the New Testament, not the patriarchs, prophets, or Jesus. Both sides of the Civil War (1861–1865) firmly believed that their interpretation of the Bible was correct. The Southern Christians said that the Bible supported slavery. The Northern Christians used other passages to argue against slavery. President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation at the end of the Civil War, but that was not the end. In the 1960s Martin Luther King, Jr., was asked to cease his leadership in the civil rights movement because his actions were unbiblical. Gomes asserts that Northern Christians and Civil Rights advocates used “moral imagination” through which scripture was read through the lenses of a contemporary context or setting, instead of literally. During the summer of 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, apologized publicly for its role in justifying slavery and segregation.

“In the beginning” God was living and creating. Through the Holy Spirit Christians may experience the living God while reading ancient texts. The Bible is not archaic and it is not irrelevant. It is the Christian’s sacred book, dynamic and essential. On many issues the wisdom of the Bible is the wisdom of today. On other issues, like slavery, Christians may choose to allow the Holy Spirit to guide them as they discern the Bible in a different context. Pose these or similar questions to guide the discussion:

- What issues before Christians today need moral imagination?
- What issues need to be literally interpreted?
- How do we discern when the Holy Spirit is guiding the conversation?
- How do we listen to opinions different from ours so everyone is honored as a child of God?

Challenge the youth to reflect on the issues noted in this activity during the week.



9 Litany: Light Shining in the Darkness

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write your own litany. The litany will need to be projected or printed with copies to share.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “A Litany of Darkness and Light,” Attachment: Activity 9
- paper and pens/pencils

Review the John 1:1–14. *When has God been a light shining in the darkness of your life? Where do you need a light now?* Pray “A Litany of Darkness and Light” together. Then have youth write their own litanies by selecting a phrase or sentence for people to repeat and then writing the rest of the prayer. Have youth share their prayers with the entire group.

Reflect

“Most people are bothered by those passages of scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand,” wrote Mark Twain (1835–1910). Which scripture passages challenge you the most? How do you address that challenge? Which activities did you and your youth sojourners enjoy? What did all of you learn about encountering scripture?

Attachment: Activity 9

A Litany of Darkness and Light

- I. We wait in the darkness, expectantly, longingly, anxiously, thoughtfully.
- II. The darkness is our friend. In the darkness of the womb, we have all been nurtured and protected. In the darkness of the womb, the Christ child was made ready for the journey into light.

All: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

- I. Only in the darkness can we see the splendor of the universe—blankets of stars, the solitary glowing of distant planets.
- II. The darkness allowed the Magi to find the star that guided them to where the Christ child lay.

All: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

- I. In the darkness of night, desert peoples find relief from the cruel, relentless heat of the sun.
- II: In the blessed desert darkness, Mary and Joseph were able to flee with the infant Jesus to safety in Egypt.

All: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

- I. In the darkness of sleep, we are soothed and restored, healed and renewed.
- II. In the darkness of sleep, dreams rise up. God spoke to Jacob and Joseph through dreams. God is still speaking.

All: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

- I. In the solitude of darkness, we sometimes remember those who need God's presence in a special way—the sick, the unemployed, the bereaved, the persecuted, the homeless, those who are demoralized and discouraged, those whose fear has turned to cynicism, those whose vulnerability has become bitterness.

All: You are with us, O God, in darkness and in light.

- I. Sometimes, in the solitude of darkness, our fears and concerns, our hopes and our visions rise to the surface. We come face to face with ourselves and with the road that lies ahead of us. And in that same darkness, we find companionship for the journey.
- II: In that same darkness, we sometimes allow ourselves to wonder and worry whether the human race is going to survive.

All: We know you are with us, O God, yet we still await your coming. In the darkness that contains both our hopelessness and our expectancy, we watch for a sign of God's hope.

Source: This litany was written by members of the Department of Parish Development and Mission, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Older youth understand that there are rules for participation. They know the rules at school, in their various organizations, and where they work. Some youth have rules at home; others barely have any. Youth become cynical of churches when they see one set of rules applied to adults and another (usually more stringent) set of rules applied to youth and children. Christian discipleship is a choice. Yes, there are guidelines and rules. These rules are fairly predictable—no harming anyone, no lying, worshipping God, and so on. There's a lot of freedom as a disciple. We determine how and where God is calling us. We determine our day to day choices and how we respond to and with people and nature. God empowers us, and how we respond demonstrates our style of discipleship as well as our commitment.

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
Acts 8:26–40

Leader Preparation

Discipleship is created from our choices to be on God’s team day by day. We read scripture, try to discern how to proceed, and act as we feel called. Saying we are a disciple is not that difficult. Committing to discipleship and having our life reflect Jesus to the world is an intentional decision. Read the various activities and create options that best serve your sojourners.

Prayer: *Gracious and Loving God, give me the assurance that I am on your team. Being a disciple is hard work, and some days I’m not quite sure I’m doing a good job. Grant me an abundance of patience and a ready sense of humor as I witness your love for me and all people. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1 No One Is An Island (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Review the quotation from John Donne below and, if possible, the video “Mankind is No Island, the 2008 Tropfest winner. Your group may need to see the video more than once. The slides and text change quickly. A popular 17th-century religious writing inspired Jason van Genderen, an artist, to make the video. We never know how God uses the work of God’s disciples.

Supplies:

- (optional) video: “Mankind is No Island,” <http://tinyurl.com/4j68os>

Read aloud the following quotation from John Donne. Consider asking any of the questions to prompt discussion.

The church is catholic, universal, as are all its actions; all that it does belongs to all. When it baptized a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and engrafted into that body whereof I am a member. And when it buries someone, that action concerns me: all of us are of one another, and are one volume. . . .

No man is an island, entire of itself, everyone is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

—John Donne (1573–1631), Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London; from *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*

What is the general theme of the Donne quotation? What does the line “for whom the bell tolls” mean to you? For Donne, why is no person an island?

Option: The video is the 2008 Tropfest Winner. Tropfest is an international festival of short films that originated in Australia. After the three-and-a-half-minute video (perhaps with two viewings), debrief with open ended questions such as: *What do you think of the video? Where is discipleship needed in our community? Where is the bell tolling for you? Where are you feeling called to be a disciple?* Show the video again.

 **2 Reflections on Baptism**

Leader Preparation: Every Christian community celebrates baptism and communion. Review the activity and create your own reflection. You may also want to review the liturgy your community uses when it baptizes an individual.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West <https://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR3>
- Bible
- paper and pencils

Encountering Scripture

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.

Place the artwork “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West where youth can easily see it, or gather youth around the image. Give them a few minutes to gaze at it, allowing their eyes to wander. There’s a lot to view and absorb. Then read Acts 8:26–40, or ask a few youth to read the passage. *What is extraordinary about the Acts passage?* (There are many options.) *What do you know about baptism?*

Invite the youth to write a reflection on baptism, either their own or a baptism they have witnessed. Write using the letters as a guide. Here’s an example written by Maren Tirabassi in *Daybook for New Voices* for March 20 (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004).

Back before many of us remember, we were touched with water and blessed.

All of our family was present, and the church invited us into its faith.

People offered to bless and keep us safe and to raise us to be the best people we can be.

The minister asked that God watch over us as with all who ask for God’s guidance and **love**.

In every church, baptism is different, but the idea remains the same.

Some part of our hearts will forever be touched by the love of our families and of God.

Mighty is the power of loving and gentle faith in the lives of children.

We Are Dancing Sarah’s Circle

Leader preparation: This song is one of the three hymns used in every age group and setting of *Encountering Scripture*. The words are sung to the tune used for “We are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.”

Supplies:

- hymn: “We are Dancing Sarah’s Circle” (tune: Jacob’s Ladder, 8.8.8.5.)
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ladder>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Write the verses of the song on the newsprint or whiteboard. Then prompt discussion by using important lines from the hymn.

- “We are dancing Sarah’s circle.” Why would a circle be an image for faith or for a faith community? Why dancing?
- “Here we seek and find our story.” In the church there is room for your story, wherever you are on life’s journey. We believe that your story can help us understand God’s story.
- “We will all do our own naming.” (Youth usually like this verse because they want to do their own naming.) Who are you? How do you identify yourself? What would you name yourself?
- “Every round a generation.” The Christian faith is important our entire lives. It’s not just something we do to make family happy during confirmation. Scripture, worship, praise, service, caring—it’s lifelong and it’s a privilege. Who are the people from other generations who most influence your faith?
- “On and on the circle’s moving.” Where is the circle going? What’s next? Why might this hymn be sung to remind us of discipleship?

Sing the entire hymn, swaying and dancing.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Extravagant Love: Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Note the extravagant love in all the relationships. Even though Orpah and Ruth made different choices, both loved Naomi. Orpah loved her enough to follow her wishes and return to her family. Ruth loved her enough to return to Judah, a different homeland and different religion. Honor all examples of love.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Take turns reading aloud the first chapter of Ruth. *After the first reading, what words or ideas jumped out and seemed to say, “Pay attention to me”? Why do you think those words or ideas are in your thoughts?* Read the chapter again, this time pausing whenever there is an example of a loving or caring choice. (Begin with Elimelech caring for his family and the family moving.) Record each example on newsprint or a whiteboard. *How is Ruth different from a BFF, Best Friend Forever? How might Ruth have felt hearing Naomi call herself Mara, meaning bitter, when she had made personal sacrifices for Naomi out of love? What are examples from your life where you or a family member made a sacrifice out of love?* (Caring for elderly relatives or a relative who is ill, helping care for younger siblings, working to supplement a family’s income, going to a college closer to home so you can reside at home, a parent turning down a job that requires a lot of travel)

5 Molas: Layers of Understanding

Leader preparation: Read through the activity and the background information, and view the link. This activity can be used for either Ruth 1 or Acts 8:26–40. In this activity, youth will create a *mola* from paper, not the traditional fabric. Prior to your gathering time, create a paper *mola*.

The Kuna women are part of an indigenous matriarchal society along the northern coast of Panama, the San Blas Islands. They have unique textile designs called *molas*. A *mola* is a decorative panel on the front of a woman’s blouse. The pattern is created by exposing colors through layers of fabric. Usually the fabric is stacked, and the design is cut in a small area, hemmed, and sewed to the layer beneath it. The careful cutting of four to five colors reveals an intricate design. This technique is type of negative appliqué, in which the design is exposed by what is removed. Some artists also use positive appliqué, in which a shape is cut and sewn on top of the fabric. (This technique is common in North American quilting.) If you think a negative appliqué technique will be too difficult, adapt to the positive technique where shapes are cut and then glued to the background.

Supplies:

- Bible
- <http://tinyurl.com/3fyspop>
- construction paper, three or four sheets per person
- pointed scissors (small scissors like those used for sewing or trimming fingernails work well)
- glue
- paint brushes to apply the glue
- sharpened pencils

- pins to put small holes in the paper
- flat surface for drying

Read either the Ruth or Acts passage. (If you have read both texts, invite the youth to choose which text is their focus for this activity.) Think of simple, meaningful image for each passage. For Ruth 1, it may be a road to indicate journeys, a heart for the love between the women, or tears of grief and parting. For Acts 8:26–40, it may be a scroll or a Bible for the Word of God, or a river for baptism or the road or chariot image for journey. Share some of the images from the link in the Supplies list. Each person will want to select one image. The main image will represent the chosen Bible text, and that will be the central image in the *mola*. Then youth will create a geometric design for the surrounding areas. This activity uses negative space, where the pattern is revealed from what is removed. *While working on the design, you may want to ponder what you may need to cut away from your life to become a more faithful disciple or to become more like a biblical figure. If you chose to cut away limiting behaviors, what patterns and colors of discipleship might be revealed?*

Have youth follow this procedure to create their *molos*.

1. Select three or four colors of construction paper. These will be your design colors. Put them in the desired order.
2. Lightly trace your main image and background patterns on the paper. Decide which color will be each detail.
3. Using a pin, gently poke holes in the paper.
4. Remove the paper and carefully cut your design.
5. Replace the paper and poke the holes for the details from the next layer.
6. Remove the sheet and cut the design.
7. Repeat the process of tracing, poking, and cutting until the pattern is as desired.
8. Then, using a brush for application, glue the layers of cut paper together, beginning from the bottom and gluing upward.



6 Music and Discussion: Abundance vs. Scarcity

Leader preparation: Review the activity, and watch the video included in the Supplies list. Think through the questions. Are you a person who views life with a sense of abundance? Or, do you view life with a sense of scarcity? This activity involves discussing loss. If you are new to your congregation, check with your pastor or previous youth volunteers so you know the caring ministry needs of your pilgrims. If you are uncomfortable discussing loss because of a recent personal loss, ask someone else to lead this discussion.

It's important for youth to know that faith communities do not gloss over loss. We listen, we hold people in prayer, we help when appropriate, and we support one another—through good and bad times. Youth are accustomed to being accepted only during good times—when grades are good, when they are the section chair in orchestra, when they are part of the cast, when they score a touchdown. They know how quickly a person can go from being a hero to being an embarrassment. The fact that faith communities remain supportive is not a well-known aspect of church life, and it is one that will surprise many youth.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- video: “Kutless—What Faith Will Do,” <http://tinyurl.com/y9fwcy7>

- artwork: “Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab” by William Blake

<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apwb>

In Ruth 1, there are many layers of loss. Read the chapter aloud once. Then reread it, pausing to record the various losses that the characters experienced. Consider the character’s emotions at each stage. View the Blake image and determine which scene is being illustrated. People who view the world with a sense of abundance tend to think that everything will work out, that there’s plenty for everyone, and that the losses they endure make them stronger and more resilient. Their faith sustains, comforts, and heals them because they are reminded of God’s abundant grace and love. Folks who view the world with a sense of scarcity tend to think that a loss is another trauma in a cycle of trauma, that they are being penalized, and that there is not enough for all people. Scarcity-thinking people tend to blame God or the church for their loss. (Note that Naomi changed her name to Mara, meaning “bitter.”) Each youth and adult volunteer probably knows people who fall into each category.

How do we experience loss? Who provides support? Ask youth to reflect for a few moments on their own experiences of loss or transition. You may need to facilitate by giving examples: a geographic relocation, the death of a pet or loved one, a rejection from a college or a part in a play or being on a team, unemployment, health challenges or disability, moving an elderly relative to a retirement or nursing home, or breaking up with a friend.

Listen to the Kutless song “What Faith Will Do.” Close with a prayer. You may use this, if desired: *God you feel our pain and hear our cries. We don’t always understand why things happen, but we trust that there are other options, even if we don’t see them. Thank you for those who are supportive and who care about us. Give us the faith to realize that we are always in your loving embrace. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities

7 World Communion: Everyone Is Invited (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: God wants everyone to be part of God’s family, 100 percent inclusive. Ruth 1 and Acts 8:26–40 are wonderful reminders of that. Many faith communities celebrate World Communion on the first Sunday in October. The focus is usually on global faith communities and our mutual belief in Christ. Whether you worship somewhere in October that has snow or record high temperatures, whether you worship in a cathedral or have open sky as your roof, whether your community has five members or five thousand members, all are welcome. Through imagination we bring everyone to the communion table.

This church celebration is powerful for youth on a different level. Your youth group this year will not be your youth group next year. People will move, go to college, join the military or make other life transitions. Making a commitment to participate in World Communion Sunday is a promise youth enjoy making. It connects them with “the home church” as well as their friends, regardless of their age and regardless of their location. It is not difficult to send electronic reminders, and it is easy to add more people. Add the announcement in the September newsletter so parents and youth remember their commitment. Consider keeping

a world map in a main area and mark where your youth are each year. Within five years you will probably mark cities all over the world.

Supplies:

- Bible

In Ruth 1, God needed Ruth, a Moabite woman who was new to the Jewish faith. King David is descended from Ruth, so she is part of Jesus' lineage. In the Acts passage Philip converted the Ethiopian court official, a foreigner and eunuch who knew very little about Jesus before meeting Philip. In both cases God needed people who were on the outside, not part of any religious circles or religious leadership. God welcomes everyone. Reflect on what you know about biblical figures and how God accepts them with their flaws. List some examples (Sarah laughing when she learned she was pregnant, David guilty of adultery and murder, Paul not originally a friend of Christians). God forgives and keeps us on the team. *Who can you invite to our faith community who may be on the outside? What would you like them to attend—a concert, worship, youth retreat, mission project, or something else? When will you invite that person or family? How do you intend to invite them?*

On World Communion Sunday, usually the first Sunday in October, we celebrate that God's table stretches all around the world. Every Christian community celebrates communion that day. *That also includes all of you as you live in different locations, accept internships, and live your adult life. Can we make a commitment to worship the first Sunday in October every year? (Don't force anyone, but plant a very large suggestion.) After worshipping, send the church a quick e-mail or note so we know where you are and how many other people you were able to join on World Communion Sunday. Let's have that Sunday as a time to reconnect, even if we are not physically in the same sanctuary, and to remember how our faith unites us. This congregation makes a commitment to pray for you. Please pray for us. God includes everyone—you, me, and everyone we know.*



8 Water Music: Baptism

Leader preparation: This activity is so much fun that you may just start using water and glasses as your new keyboard (for simple tunes). Try this at home so you can encourage your pilgrims.

Hint: The more water, the deeper the tone. The youth may create their own baptism tune, or use "When I was Baptized," or both.

Supplies:

- eight water glasses per team, same size per team (smooth-sided inexpensive glasses work well)
- one pitcher of water per team
- one towel per team
- blank paper
- pencils
- spoons
- "When I Was Baptized," Attachment: Activity 8

Tell each team to set the eight empty glasses in a row and pour water to a different level in each glass to create tones for an octave. The first glass should have just a little water, the last should almost be full, and the ones in between should have slightly more than the last. This process is so much easier if the lowest note is on one end of the row and the highest note on another end. Tap the spoon gently on the glass ("gently" is a key adverb.) The glass with the most water will have the lowest tone, while the glass with the least water will have the highest.

Challenge teams to create a simple tune and words for a baptism song or use the praise hymn “When I was Baptized.” The tune can be played on the water glasses while people sing along. Have teams share the tunes they created. Encourage the pilgrims to continue experimenting with tunes and words during the week.

9 Affirmations: What We Believe

Leader preparation: Each affirmation in this activity will probably be different. Steer away from the standard affirmations often included in worship and, probably, in the hymnal. For us to be comfortable speaking about our faith, we need to do the thinking, and we need to use our own words. Write your own affirmation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pencils or pens

Read aloud Acts 8:26–40. Most of us are not persuasive speakers like Philip. All of us, however, have the ability to tell people about Jesus and how God’s promises with God’s people through the ages. All of us can describe how the Holy Spirit works in our life. Maybe we speak words, dance, sing, are awed by nature, draw or sculpt, or we serve faithfully. Sometimes it’s hard to get the conversation started because we are not sure what we believe. Philip knew and he was ready to tell the Ethiopian about Jesus. Start this activity now and continue it during the week.

Provide paper and pens or pencils and give the youth time to write a word or statement to complete each of the following phrases:

- I believe that God . . .
- I believe that Jesus . . .
- I believe that the Holy Spirit . . .
- I believe that the church . . .
- I believe it is important to live as Christ’s disciple . . .

Your answers are called “affirmations.” You affirm what you believe. If you know what you believe, wherever you are on your faith journey, you will have a less difficult time speaking with others about your faith.

Reflect

“Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too,” wrote Frederick Buechner (1926–). Where are you feeling like Ruth, needing to move to a different location and try on a new way of being? Where are you feeling like the Ethiopian, recognizing a need for God’s grace and welcome?

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Attachment: Activity 8

When I Was Baptized

$\text{♩} = 100$

F B \flat add \flat /D C 7 B \flat F/C Dmadd \flat Dm/C G 7 /B

When I was bap-tized the wa-ter was so
I Lou Pa - pa - ti - so - ga Le va - i - e Pa -

Gm/B \flat C 7 Gm Eb/F C 7 /E A 7 /C \sharp D G 7

ho - ly. It spark - led in my hair and
- i - a Fepu - la - fi - i o - u Lu - ga E - ma -

F/C B \flat /C C 7 F C 7 Dm

washed me clean and new. Liv - ing Wa - ter, Liv - ing
- ma ai e faa - va - vau; Va - i O - la, Va - i

C 7 C 7 /E Gdim/F Gm C/B \flat F/A F C 7 F

Wa - ter: this is the well so deep to drink; Liv - ing
O - la, Le vai mai Lu - ga ete i - nu ai; Va - i

C 7 Dm C 7 F C 7 /G F/A Gm/B \flat

Wa - ter, Liv - ing Wa - ter; this is the well, the
O - la, Va - i, O - la: Le vai mai Lu - ga E

F/C C F F C 7 /G F/A C 7

well so deep.
faa - va - vau.

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 Music: Lauaki Agaiotupo Pouesi
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Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

While older youth may make chiding comments about tradition, they also don't want a chaotic worship service. They like knowing that seniors are honored in a special way every spring and they like the church rituals surrounding confirmation or baptism. They like returning to mission trip locations so they can see how other groups have helped and to see the local friends they made the previous year. They like knowing that youth retreats have some unstructured time so they can nap, take a walk, chat with friends, or finish some homework. They want variety, and they want stability. Thankfully, traditions in faith communities offer both options.

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

Leader Preparation

Tradition has its own blessings. Your gathering time may be determined by tradition. Select activities that stretch tradition while honoring its role in our faith communities. Spend a few minutes reflecting on which traditions drive you crazy, which traditions you don't understand, and which traditions bring you comfort.

Prayer: Through the ages, you have gifted us with people willing to share their faith as your disciples. Thank you for the wonderful souls who bake bread, hold infants, preach, usher, tend gardens, and hold our hands. Thank you for devoted musicians and artists, spiritual guides and teachers, administrators and custodians. Through the ages all have told your story in their unique way, and they have passed their love of you to us. Grant me gratitude for their example and a cheerful heart to join the procession. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Greetings: What Are You Really Saying? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the activity and notice conversation starters throughout week.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or copy paper
- Bible

Make a sheet of "conversation bubbles" like you find in a comic strip. Ask each youth to fill in the bubble with a favorite way to greet someone. Pay attention to how they greet one another as they gather, and make sure the various greetings are on the sheet. Ask them to describe any other greetings they know but perhaps do not use. Add those options. Look over the list and add greetings you heard throughout your week. Then ask: *How do we say these greetings?* Usually greetings involve more than words. They may include a wave or a smile or a hug or a welcoming gesture. Include greetings from other countries, such as the Namaste greeting (folded hands and a brief bow), or in other languages. Add the nonverbal greetings between the bubbles. *How can you greet someone and not be welcoming?* Keep them accountable. Many older youth have perfected shrugs, glares, and nonverbal communications that indicate disgust. *How does it feel to be on the receiving end of an unwelcoming greeting?* *This is the way Paul greets his friend Timothy in a letter.* Read aloud 2 Timothy 1:1–4. *How do you think Timothy felt reading that greeting? What parts of that greeting can be a part of your greetings to one another?*



2 Drawing and Discussion: Images of God

Leader preparation: This is a fairly simple activity that facilitates awareness or "ah-ha!" moments. Sometimes we limit God, and then we become frustrated by our self-imposed limitations. We can be more expansive, but we need to make that choice. This activity introduces that idea to older youth.

Supplies:

- drawing or copier paper, cut in half
- colored pencils and markers
- artwork: "Two Women and a Child" by Diego Rivera

www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdr

Have youth close their eyes and take a couple deep breaths. *What image of God appears on your eyelids? Draw or outline that image on the paper.* Images of God have traditionally been male, Caucasian, and bearded. Older youth may have a more expansive view, so you may have a variety of images. How did your pilgrims imagine God? Display the Rivera image of "Two Women and a Child." *Is there an image of God in this painting? If so, where? If not, why not? What other nontraditional images of God can you name?* If no one mentions natural images—trees, animals, bodies of water—add that suggestion. *How have traditional images of God "boxed in" God or limited our awareness of God? Close your eyes again and take a couple deep breaths. Create an image of God that is different from your first image. Draw or outline the new image.*

Encountering Scripture



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.



3 Origami: Cross

Leader preparation: In this activity, you may use colored copy paper, but origami paper creates a crease without tearing or splitting. Cut the paper to size prior to your gathering time. Once your pilgrims know how to make these crosses, you will have a group who can also make the palm frond crosses for Palm Sunday. Practice making a few of these.

Note: These crosses are fairly flat when finished. They could easily go in an envelope and be sent to college students or added to deliveries for homebound members or given when a child is born or adopted. Your pilgrims may want to make a few as gifts.

Supplies:

- “Origami Cross,” Attachment: Activity 3
- origami or other paper, cut ½” × 12”

The attachment has instructions for how to make an origami cross. You may want to have youth work in pairs as they make their crosses. *While making crosses, think of the different cross patterns in your church and in your home. Why might there be so many different patterns? Which pattern may have been the original pattern? How has the traditional design of the cross stayed the same and how has it changed?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Praise the Lord: Psalm 96 (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Psalm 96 was written for use during Temple worship. Praising God seems like something Christians should want to do, but many Christians pray more frequently during times of crisis or conflict. Sometimes we need to be reminded to say “thanks.” The praise song “Shout to the Lord” was written by Darlene Zschech in 1993. Older youth have grown up with this song, and many of them have it as part of their portable music collections. There are also many online videos if you prefer that option. Downloads and sheet music are also readily available.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- (optional) hymn: “Shout to the Lord,” <http://tinyurl.com/3fzevzm> or <http://tinyurl.com/4556udq>
- (optional) “PraiseCharts” (to purchase music), <http://tinyurl.com/42cu92u>

Start by reading aloud Psalm 96. Ask the youth to shout out the verbs as another youth records the words on newsprint or a whiteboard. Look at the verb list. *How does the psalmist suggest we praise God? Who is being invited to praise God in each stanza? How does your faith community praise God? If your community sings the “Doxology,” look at the words and sing it. How do each of you praise God? Are there any special rituals or parts of your gathering time where God is praised? Ask a few readers to read Psalm 96 again from a different translation.*

Option: Play Chris Tomlin’s version of “Shout to the Lord.”

5 Helping Nature Rejoice: The Great Barrier Reef

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and water stewardship. Add local resources, if available. One privilege of being children of God is being responsible stewards of creation. Review the web-links and videos in the Supplies list. You may also ask other pilgrims to review the websites and come prepared with their information. Give them a time limit. Many older youth have given reports about water conservation and have learned about the global impact of dwindling water resources. In the beginning God was creating, and all of nature rejoices in Psalm 96. Discussions about water conversation or nature and our call to environmental stewardship should be sacred conversations.

Supplies:

- Bible
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/> (includes the most recent Reef Outlook Report)
- video: “Exploring Oceans: Great Barrier Reef, <http://tinyurl.com/dcq2ct> (National Geographic video)
- “Water Conservation Tips,” <http://tinyurl.com/2djxyad> (from Environment Canada)
- World Wildlife Fund, <http://tinyurl.com/3t2sogj>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Psalm 96:10–13. God’s creation is rejoicing. *What parts of God’s creation are part of your community or ecosystem?* Record the responses on newsprint or a whiteboard. View the video of the Great Barrier Reef. It is located off the coast of Australia and is a World Heritage Site, meaning it is one of our global environmental treasures. After viewing the video consider asking these questions: *How might creation praise God? What is special about the Great Barrier Reef? Why is it so important globally? What can we do to help protect it?* Move the conversation to national or local issues. If someone reviewed the water tips from Environment Canada or “Beyond Belief” from the World Wildlife Fund, ask that the information be presented. *How can we help with water conservation at a local level? What commitment could we make to water conservation that could involve all of us? Who is organizing the project? Time line? Followup?*

6 Holy Calling

Leader preparation: Older youth are exploring the concept of “call.” They are looking at school and career options and discerning how they can live a faithful life and be gainfully employed, which is also challenging for many adults. Parents, teachers, and counselors do not determine a person’s “call.” Adults can be prayer partners or discernment guides, but each youth decides where God is leading him or her. It’s important for youth to understand that God usually does not call us to one place. Sometimes one place is a stepping stone to another and then another place. Trusting a sense of call is usually difficult for older youth. Before the gathering time, ask your pastors which additional adults may be available to speak with youth about their plans for the future and how God is calling them.

While the focus of the activity is on living a faithful life, as called by God, it also includes time to make a sales pitch for careers in the ministry. The youth are hearing from everyone else, and often churches are quiet. Ask for your pastor’s assistance with denominational information.

Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “The Potter’s Hand,” <http://tinyurl.com/5br9n4>
- video: “Potter’s Hand—Darlene Zschech,” <http://tinyurl.com/3port58>
- denominational information about career and volunteer options for youth and young adults

Read aloud 2 Timothy 1:1–10. *Who helps Timothy in his faith journey? Who has helped you? Explain that Paul writes to Timothy about a holy calling or holy work. What is a call? How is call different from finding the best job or applying to your favorite college? How do you currently blend daily life and a faithful life? How can we determine when God is calling us? Who can you speak to about discerning a call?* Explain that discerning God’s call for our life is ongoing. It may or may not include a career within a faith community, but we are always called to worship wherever we live.

Many youth are not aware of the wide varieties of careers and skills needed for church ministry. Congregations need pastors and educators. They also need missionaries, often for one or two years, and the youth can use their college degrees. There are missionaries who specialize in computer technology, agriculture, English, various medical areas, accounting, marketing, training to set up small businesses, and so on. Churches at the regional and national levels also need professionals in fundraising and long-term financial planning, publishing, administration, resource writing, organizing conferences, and bridging international nonprofits with denominational offerings (such as One Great Hour of Sharing). Denominations often have seminaries and colleges and universities that need faculty, housing, deans of students, admission counselors, human resource directors, and support staff.

Listen to “The Potter’s Hand,” written by Darlene Zschech, or watch the video of the potter.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Prayer: Everyday Items (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: If we can help youth discern the Holy in everyday objects, we can give them a gift they can unwrap anywhere and any time. Complete the activity ahead of time so you have an example.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils or pens

Ask each youth to create a prayer based on an item used every day or used frequently, perhaps a computer, cell phone, or vehicle, allowing the parts or function of the everyday item to guide the prayer. This example is a prayer by an anonymous islander from Melanesia.

O Jesus,
 Be the canoe that holds me up in the sea of life;
 Be the rudder that keeps me in the straight road;
 Be the outrigger that supports me in times of temptation.
 Let your Spirit be my sail that carries me through each day.
 Keep my body strong, so that I can paddle steadfastly on in the voyage of life.
 Amen.

Leave time so your sojourners may share their prayers with one another. You may want to keep the prayers so they may be used at other gatherings, or they could be used as part of the community's worship.

8 Art and Blessing: Laying on of Hands

Leader preparation: In this activity, each youth may trace and cut out his or her hand, or you may purchase pre-cut hand shapes from an educational supply store or online. Both options are equally acceptable. Trace and cut out your own hand pattern so you have one per youth. You may prepare your paper hands ahead of the gathering time.

Note: If you do not want to string the hand affirmations, ask each person to create a poster with his or her hands. You will need poster board or a heavier paper, plus glue sticks. This activity should be meaningful and fun. Don't hurry it. Allow each person time in the middle.

Supplies:

- Bible
- construction paper, variety of colors
- scissors
- pencils or pens
- paper punch
- yarn or string
- chair

Have each person trace his or her hand on a sheet of paper to create a template and cut out that hand shape. *Stack two pieces of construction paper. Then place the paper hand horizontally on the construction paper (in the landscape direction) and trace the pattern. You may be able to get two hands per sheet of paper. Cut out the hands. Repeat the process. You will need to cut one hand per person in your group.*

Read aloud the 2 Timothy 1:1–14 if you have not already read it. Paul encourages the early Christian community to “rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” All of us have moments when we need to be encouraged. Ask the youth to write an accurate and kind affirmation on a construction-paper hand. They will each need to write one affirmation for every person present. Affirmations are positive, accurate, kind, and supportive. They are also usually one sentence.

Gather in a circle, with one youth in a chair in the center. Each person reads aloud an affirmation for that person and then gives him or her the hand. The seated person will have a stack of hands, one from each person. Repeat this process until everyone has a hand. When finished you may either use a paper punch to make a string the hands or put together a poster of hands.

9 Guard the Good Treasure

Leader Preparation: In 2 Timothy 1:1–14, Paul sends Timothy a rally cry to stay on course, stay courageous, and guard our faith, rooted in Christ. How do you protect your faith? How do you keep your faith honest and burning brightly?

Supplies:

- Bible
- rolled paper, butcher block or lightly patterned wrapping paper
- bag of plastic “jewels” from a craft supply store
- glue
- markers, permanent and water-based

Read aloud 2 Timothy 1:14. The New Revised Standard Version says, “Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.” *The Message* says, “Guard this precious thing placed in your custody by the Holy Spirit who works with us.” *What is Timothy asked to guard?* Read aloud the entire passage, 2 Timothy 1:1–14. *What is Timothy supposed to do with the treasure? How has the treasure been guarded over the centuries? By extension, what are we as 21st-century Christians asked to do with the treasure?* Create a banner from the rolled paper. Write verse 14 or simply “Guard the good treasure” on the banner. Decorate as desired. Ask the youth to add to the banner throughout the week.

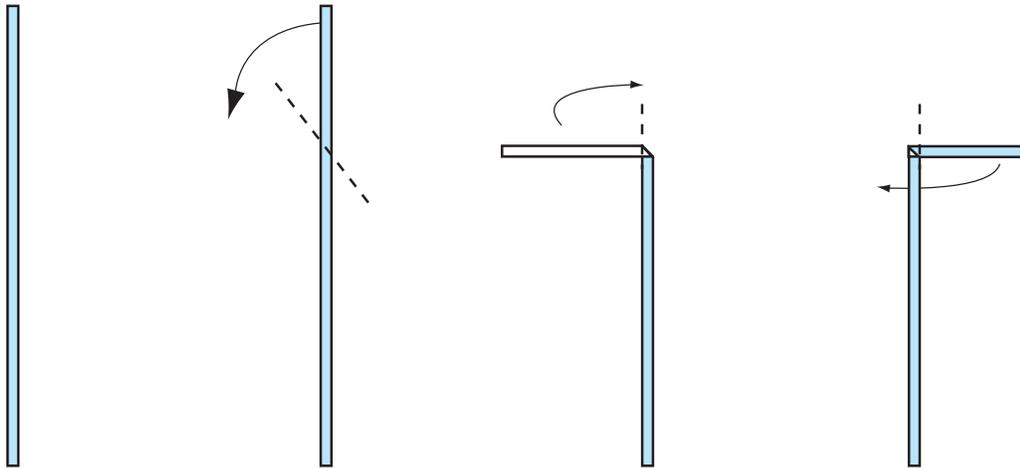
Reflect

“What an enormous magnifier is tradition! How a thing grows in the human memory and in the human imagination, when love, worship, and all that lies in the human heart, is there to encourage it,” wrote Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). What parts of tradition are you encouraging? How have traditions changed in a meaningful way in your life?

Attachment: Activity 3

Origami Cross

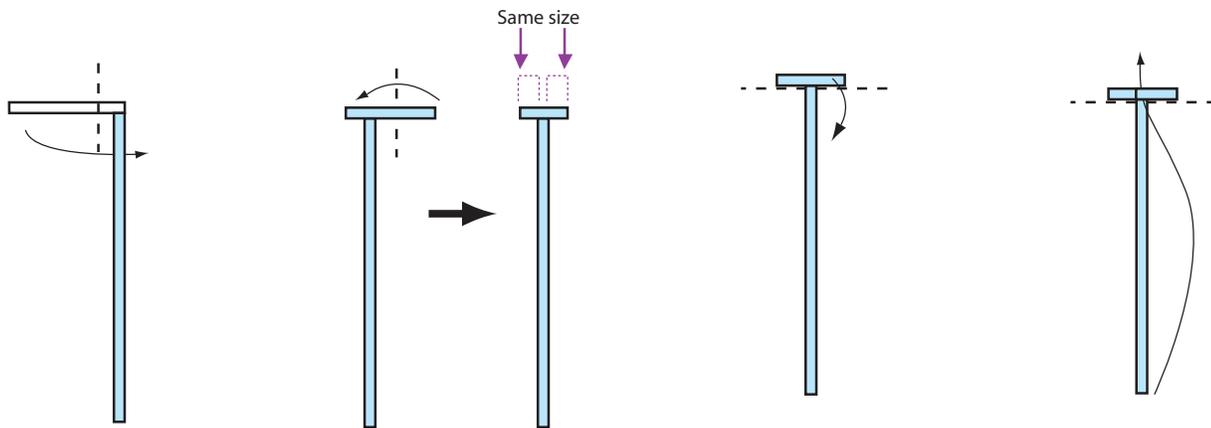
Follow these directions to make an origami cross.



Begin with a strip of paper approx. 0.7 cm X 30 cm, colored side up.

1. Fold one third down the strip

2. Fold end around back.

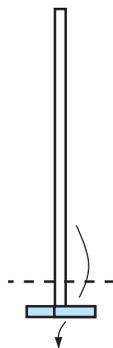


4. Fold the end in front.

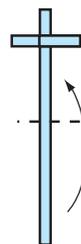
5. Fold section around the back, past the center and tuck back into center of model. Make sure the 2 sections indicated are of equal size.

6. Fold whole section down.

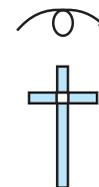
7. Pull bottom of paper through and up center section of cross.



8. Fold down along crease shown, and thread through center again.



9. Fold up behind cross and tuck the end underneath the center square.



Turn over.
Finished cross.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Older youth tend to have a passion for mission. They can plan fundraisers, speak to legislators, and help in numerous ways. They thrive on the short-term projects, such as raking leaves or collecting school supplies or visiting a nursing home. They also tend to get frustrated easily when working on the larger issues, such as human rights or responsible environmental stewardship. The larger issues remind them that they don't vote, that some issues take years to resolve, and that some issues need international cooperation. Older youth tend to take an all or nothing view of correcting social justice challenges. An adaptation to a legislative bill may be seen as a failure, or a nonresponse from media can deflate them. They need adults to help them celebrate short-term accomplishments while striving for long-term justice.

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:

Esther 4:1–17
Mark 4:26–34

Leader Preparation

Spend time with the Bible passages and allow them to become a part of you. Read them frequently at different times of the day. How is God speaking to you? Review the activities with the passages in your heart and mind. Select choices that will speak to your group as you guide them to develop the heart of Christ.

Prayer: Holy One, grant me the wisdom to recognize you in every person, known and unknown, today and always. Grant me the courage to respond appropriately. 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 Planting Seeds: Healthy Relationships (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Teen dating violence recently was declared a public health issue in the United States, Canada, and throughout Europe. We need to help young people learn the characteristics of healthy relationships. “Our Whole Lives” is a comprehensive faith-based human sexuality curriculum for people from elementary age through adult. The information for that curriculum is referenced should your congregation wish to offer the resource. The Supplies list also includes a link to an article on teen dating violence from the United States Department of Justice. The KidsHealth article and the Dating Bill of Rights have understandable information for teens about healthy relationships. Read through the information on the websites referenced below and decide what information you would like to share.

Supplies:

- various colors of construction paper, cut in half
- markers
- tape
- (optional) “Am I in a Healthy Relationship?” <http://tinyurl.com/427vjus>
- (optional) UCC “Sexuality Education,” <http://tinyurl.com/3my9yvm>
- (optional) “Dating Violence,” <http://tinyurl.com/qgk8a> (the Dating Bill of Rights in right-hand column)
- (optional) “Teen Dating Violence: A Closer Look at Teen Adolescent Romantic Relationships,” <http://tinyurl.com/4x7kask>

Often adults speak with youth about unhealthy relationships. We also need to equip them with information about healthy relationships. Developing healthy relationships is essential and does not happen automatically. Invite the youth to name the characteristics they value in a relationship (any kind of relationship). Ask someone or a small group to write each characteristic on a separate sheet of construction paper. You will probably hear words like “honest,” “caring,” “thinks of others,” “faithful,” and so on. These are also words to describe how God asks us to relate to one another. *How is your relationship with God reflected in your relationship with others?* Tape the sheets together in any configuration as a reminder of healthy relationships. *How might we share these insights with other youth?*

2 Video: Be the Change

Leader preparation: The video in this activity was filmed in India and is not in English. You do not need to understand the words to understand the message. Reflect on Mark 4:26–34 and the Esther 4:1–17. The little boy in the video could be planting a seed that inspires others. Or the little boy could be ready “for such a time as this,” as in the Esther passage. Review the video and decide which text you want to include. Write the Gandhi quotation on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Supplies:

- Bible
- video: “Be the change that you want to see in this world,” <http://tinyurl.com/35gbzfs>
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), an Indian advocate for nonviolent change, said that each person should “be the change you want to see in the world.” Show the video. Then read aloud the selected Bible text. Debrief the Bible text and the video using the Gandhi quotation.



3 Self-Portraits with Christ

Leader Preparation: Developing a heart for mission is usually a cultivated trait in faith communities. Young children want to serve others, but by the late elementary years most of us need to be encouraged to serve. If we can help older youth link their service with Christ and remind them to stay grounded in scripture as their motivation for serving, they will reduce their risk of burnout. When we partner with Christ, we are better prepared for long-term mission. We are better prepared for the setbacks and the frustrations that sometimes accompany mission work. To do that, we need to know that as we partner with Christ, Christ partners with us.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Christ Among the Children” by Emil Nolde www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3
- paper
- drawing supplies: colored pencils, crayons, pastels, markers

View the Nolde image of “Christ Among the Children.” Select one person in the group to be “Christ,” and allow everyone else to decide whether to be a disciple or a child. Stage the image, enacting it. *What might Christ be saying to the children? What might the children be saying to Christ? What might the disciples be doing and saying? Return to your original places and look at the image again. Imagine yourself as the child being held by Christ. Give them a few minutes. Draw a self-portrait of yourself in Christ’s arms.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Discussion: Parables Alive! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use Mark 4:26–34 as a refresher on parables as well as an opening to reflect on our current life. Read and complete this affirming activity.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read aloud Mark 4:26–34, inviting each person to read one verse. Read the passage aloud two or three times so everyone has repeated opportunities to speak. Start each reading with a different person. *What is a parable? Why might Jesus have spoken in parables? What are the similarities and differences in the two short parables? Move the discussion to their current life. What is an example of a planted seed that is bearing fruit in your life? Who planted it? Many youth pursue careers because of*

a teacher's influence. Consider the skills and interests you already have and the skills you enjoy using. These are also "seeds" that bear fruit in many different ways. Imagine possible ways to use your gifts to further God's work. Share your ideas. Encourage the group to be affirming of each person's gifts. Sometimes other people can help us discern how God is already working in our lives or an idea exchanged may be another seed planted.

5 Movie: *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)

Leader Preparation: *Hotel Rwanda* is worth a movie night, but the trailer and many clips are readily available online and on YouTube, if you prefer a shorter option. When youth read Esther 4:1–17, they will understand that Esther saved the Jewish people from genocide. They can think of other Jewish genocides, like the Holocaust during World War II. They may also be aware of the early 21st century genocide in Darfur (Sudan). *Hotel Rwanda* is based on the factual heroic actions of Paul Rusesabagina, the manager at Des Mille Collins, a four-star hotel in Kigali. He opened the hotel to 1,268 Tutsi and Hutu refugees during the genocide in Rwanda. He was prepared "for such a time as this" (as was Esther), and he planted seeds of understanding, courage, and accountability that relate to Jesus' parables in Mark. The movie also highlights the lack of global outrage and global intervention with the deaths of over 1 million people in Rwanda. *Hotel Rwanda* is two hours in length and is rated PG-13 (violent images). Ask all youth leaders to watch the film prior to showing it to your pilgrims.

Supplies:

- Bible
- Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com (information on the movie and images)
- movie: *Hotel Rwanda*
- popcorn or a different snack for the movie
- beverages
- denominational information about the faith community's role in ending genocide

Ask how many youth have seen the movie *Hotel Rwanda* in school or with school extracurricular groups. Remind them that you will be viewing the movie through the eyes of God. Read aloud either Esther 4:1–17 or Mark 4:26–34. Prior to showing the movie, ask everyone to observe how Mr. Rusesabagina's concept of family changed, what skills and advantages he had prior to the genocide, what options existed for international assistance, and how people changed throughout the film (for good and bad). Show the film and serve the planned snack. After the film, give everyone a short bathroom break prior to discussing the movie. Adapt these questions as desired:

- How did Mr. Rusesabagina's concept of family change?
- How was Mr. Rusesabagina like Esther, in the right place at the right time?
- What skills and advantages did he have?
- What was the role of his family in his various decisions?
- What were the options for international help? Why might the responses from international governments (and faith communities) have been largely silent? You may want to share this quotation from the movie:

Paul Rusesabagina: I am glad that you have shot this footage and that the world will see it. It is the only way we have a chance that people might intervene.

Jack (a reporter): Yeah, and if no one intervenes, is it still a good thing to show?

Paul Rusesabagina: How can they not intervene when they witness such atrocities?

Jack: I think if people see this footage they'll say, "Oh my God that's horrible," and then go on eating their dinners.

- What does it take today for the global community to respond to an international crisis? What strategies might Esther have used today? Here's another quotation from the movie:

Paul Rusesabagina (to the refugees in the hotel): There will be no rescue, no intervention for us. We can only save ourselves. Many of you know influential people abroad, you must call these people. You must tell them what will happen to us . . . say goodbye. But when you say goodbye, say it as if you are reaching through the phone and holding their hand. Let them know that if they let go of that hand, you will die. We must shame them into sending help.

- How does your denomination or communion address issues of genocide?
- Where is genocide happening today?

6 Human Trafficking: Slavery in the 21st century

Leader preparation: This is a difficult topic, and the video clips listed below may be difficult for your pilgrims or for you to watch. The website that hosts the video "Finding Humanity" has many options—music videos, short documentaries, and short interviews. Many college campuses include a session about human trafficking, as well as warnings about suspicious behavior, as part of freshmen orientation. Many high schools also address human trafficking and the reporting needed to stop it. Every state in the United States, every province in Canada, every country in Europe, and every state of Australia has experienced human trafficking. Six of earth's seven continents have experienced increased human trafficking reporting. The victims are overwhelmingly children, younger youth, and older youth. If your community has a Human Trafficking Task Force that is part of the police department or a local federal law enforcement office, invite a representative to speak to your group.

Supplies:

- video: "Famous Models," <http://tinyurl.com/3z6ejch>
- video: "Finding Humanity," <http://tinyurl.com/3wsl9cg>
<http://tinyurl.com/3s76yzq>
- Internet access and equipment to show a video

Esther chose to use her attractiveness and sexuality to save the Jewish people. She reminded the king why he chose her as his queen. She fasted, she prayed, she listened to Mordecai, she devised a plot, and she succeeded. Not all people, female or male, choose how their sexuality is expressed. Many young people are lured from their homes or are sold by family or are runaways. Many become sexual property, forced to provide sex anonymously. Show the selected videos and present information about human trafficking. *How is your community alerting people to the dangers of human trafficking? What role is your faith community taking in ending human trafficking? When does your faith community discuss healthy sexuality, where individuals are not objectified and abused?*

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Dialogue: Esther and God (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Learn the Esther story well enough to relate a few of the details not in Esther 4:1–17. It is a short book and one of the oldest mission stories in the Bible. Esther’s parents died and Mordecai raised her. She hid from the king the fact that she was Jewish. Someone will certainly ask about the outcome of Haman. The gallows that were prepared for the Jewish people were used to hang Haman. The focus of the selected passage is on Esther’s call to serve and save her people and her God, not on capital punishment in the ancient world. Be prepared, however, with information about capital punishment in your local context, and whether it is allowed or not.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens/pencils

Read aloud the Esther passage twice. Note that Esther fasted and prayed for three days. Those three days transformed her. Have youth form small groups. The Bible does not detail the conversation between God and Esther. We know the beginning and the ending. Ask each group to create a dialogue between God and Esther. *What questions and concerns might Esther have had? How might God have responded? Where is the give and take in this relationship?* Have groups share their dialogues. *During the week be aware of how and when God speaks to you.*

8 Planning Ahead: Preparing Seeds

Leader preparation: Review the link to make seed tapes. If you are planning this activity during a time when you may plant seeds directly in the ground, you may do that instead. Otherwise, the seed tapes (with dried glue) can be stored for many months and used when the ground has thawed and the danger of frost is past. Remember to label the bags so you know which seeds are in each bag. Or you may use the seed tapes in starter pots if your climate has a short growing season. Choose the option that works best for you. Also, before selecting seeds, check with your faith community’s gardening or landscaping committee. Make sure you are seeding options that they also endorse. Invite them to join your pilgrims for this project. You will also need a flat area where the tiny drop of glue may dry completely.

Supplies:

- “How to Make Flower Seed Tapes with Toilet Paper and Glue,” <http://tinyurl.com/3egtggr>
- toilet paper, precut to size
- seeds (vegetables, herbs, flowers)
- water-soluble glue
- toothpicks
- sealable plastic food-storage bags
- permanent markers or labels, if storing the seeds

Read aloud Mark 4:26–34. Sometimes we plant seeds literally and sometimes metaphorically. Prepared seed tapes can be used at your church, at the homes of elderly church members, in a community garden, at homes, sold as a fundraiser or used to brighten a spot in your neighborhood. Explain the seed tape project, and have youth create the tape. The glue will need to be completely dry before rolling the tape. Mark the calendar for when you hope to use these seed tapes.

9 Mission: For Such a Time as This

Leader preparation: Scripture is empowering. It expands our worldview and our options. How God calls us differs for every person. The 5-minute video in this activity is about the relationship between an owner and her dog. The dog was born and raised to be a service dog for a person with a disability. Ricochet, the dog, had other ideas. Prepare for the activity by viewing the video “Turning disappointment into a joyful new direction” beforehand.

Supplies:

- video: “Turning disappointment into a joyful new direction,” <http://tinyurl.com/3naf5s5>
- Internet access and equipment to show a video

Youth may not understand that sometimes “to be the change” we may need to change. We may need to develop new skills, learn new information, meet new people, or readjust our thinking. Sometimes other people’s expectations of us need to change. Being ready “for such a time as this,” as Esther learned, requires multiple levels of prayer and understanding to merge. This concept is easier to understand when viewing this video. God gifted the dog, Ricochet, and his owner needed to adapt her expectations. The result has been one success after another. Use these or similar questions for discussion: *How did this dog’s mission change? How did the owner change? When in your life have you needed clarity on your mission? God is in the questions, the discernment, and the answers.*

Reflect

“Salvation happens every time someone with a key uses it to open a door he could lock instead,” wrote Barbara Brown Taylor (1951–). What doors did you help unlock? How did Esther and Jesus inspire you?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

The future is exciting and frightening for older youth. They are making major decisions and preparing for an adult life. Our culture expects maturity, but an older youth brain is still not fully developed. They pull away from family at a time when they need adults to help them evaluate choices and decisions. Scripture and different ways to enter and experience God's Word is a gift they can use and reuse to guide and enhance their entire life.

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 30:15–30
Hebrews 11:1–16

Leader Preparation

In the Deuteronomy passage Moses urges the Israelites to “choose life” by following God’s way. The Hebrews passage instructs us about faith. Both urge us to look beyond our immediate needs, our immediate trials for a life with God. Read the Bible texts and the activities.

Prayer: God of my heart and soul, from age to age you are holy. From age to age you guide your people by Word and deed. From age to age your Spirit and your Son inspire and speak to us. Give me courage and passion so that I recognize your voice in scripture and in my daily life. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Game: Observing the Rules (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This game needs people to follow your instructions well. Read the activity and try it with the adult leaders, your family, or gather a few people during a break at work. Read Deuteronomy 30:15–30.

Supplies:

- Bible

Have everyone in a circle, standing close, shoulder to shoulder. Ask everyone to turn to the right. Each will be looking at a neighbor’s back. Hands should be to the side. On the count of three (or any number you choose), everyone sits or squats. Each should be sitting on a neighbor’s knee. Sometimes the person who is last needs a hand on the shoulder in front to balance. If instructions are not followed—and people hesitate squatting—there will be a domino effect and people will tumble. Try again. It may take two or three times, but soon everyone will trust the process and will follow instructions. What happened the first time? What happened the second time? Then, read aloud Deuteronomy 30:15–30. *Why was Moses so insistent that God’s people follow God’s rules? Thinking of the game, what happens when we don’t trust the person giving the rules? Is God a leader you can trust? Why or why not?*

2 God Rules!

Leader preparation: Both Deuteronomy 30:15–30 and Hebrew 11:1–16 mention commandments, rules, walking in God’s ways, and names of Old Testament leaders, like Abraham and Noah. We often assume that youth know God’s rules. This activity is a quick refresher that may be especially helpful if you have youth who are new to a faith community. Keep the activity moving quickly. Be affirming, highlighting what they know. *Note:* Pay attention to the areas where they struggle. Example: If they don’t know the Great Commission, consider that as a focus for a retreat or another gathering time.

Supplies:

- Bible
- video: clip from *Despicable Me*, <http://tinyurl.com/3v9x8v7>
- several bags of Tootsie Rolls or bunches of grapes or any favorite bite-sized snack
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Deuteronomy 30:15–30. Sometimes it’s hard to “choose life” because we don’t know the ground rules. Show the clip from *Despicable Me*. The ground rules in the movie are unrealistic. *What are the rules in the movie? What are God’s ground rules for us?* Ask the group to list them as quickly as possible. Record their answers on newsprint or a whiteboard as quickly as possible. (Choose whether you want the group to state the rules by passage or you want to go with the flow and group them as you record them.) Ask someone to hand out a snack for every recordable answer. Possibilities include: 10 Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6–21); Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–5); the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11); the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13); the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12); the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34–40); and the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18–20). Affirm what they know and fill in as needed and as desired. Make sure everyone has had

Encountering Scripture

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

a snack. This activity should be affirming for the youth, celebrating what they know. *When you know God's ground rules, you know God's expectations.*

3 Visual Meditation: Faith

Leader preparation: When encountering scripture and trying to discern what God wants you to do, it helps to slow down. Most youth have difficulty slowing down. Some of this is due to long-term parental over-programming and some to self-imposed pressures. It also means that we are creating a generation that has difficulty relaxing. The 9-minute video in this activity is significantly shorter than the time spent on homework or practicing a dance step or sports technique. Most youth spend more than 9 minutes a day using social networking sites. Nine minutes for relaxation and meditation may seem like forever to many youth. Affirm the importance of relaxation to prayer, to spiritual growth and renewal, to mental and physical health, and to general well being. There are many additional meditations available online.

Supplies:

- video: "Air," <http://tinyurl.com/dan221>
- space for everyone to relax

"Air," a video meditation with music, was created by Paul Collier. *It is just over nine minutes and is designed to slow your heartbeat, to reduce stress, and to help you think more clearly. You may view the video and focus on the changing image or you may close your eyes and allow your mind to wander as you listen to the music. Make sure everyone turns off all cell phones and music players and eliminates any other potential noise. Dim the lights, if possible, but do not make the room completely dark. Before the video starts, ask each person to think of one word or phrase to ponder for the 9 minutes, such as "faith" or "choose life." Become comfortable, and then take three deep cleansing breaths. Focus on the chosen word as you experience the video. At the end of the video, slowly increase the lights and invite the youth to return to the present slowly. Gently discuss the activity. How did this activity make you feel? Some may have fallen asleep or felt their pulse lower or they were bored. What might be the benefits of meditation? How could a few minutes of "down time" each day help you focus on how God is working in your life?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Saints Past and Present (Easy preparation)

Leader Preparation: Saints are people who choose to follow God's will. We recognize them as doing God's will. They choose to follow God and we choose to notice. They are saints, however, whether or not we notice them. Noticing, honoring, and being inspired by saints is a blessing we give ourselves. Frederick Buechner (BEEK-ner) said, "In his holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints" (from *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, page 83). Review and complete the activity. Who are the saints or dropped handkerchiefs in your life?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- colored pencils
- information about your faith community's traditions for All Saints Day
- (optional) white handkerchiefs or pieces of white cloth
- (optional) soothing background music

Read aloud Hebrews 11:1–16. *Which saints are mentioned in the Hebrews text? What was special about those saints?* Many faith communities celebrate All Saints Day on November 1 or on the first Sunday in November. Present information about how your community honors its saints. *How would you describe a saint? Who are saints in your life?* Consider using the third verse of “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” as a description of saints:

They lived not only in ages past,
 There are hundreds of thousands still.
 The world is filled with living saints
 Who choose to do God's will.
 You can meet them in school, on the road, or at sea,
 In a church, in a train, in a shop, or at tea:
 for the saints are folk like you and like me,
 and I mean to be one, too.

Have each young person draw an image with one part for every two years of his or her life. Example: A flower with a petal or a leaf for every two years, or a track with lane markers, or a calibrated test tube. *For every two years of your life, reflect on the most influential saint. Add that person's name and how he or she influenced you.* If you have handkerchiefs or white cloth, have the youth write the name of an influential saint on each one. You may want to play soothing background music as the youth work on this project. Allow time to share at the end.



5 Faith: Long Term Vision

Leader Preparation: Read through the activity and complete the questions. Be prepared to share some the answers with your youth sojourners.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hidden Depths” www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphd

What promises do you need so you follow a plan? You were promised a high school diploma if you met state standards, passed certain courses, attended regularly, and so on. What are God's promises for us? Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Show the “Hidden Depths” image of the iceberg. *Think about faith and Hebrews 11:1. How might this iceberg be an illustration of faith?*

Hebrews lists examples of faithful followers, including Abraham, Noah, Abel, and Enoch. These are Old Testament figures who never heard of or knew about Jesus. They “knew” less about God's plan than we do. *The Message* translation for Hebrews 11:13–16 is, “Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country

than that—heaven country. You can see why God is so proud of them, and has a City waiting for them.”

What do you need to be faithful? How can you keep God in your present and in your future? Is your vision of God’s heavenly city clear enough to sustain you through difficult times? Why or why not?

6 Communion: Triumphant Love

Leader preparation: “As We Gather at your Table” is a hymn selected for every age and setting of this faith practice. Speak to your pastor and learn who in your faith community may serve communion.

Supplies:

- hymn: “As We Gather at Your Table” (tune: Beach Spring, 8.7.8.7.D)
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-table> <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-table2>
- communion elements: bread and grape juice
- basket
- cup or chalice

Learn the hymn “As We Gather at Your Table.” Sing the first verse. Ask four people to read the second verse, one person per line. Read the third verse, line by line, and discuss the ideas in this verse.

- “Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share this feast.” How do we do this?
- “Where triumphant Love will welcome those who had been last and least.” Who is triumphant Love? Who is last and least? When have you felt like the last or the least? What would make you feel welcome? How will people be welcomed?
- “There no more will envy bind us, nor will pride our peace destroy,” How does envy bind us? What are the positive and negative aspects of pride?
- “As we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.” How does joy sound?

Use your faith community’s liturgy for communion and the words of institution. After partaking of the elements, consider closing with this communion prayer from La Iglesia Unida de Cristo Buenas Nuevas in Cleveland, Ohio.

*O Dios que nos llamas de diferentes lugares a participar en esta mesa;
recordamos el sufrimiento de tu amado hijo Jesucristo.
Su sufrimiento continúa en el sufrimiento de nuestro pueblo.
Sus luchas por ser fiel a tu voluntad son también nuestras luchas cotidianas.
Al participar de estos elementos,
recordamos que tu cuerpo fue partido y tu sangre derramada por nosotros y nosotras.
Recordamos también la sangre de nuestro pueblo
que lucha cada día en el campo, en las fábricas,
y en nuestra sociedad para ser proveedores y proveedoras
de sus familias en la misma medida en que
Tú provees para nosotros estos elementos.
Que ellos sean un recordatorio de tu gracia y de tu amor
inigualable por nosotros y nosotras.
En Jesucristo oramos. Amén.*

O God, who calls us from different places to participate at this table,
 we are reminded of the suffering of your beloved son, Jesus Christ.
 His suffering continues in the suffering of our people.
 His struggles to remain faithful to your will
 continue in our daily struggles to be faithful
 As we partake in these elements,
 we are mindful of Jesus' body broken for us and the blood shed for us.
 Keep us also mindful of the blood of our people
 who struggle everyday in the fields, in the factories,
 and in our society.
 In the same way you have provided for us,
 sustain those who labor without rest in order to provide for their
 families,
 Bless these elements. May they remind us
 of your grace and steadfast love for all people.
 In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

—*Worshipping into God's Future* (online resource), United Church of Christ

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer: For My Future (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write your own prayer. Decide whether the prayers will be shared or remain private. You may want to ask the pilgrims which option (or a blended option) they prefer.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils
- “A Prayer for the Future,” Attachment: Activity 7

What is your prayer for your future? Distribute copies of “A Prayer for the Future.” This quotation is from *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton (1915–1968). Ask someone to read it to the group. After listening to Merton’s prayer, have each person write his or her own prayer. *During the week, pray your special prayer every day.*

8 Science and Faith

Leader Preparation: You may use either or both options. There is a YouTube video of the Hubble Ultra Deep Field, which was discovered in 1996. Scientists thought they were pointing the telescope at dark space. The result was a new understanding of space, Earth’s position in space, and the enormosity of God’s creation. Until the early 18th century, humans did not know that light consisted of many colors. Now, prisms are part of early elementary science resources. Science and faith are often considered at odds with each other. Yet, the more we learn from science, the greater our understanding of God’s creative way of being in our world. Many parts of nature that were simply accepted on faith now fill humans with wonder and a deeper way of being with God. Read and try the activities.

Supplies:

- video: “Hubble Ultra Deep Field in 3D,” <http://tinyurl.com/l593o5>
- glass bowl
- flat mirror
- white paper or white cardboard
- prism

Faith is about believing in what we do not see, believing when we have no concrete proof. Sometimes the “evidence” we need is already there, and it’s us who need to adjust our vision. The Hubble Ultra Deep Field video presents a recent view of our universe that is awe inspiring on various levels. Until the early 18th century, no one knew that light contained a spectrum. Explain that if you do not have a prism, you can create one (on a sunny day). Fill a glass bowl with water and rest a flat mirror inside the bowl. Place the bowl so sunlight is directed to the mirror. Hold a white paper or a white card in front of the mirror. You may need to adjust the paper or the mirror so you can see the color spectrum. The white paper may be held in place or taped. The mirror can be propped with a small piece of modeling clay. *What evidence is needed so we believe? As science explains more and more about our universe, how does our faith become larger and not smaller?*

9 Kites: Prayers and Hopes Rising

Leader Preparation: If you are making the diamond kites, glue the cross pieces and allow them to dry prior to the gathering time. Having that step finished makes the project significantly easier to complete. You may use Deuteronomy 30:15–30 or Hebrews 11:1–16 or both passages. Make a sample kite beforehand.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “How to Make a Diamond Kite,” <http://tinyurl.com/3pnbsr4>
- “Kids Kite,” <http://tinyurl.com/3ugq7rc> (simple kite pattern)
- double sheets of newspaper or strong paper, such as rolled butcher block or packing paper
- 2 long straight wooden sticks
- tape or glue
- permanent markers
- twine

Read either the Deuteronomy or the Hebrews passage. The kites to be created can be made for flying outside (both patterns work with a breeze), or they may be hung in the church or a youth’s home as a reminder of God’s magnificent future. If you use the Deuteronomy passage, focus on “Choose Life” as a theme for the kites, decorating to highlight the theme. If you choose the Hebrews passage, focus on faith or the heavenly city awaiting believers. Our faith in the future corresponds with our vision for the future. With God as the architect and builder of our heavenly city, our prayers and hopes are assured.

Reflect

“Faith is taking the first step even when you can’t see the whole staircase,” said Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). In faith and faith practices we can’t see the whole staircase. Thank you for guiding these youth and planting seeds of faith. You may never know how your seeds will bear fruit, but God does. Thank you for loving God and walking in God’s ways.

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Attachment: Activity 7

A Prayer for the Future

God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

From *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton (1915–1968) (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1958. Copyright held by The Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky.)