

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Scripture is full of mystery, stories, and hidden treasures, and small children enjoy a treasure hunt. These activities can help them to see that the scriptures have many gifts for them to uncover and enable them to seek wisdom and insight in the scriptures all their lives. Young children may surprise you with their depth of understanding of Bible characters' joys and concerns. Because young children have not heard Bible stories many times, they bring fresh eyes and ears to stories that may become overly familiar to older people. Be open to talking with them about new things they notice in the scripture; be cautious about weighing them down with interpretations. Rather, let them use their active imaginations to uncover new possibilities in the texts. Children learn through many senses, and many children need to move their bodies. As you select activities for your group, use a variety of different learning approaches. Build in many opportunities for movement, music, and art.

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. As we engage with scripture, we discover God and we discover a new world through words from long ago. We encounter scripture as an ancient text, but one that is living, breathing, and alive to contemporary people. 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 encounter scripture, we join with the great diversity of God's people to ask questions, connect with the text, pray, and discern together God's unfolding word for us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Proverbs 2:1-8
John 21:1-19

Leader Preparation

Prayerfully consider some of the discoveries you have made in the scriptures. How have these discoveries touched your life in both easy and difficult times? As you explore passages with the children, new ideas may bubble up for you as well. Open yourself to see what is new even in the most familiar of passages. Be in an attitude of discovery with the children as you uncover new ideas together.

Prayer: God, You are full of mystery. You are full of love. You are full of possibilities. Help me and the children experience You in the scriptures as we explore them together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Session Development

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

Leader preparation: Create an adventure for the children by preparing a treasure hunt for them. Print, cut, and separate the following wisdom sayings from the *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*. Before the children arrive, hide the wisdom sayings in places in your room, making some easier to find and some more difficult.

"Friends always show their love." Proverbs 17:17

"Listen before you answer." Proverbs 18:13

"Do yourself a favor and learn all you can; then remember what you learn and you will prosper." Proverbs 18:8

"If you listen to advice and are willing to learn, one day you will be wise." Proverbs 19:20

"The Lord has given us eyes to see with and ears to listen with." Proverbs 20:12

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Mark 12:30

"Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Mark 12:31

Supplies:

- Bible or children's Bible
- wisdom sayings
- (optional) Dora the Explorer or Sherlock Holmes type of hat and overcoat and/or magnifying glasses

Before the children arrive, cut apart and hide separately the wisdom sayings. If possible, copy the texts on the same color of paper to make them easier to identify. If available, put on some kind of detective clothing and a magnifying glass. Tell the children you are in search of wisdom. You are not quite sure where to find it, but you know there are examples of wisdom right in your room. Open a Bible and find Proverbs 2:1-6. Read the passage from a children's Bible or a paraphrase such as:

If you ask for help knowing what is right,
If you ask lots of questions,
If you try to learn good things,
If you hunt for truth like you'd hunt for buried treasure,
Then you will know God. Because God gives us wisdom.
God's words are good and true.

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

The passage tells us that if we will seek God’s wisdom and truth like a treasure, we will find God. Ask for children’s help to find slips of paper with wise sayings. When all seven are found, stop and read one of the sayings. Invite the children to act out the saying. For example, “Friends always show their love” could be shown by a handshake or hug or by giving something to someone else. Encourage the children to be creative and do more than one action where possible.

Share Breakfast Together

Leader preparation: Think about how you feel when you are invited to dine with someone. What does it mean to you to be a guest? If you were afraid and someone who loved you served you and ate with you, how would that encourage you? As you select food items for this activity, be aware of any food allergies or special dietary needs in your group. Make a welcoming space for the children.

Supplies:

- Bible
- plates, cups, and napkins
- juice or other drink
- breakfast foods of your choice, such as fruit pieces, cereal, breakfast bars, or eggs (be aware of food allergies in your group)
- empty box of fish sticks, a cooked fish, or fish-shaped crackers
- table and chairs

Set a table with a place for each child. Have the food items you have chosen and the empty box of fish sticks, the cooked fish, or fish-shaped crackers already on the table. Encourage the children to play away from the table until you believe all the children have arrived. Then invite them all to have breakfast with you. As you sit down, say a blessing together. One of the children might enjoy leading the blessing, or you can say a short one and let them repeat, such as: *Thank you, Jesus, for this food. Thank you for loving us. Amen.*

Hold up the fish-sticks box, the fish, or fish crackers. Ask: *What do you normally eat for breakfast? Would you like to have fish for breakfast?* Then offer each of the other foods you brought with you today. As you talk with the children, tell them that a long time ago, Jesus made a breakfast of cooked fish for his disciples on a beach. They can find the story in the Bible in John 21:1–14. Jesus used a fire to cook.

The disciples had been very sad. Jesus had died on the cross, and they weren’t sure what to do. Jesus was resurrected and came to see them. He ate with them. They talked together. The disciples began to feel encouraged and happy. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter said, “Yes, Lord.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus asked Peter three times the same question. Each time Peter said, “Yes, Lord.” Each time Jesus asked Peter to help care for Jesus’ sheep. Ask: *Who do you think Jesus wanted Peter to feed?*

Close breakfast time by asking the children, “Do you love Jesus?” If they respond with a yes, encourage them to feed and care for others and help Jesus.

3 Get Familiar with the Bible

Leader preparation: Check to be sure your church library is available for a tour, or bring a collection of books into your room and create a shelf of books using bookends.

Supplies:

- access to your church library or a variety of books from your church or home library; select books of different colors, children’s books, history books, fiction books
- Bibles, including a children’s Bible

Go to your church library or your minister’s library and look at all the books. Ask the children to pick ones that look interesting to them. Ask them to tell what attracted them to the book. Explain a little of how the children can find books in the library. *Where are the ones for children? What are the adult sections about?* Tell them there are fiction books, or stories that did not really happen, but are interesting to read and may help the reader learn something new. There are also books with facts that help people to learn new things. There are books about what happened in the past that help people to know history.

If your church does not have a library, or if it is unavailable for a tour, bring a collection of 10 to 15 different types of books into your room and use bookends to display them on a table. Show the children several different Bibles. Encourage them to open the Bible. *What do you notice about the Bible?* Tell them a full Bible has 66 books. Each book is unique and different. *We can carry one book and really have 66 books in our hand. Part of the Bible is the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) that tell about before Jesus was born. This part has 39 books. Count to 39 together. The other part is the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) that tells us about Jesus’ birth, his life, and what the church did after Jesus died and was resurrected. It has 27 books. Count to 27 together.* Give the children an opportunity to ask questions about the Bible.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Identify Who Is Wise (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: What does it mean to you to be wise? Who are some people the children may know who are wise? Have some examples of people in advance, in case they are needed to help the children discover more about wisdom. Keep in mind that wisdom is an abstract concept and not one the children (or most adults) fully understand at this stage in their development.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and markers or crayons
- children’s Bible

Write the word “wise” on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the children: *What does it mean to be wise?* You might help them with some similar words, such as “smart,” “brilliant,” or “understanding.” *How do you know when someone is wise? Who do you know that is wise?* Help the children each to identify someone he or she considers to be wise. Encourage the children to tell about some of the wise things the person has said or done. Read Proverbs 2:1–8 from a children’s Bible, or use the paraphrase in Activity 1. *What additional ideas about what is wise does this provide?* Invite the children to draw the person they have identified as wise. If they have

something the person has said or done that is wise, help them to write this, or write it for them, on the back or bottom of the paper. You may want to invite the children to share their picture and what they identified with the person they believe is wise or with their caregivers.

5 Exploring Types of Bibles

Leader preparation: Find as many different kinds of Bibles as you can. Pick one from your worship space if you have one, children’s Bible story books from your room, Bibles of different colors and translations. If available, find Bibles written in languages other than the one primarily spoken by your group. If available, pick a dramatic reading of the Bible on CD or DVD.

Supplies:

- diverse shapes, translations, languages, and types of Bibles
- paper and crayons or markers
- (optional) recorded reading of scripture, preferably done dramatically, such as *The Bible Experience New Testament Dramatized* (ISBN: 0310926319, ISBN: 9780310926313); a free download sample is available online at the Bible Source, <http://www.thebiblesource.com/product.php?p=1679>

Display a variety of Bibles on the table for the children to open and touch. Ask each child to choose a Bible. Ask: *What do you like about that Bible?* Some children might like to identify the colors of the Bibles. Others might be interested in pictures or layout inside the Bible. Explain that the Bible comes in many different shapes, sizes, and languages. The words inside are so important to people back even before Jesus that they have been written and printed and memorized by people all over the world. Read from three different translations a short verse your group has discussed today or recently. Ask: *What sounds the same? What sounds different?* Invite the children to draw a picture of a Bible they would like to own or a picture of a Bible story they enjoy. If you selected a recorded version of the Bible, play this while the children draw.



6 Explore God’s Presence in Art

Leader preparation: Spend time with the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess. Notice what you see and feel as you view the poster. Take time to see what it looks like from multiple angles. What do you experience in the painting? If you choose to have the children finger paint, gather protective covering for the children and furniture or floor of your learning area. You may want to recruit additional help.

Supplies:

- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- paper for finger painting, finger paints, smocks or shirts, protective covering for floor and tables
- (optional) paint brushes and paint or markers and paper

Lay the poster “No-Traveller’s Borne” either on the floor or a table where the children can gather around it. Ask: *What do you see and feel when you look at the picture?* Turn the poster a quarter turn. Repeat the question. After the children have commented on the artwork, ask them if the picture in any way shows them who God is or what God is like. Sometimes when artists create things, they are expressing a part of how they know and experience God. We can see God and God’s ways revealed in the artwork. Read the children this paraphrase of Proverbs 2:4–5:

If you search high and low for God's ways, you will find them. If you work to find goodness like you would hunt for hidden treasure, you will find and understand God.

Invite the children to finger paint a picture. Ask them to create something that helps them to feel God's presence with them. If you prefer, use paint brushes and paint or crayons and markers. Be prepared to hang or lay the paintings somewhere to dry. If time permits, talk with each child and ask for him or her to tell you about his or her creation.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Wisdom Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use the list of sayings below to help the children test their own wisdom skills. Consider sending home a copy of the list for caregivers to review and play with their children. As you choose the body movements your group will use to distinguish wise or unwise sayings, be aware of any special physical needs among the children. Adapt the instructions as necessary.

As we grow, we need God's help to make wise choices. In each case in the list below, decide if the saying is "wise" or "unwise." You might also create some ideas of your own.

- Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- If you want a friend, be a friend.
- Leave the place where an adult asked you to stay.
- Study and seek wisdom.
- Take whatever you want from anyone you want.
- Tell others about Jesus.
- Come to church.
- Learn to read.
- Don't do your homework.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Watch lots of television.

Supplies:

- (optional) pom poms

Read the children this simplified version of Proverbs 2:6:

God gives out wisdom for free. God speaks to us truth and understanding.

Tell the children you are going to play a game together. You are going to see if you can understand some of God's wisdom. Invite the children to stand up tall or raise a hand when you read something from the above list that sounds wise to them. If what you read is not something they think is wise, have them squat down or keep their hands lowered. The children may also enjoy taking turns coming up with ideas that are wise or unwise. Encourage them to use their creativity and wisdom. Making wise decisions is something each of us can get better at with God's help.

Enjoy creating a cheer with the children to serve as a reminder to seek wisdom. Start with the sentence “When you are _____, BE WISE” (cheer). Words that could go in the blank include: “afraid,” “happy,” “lonely,” “tired,” “excited,” “silly,” “lost.” Ask the children for ideas for words to go in the blank. Add motions with pom poms, jumps, or arms in the air to make cheering more exciting. Encourage the children to keep seeking wisdom. Close with a prayer, such as: *Thank you God for teaching us to be wise. Help us seek your wisdom as we make choices. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

8 Gather at the Table

Leader preparation: The song “As We Gather at Your Table” is a communion song. You will need either to have someone come in to sing for your group or to pre-record the song if you do not sing. Check to see if the song might be used in worship near the time you do this activity. If so, encourage the children to listen for it. If children in your church are not present for communion in your worship service, or if you feel the children need more of an introduction to communion, you may want to take them to the sanctuary and show them how and why communion is taken before you share your snack or meal together. Arrange access to the sanctuary and communion elements to show the children if they need information about communion in your church. Your pastor or an elder may also want to talk with the children about communion and its meaning. Before the children come, decide if you will have them bring small action figures or people toys to a small table or stuffed animals to a regular-sized table. Hide enough for each child to find at least three during the activity. Place the food item you plan to share on the table as the activity begins.

Supplies:

- a small table and action figures, or small people toys or stuffed animals and your room’s table (three or more toys per child)
- children’s Bible
- hymn: “As We Gather at Your Table,” (tune: Beach Spring, 8.7.8.7.D.) <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/a/a366.html>; Tune: <http://www.ccel.org/cceh/0001/x000147.htm>
- (optional) bread or snack food to share (be aware of possible allergies), napkins

If you have chosen to take the children to the sanctuary to learn about communion, start with this experience first. Then return to your room and place food item and napkins on the table. Ask the children: *When you gather to eat, who sits at your table? Read or review the story in John 21:1–19. Who did Jesus invite to eat with him at the shore? In worship we have a special table we use. Identify how frequently you take communion—weekly, monthly. Ask: What is it called? What kind of food do we have on it? Who is invited?*

Tell the children you will be inviting some guests around the room to the table. Introduce your guest who will be singing, if you have one. While you listen to the first verse of “As We Gather at Your Table,” ask the children to go and find one guest that is hiding in the room who could come or gather at this table (the action figures, people toys, or stuffed animals). Repeat this activity with the second and third verses. As the children share the snack, you may want to hear the song an additional time. If you have a guest musician, be sure to invite him or her to enjoy the snack and thank him or her when the activity is completed. Invite the children to consider who they could invite to church or to eat with them at home, with their caregiver’s permission, this week.

9 Feed My Sheep

Leader preparation: Be certain you have enough space in your room for the relay in this activity. If not, schedule time in another part of your facility or go outside, if possible. Encourage children with special needs to participate in a manner that works for them. Consider decorating the bowl by gluing or taping cotton balls on it to make it look like sheep. The children could help you create the bowl.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible or *The Message Bible*
- two large spoons and 50 cotton balls
- one medium-sized bowl large enough to hold the cotton balls.

Read the children John 21:1–19, or, if you have read this story earlier, get the children to help you retell the story. Ask some of the following questions: *What is Jesus asking Peter to do? Who are Jesus’ sheep? How can Peter feed them? How can we feed Jesus’ people today? Is it easier for us to help more people when we work with others, or when we try to do it by ourselves?* Explain that sometimes it is hard to get people what they need. It can take team work, and it can take time.

Explain that you will do a group relay to the “sheep” (the bowl) at the other end of the room. Each person will need to help “feed the sheep” (fill the bowl). The first person in line puts a cotton ball in the spoon and walks or runs to the sheep. The player must then put the cotton ball in the bowl without dropping it. If the cotton ball drops, the player must stop and pick it up in the spoon and continue toward the bowl. Call on the children to encourage one another. Time how long it took to fill the bowl. *How long did it take you to get the sheep fed when you went one at a time?* Now divide the group into two lines on opposite sides of the bowl. Have one person going toward the bowl from each side, and time the process again. *Was it faster when two people at a time were helping to feed the sheep? When we work well together, we can help many more people.* Try this with three or four lines. *Does your time get faster?* If possible, see if you can decrease the time needed to “feed the sheep” with more group cooperation. Close with a prayer, such as: *Jesus, we love you. Help us to feed your sheep. Amen.*

Reflect

What new discoveries did the children make about the Bible? What questions or ideas do you want to follow up on in the future? What additional resources may you need? Say a prayer of thanks for any joys or delights of this session. Give thanks for each child in your group. Consider how you will attend to the particular needs and interests of each individual as you prepare for future sessions.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Young children love to hear and create stories. They will readily respond to the stories of the Bible if the stories are told in a lively and engaging way. This is an age when children are just beginning to discover that the Bible is a special book for their faith community. Help them to get comfortable holding a Bible. Even if they are not yet readers, show them the list of books in the Bible. Even though some children may not yet be reading, it is good to begin to help them understand that the stories you study together are part of the same larger book and that there is a system they can use to find those stories. Explain that the first part of the Bible—the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament—records the unfolding of faith in God before Jesus, and the second part—the Christian Scriptures or New Testament—tells the stories about Jesus and the early church. It is important to let children feel comfortable asking questions about the Bible. Let them know that there are no wrong questions or wrong answers. Encourage them to seek answers from within themselves as you help them create a strong foundation for their continued growth in faith.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

Leader Preparation

Read 2 Kings 2:1-14. What do you like about this story? What seems puzzling? Consider how children in your group may hear this story. If any of them have lost loved ones, through the death of a grandparent, another relative, or a close family friend, this story may be particularly resonant for them. Consider how you might address questions about what happens when we die. Elisha pursued Elijah to receive a portion of his spirit so that Elisha might be Elijah's successor. Elisha laid aside everything else in order to receive this. What have you laid down or given up in order to be a follower of Jesus?

Prayer: Wonderful God, You made yourself known to me though Jesus. You show yourself to me through the stories of the Bible. I see you dance in the eyes of these children when they recognize your presence in our midst. Help me to receive your grace. Help me to be transformed by your word. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Seek Help Knowing God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the story of Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2:1-14. Consider people who have helped you to grow spiritually. What do you seek from these people? Who has mentored you in faith? Consider things you could tell the children about people who have mentored you. If the children would enjoy meeting your mentor, consider inviting him or her to come and meet the children.

Supplies:

- Bible and children's illustrated story Bible
- "Elijah and Elisha," Attachment: Activity 1

Tell the children you will be reading them a story written a long time ago. It comes from the Bible. Show the children where 2 Kings 2 is located in the Bible. *The story is about someone named Elisha who learned how to follow God from a prophet named Elijah.* Since it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between Elijah and Elisha, you could have half the group raise their hands every time you say the name "Elijah" and the other half raise their hands every time you say the name "Elisha." Read 2 Kings 2:1-14 either from the attachment "Elijah and Elisha" or from a children's Bible storybook.

After the story pose these or similar questions: *How do you think Elisha felt about Elijah going away? How would you feel if a favorite teacher or friend was going far away? What did Elisha want from Elijah? Do you think Elisha got what he wanted? Why or why not?*

We all have people who help us learn about God. Tell about someone in your own life and what he or she has taught you. Ask: *Who helps you to know God better? What are some things you have already learned about God?*

Say a prayer together and invite the children to list the names of the people you have discussed. One option would be: *Thank you God for Elijah and Elisha. Elijah showed Elisha how to love and serve you. Thank you for the people who help us know you. Thank you for . . . [invite children to say names]. Thank you God for each of us here learning together. Thank you for . . . [point to each child and to yourself and have the children say each person's name]. Thank you for Jesus, who helps all of us to know you. Amen.*



2 Listen for Jesus' Words

Leader preparation: Spend a few minutes with the painting "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Nolde. What do you see in the face of Jesus and in the children?

Supplies:

- artwork: "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Nolde https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and colored pencils, crayons, or markers

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.

Show the children the painting “Christ Among the Children.” *What do you see in the picture? If you were in the picture, where would you be sitting? What do you notice about how Jesus is talking with the children? I wonder what it would feel like to be sitting close to Jesus.* Explain to the children what you like about talking with someone you can see and touch. God knew that we enjoy seeing and hearing someone we can touch and see. Read the following paraphrase of John 1:1–5, 14. You may want to show the children where the Gospel of John is in the Bible before you read.

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God from the very beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

Through the Word all things were made. Not one thing was made without him.

In the Word there was life and that life was a light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness. The darkness can never put out that light.

The Word became a human being and lived on the earth. We have seen how wonderful he was. There has never been anyone like him, so full of grace and truth, so much like God.

Ask the children to count how many times the word “Word” is used in the reading. The Hebrew people and Greek people who read this passage would have had a little different understanding of “Word” than we do. Explain that the book of John was first written in a language called Greek. The Greek word for “Word” is *logos* (LOH-gohs). Invite the children to say *logos* with you. It stands for the core of who God is, the spirit of God, the power of God. *Why do you think Jesus might have been called Logos, the word of God? How hard it would be to understand who God is if we did not have Jesus come as a person to tell and show the world? What are some of the words you think Jesus said to the children?* Write the words the children share in block letters on the newsprint. When finished, read the words out loud. Invite the children to draw their own picture of Jesus talking with them.

③ Make Bible Cookies

Leader preparation: In advance, prepare and bake cookie dough or shortbread. Check for allergies in your group. Before baking, cut the dough or bread into rectangles (roughly 3 × 5 in). Prepare frosting in zip-lock bags with a tiny hole cut in the corner. For a healthy alternative, consider whole-wheat or brown-rice crackers or maybe flatbread and cream cheese. Have celery and carrot sticks available in case a child cannot eat cookies or crackers.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- 66 straws, blocks, or buttons
- cookies or shortbread baked into rectangular pieces (or squares of cracker, rice cakes, or flatbread and cream cheese or humus)
- frosting in zip-lock bags (frosting can be flavored with cocoa powder)
- napkins and wet towels to wipe hands
- plates and wax paper

Give each child a Bible to look at. Show the children that in the front of the Bible (the table of contents) there is a list of many books. Some of the books are like books full of poems. Some tell people’s stories. Others are letters written to people in churches to help them learn how to follow God. Some are books that contain dreams or ideas said by prophets who were helping to guide God’s people. Some books tell about love, others about war, still others about life and death. Other books have wise sayings. The 66 books in the Bible have all kinds of things

for people to read. As a group, line up buttons, straws, or blocks in six groups of ten. That's 60. Add six more items to make 66—the number of books in the Bible.

Be certain none of your children have allergies or sensitivities to ingredients you are serving. If cookies are an option, give each child a rectangular cookie on a plate. Use frosting in tubes or small zip-lock bags with the corner cut off. Ask the children to work together to line up the cookies to look like a shelf of books (there is no one right way to do this—they might line up the cookies on wax paper or stick cookies together with frosting). They are making a tasty reminder that the Bible has many books to read and study. Eat the cookies (or other items you have provided).

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Play “Jesus Says” (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the directions for this activity. Consider stories you have recently explored or ones your group may know well. What ideas would you like to add to the list of sayings? If your children enjoy leading, encourage them to be the leader as well.

Supplies: None

Read the paraphrase from Activity 2 of John 1:1–5, 14. Jesus helped us to know what God is like. Invite the children to play “Jesus Says” with you. Help the children hold hands and make a circle. Explain that as we grow to know Jesus, we get to know about the words he said and the things he did. We begin to understand some of the things he would like for us to do. *In today’s game, you will only do the things the leader says if the leader says, “Jesus says.”* Explain that this game is similar to “Simon Says.” At first, you will want to be the leader in order to give the children the idea of the game. After a few times, you may let the children come up with an idea of something Jesus would or would not do. If the statement includes “Jesus says,” the children are to act out whatever the statement is. For example: *Jesus said, “Feed the poor.”* You and the children pretend to feed the poor. Or perhaps the statement would be this: *Don’t share things with others.* Because this would not be something Jesus would say, and the phrase “Jesus said” was not said, the children stand in place.

Some “Jesus says” examples are:

- Jesus says, “Come, follow me.”
- Jesus says, “Love your neighbor.”
- Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid. I am with you all the time.”
- Jesus says, “Forgive and you will be forgiven.”

Some examples for statements without “Jesus says” are:

- “Take something that doesn’t belong to you.”
- “Be mad and stay that way.”
- “Don’t play with people you don’t like.”
- “Take more than you need.”

From Bible stories you have recently read together, select other ideas that will be familiar to the children. This game can be used at any time the group needs to be up and moving.

5 Play with Flashlights

Leader preparation: Find as many flashlights as you can for this experience, preferably one per child. If possible, darken your room or arrange to have a room that can be darkened for this activity. Find a box that is dark inside (until a light shines in it). Pick a stuffed animal the children like or another object that fits into the box. In John 1:1–14, the scripture talks about the Word bringing light into the darkness. What are your feelings about light and darkness? Be open to exploring with the children both the light and the darkness and the feelings these each may create.

Supplies:

- flashlights, if possible one for each child or pair of children
- large box that is dark inside
- stuffed animal that fits inside the box or container
- song: “This Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgUtOIPsgAU>

Read aloud the paraphrase of John 1:1–5 from Activity 2. *Where are you when it is dark? What do you feel when you are in the dark? Where are you when it is light? How do you feel in the light? God’s light comes to us through Jesus, and Jesus helps us to know God better.* Show the children the box with the stuffed animal (or another object) inside it. Turn out as many lights as you can and still have the children be comfortable. Explain you will be trying to see what is in the box without any lights. Let each child see what he or she can in the darkness of the box. Then give the children a flashlight and let each one look inside the box. Ask if it is now easier to see. Invite the children to lie on the floor and play with the flashlights shining on the ceiling. Take turns with the flashlights if you do not have enough for one per child. Notice with them what happens as the lights come together and separate. Take time to turn off the flashlights one by one and see how much it changes the light in the room. Turn them back on one by one. Ask: *Is it brighter now?*

Close this activity by singing “This Little Light of Mine” by Harry Dixon. The song has been sung by people working for the light of justice to come to everyone.

6 Who Are You?

Leader preparation: If you do not already have dress-up clothes in your learning area, this activity will give you the opportunity to begin collecting some items. Young children enjoy pretending. Through trying on different identities they grow in understanding themselves.

Supplies:

- variety of dress-up clothes, such as a Superman cape, a Dora the Explorer outfit, a Barney mask, a firefighter’s hat, a police hat, doctor or nurse items, and adult dresses, shirts, and suit jackets
- (option) fabric to be used for capes
- children’s Bible storybook or “Elijah and Elisha,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read or review the story of Elijah and Elisha with the children in 2 Kings 2:1–14. Use the attachment from Activity 1 or a children’s Bible storybook to help tell the story. *How is Elijah’s cape important to Elisha? Sometimes when we have a piece of someone’s clothing, it reminds us of that person and encourages us to do some of the things we have learned from that person.*

Invite the children to look at the clothes you brought and to find some items they would enjoy wearing. Informally talk to the children and find out who they are dressing up to be. What do they like about the persons or kind of persons they have chosen? Depending on your group, you may want to have each child tell the group who she or he is. *Does this person help others to know God? If so, how?* Continue playing and switching outfits as long as the children are willing to do so. You may want to exchange clothes every 5–10 minutes so children have the opportunity to play with a variety of clothing. *Option:* Invite the children to use fabric to make capes like Elijah’s mantle.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Hide and Seek (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If your room does not lend itself to the children themselves hiding, pick three objects the children could take turns hiding, objects that are small, easily hidden, and safe for children to handle.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible storybook or “Elijah and Elisha,” Attachment: Activity 1
- Bible
- (optional) three small objects from your room

Read 2 Kings 2:1–14 either from the Activity 1 attachment or a children’s Bible storybook. *Who is Elisha trying to make sure he doesn’t lose?* Many times in Bible stories, we will hear of people hiding and seeking God and other people. Ask the children if they remember other people who were lost, who were found, or who searched for something. Tell the children some lost-and-found stories from the Bible, such as a woman looking for a lost coin (Luke 15:8), a shepherd looking for a lost sheep (Luke 15:1–6), and Jesus’ parents looking for him when he got lost (Luke 2:41–52). If your learning area has hiding spaces for the children, play Hide and Seek, with children taking turns being “It.” If your area is small or does not have places for the children to hide, select three objects from your room that can be hidden. Children can take turns hiding the objects, with others hunting together to find items. Close the activity with a prayer, such as: *Thank you God for helping . . . [say each child’s name and your own] to find You. Help us look for you every day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

8 Sing “Jesus Loves Me”

Leader preparation: If you are not familiar with the song “Jesus Loves Me,” be sure to listen to someone sing it or find a copy to review before this activity.

Supplies:

- song: “Jesus Loves Me,” http://www.dltk-bible.com/jesus_loves_me.htm
- paraphrase of John 1:1–5, 14 from Activity 2

Read the paraphrase from Activity 2 of John 1:1–5, 14. Jesus became a person and lived right here on earth so people would know that God loves us. Sometimes we sing about things that are gifts to us from God. It is a way of celebrating. You may want to ask if any of the children ever make up songs they like to sing. If the children do not know the song “Jesus Loves Me,” teach it to them. Ask the children to select a way to do hand motions for the name “Jesus.” They might make a “J” with one hand. Or they might point up, hold their arms out like on a cross, or have another idea. For other words, the children may choose the same motion

or they may choose to do something different. What could they do for the words “love,” “me,” “Bible,” “little ones,” “weak,” and “strong”?

Sing the song one or two times using the hand motions. Then invite the children to sing the song multiple times using the names of each person in your group. For example, “Jesus loves Keisha, this I know . . .” If you have more than eight in your group, you may want to create separate groups for this part of the activity. Invite the children to consider who they know that may not know Jesus. Pray together to ask for God’s help to share Jesus’ love with those who don’t know Jesus. Ask children to repeat your words when you pause in prayer, such as: *Dear Jesus,* [pause] *We know you love everyone.* [pause] *Help us share your love.* [pause] *In Jesus’ name, Amen.* [pause]

9 Make a Commitment

Leader preparation: Think about things you know are important to the children about Jesus. Think of specific things the children might do that would help the work Jesus is doing right now in their neighborhoods. Prayerfully consider what it means to you to make a commitment.

Supplies:

- “I Make a Commitment,” Attachment: Activity 9
- paraphrase of John 1:1–5, 14, Activity 2
- (optional) paper and crayons or markers

Read aloud the paraphrase from Activity 2 of John 1:1–5, 14. *If we want to learn something new like riding a bike, what do we do? If we want to be like someone, what do we do? When we want to follow Jesus, he asks us to listen to his teachings and do the kind of things he did. Think about the biblical characters you have focused on in your group. What are some of the things people in the Bible did to follow God?*

Pass out copies of “I Make a Commitment.” Invite the children to think of one specific action they can do before they go to bed tonight that would help them become a stronger follower of Jesus. Try to help them go beyond saying “Be nice” or “Be kind” to describing a specific thing they can do, such as: play a game with a younger sibling, help a friend or neighbor care for a pet, read a Bible story with my caregiver, ask someone to forgive you or forgive someone else. When each child has identified something, read “I Make a Commitment” to the group. Help each child write in his or her parent or caregiver’s name and the action the child plans to take. If time permits, invite the children to draw a picture of doing the action each has chosen. As they draw, ask: *What might make it hard for you to do this? How do you think you will feel when you have finished doing this?*

Reflect

In what ways did the children experience God in the scriptures and activities in today’s session? Who in your congregation would you like the children to get to know who may help expand on some of the ideas and questions the children raised? What did you discover about the children in your group? What needs, gifts, or interests did you notice? How will you use what you learned about your group to plan for future activities? Pray a prayer of thanks for the experiences and learning you and the children have shared together.

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Attachment: Activity 1

Elijah and Elisha

Based on 2 Kings 2:1-14

Once long ago there was a leader named Elijah. He was a prophet who helped others learn about God. Elijah was very old. He knew he would not live much longer. Soon he would be swept up into heaven inside a mighty wind like nothing anyone had seen before. Elijah told his student, Elisha, "Stay here. God is sending me to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "No way! I will not leave you!" (*Have the children shake their heads "no" and repeat with you, "No way! I will not leave you."*) So Elijah and Elisha went to Bethel together.

At Bethel, a group of prophets asked Elisha, "Did you know that today God is going to take away your teacher, Elijah?"

"Yes, I know, but don't talk about it," said Elisha. (*Have the children put a finger to their lips and say, "Shhh, don't talk about it."*)

"I am going to Jericho now," Elijah told Elisha. "Stay here in Bethel."

But Elisha said again, "No way! I will not leave you." (*Have the children shake their heads "no" and repeat this phrase with you.*) So Elijah and Elisha went to Jericho together.

At Jericho, some more prophets said to Elisha, "Did you know that today God is going to take away your teacher, Elijah?"

"Yes, I know, but don't talk about it," said Elisha. (*Have the children put a finger to their lips and say, "Shhh, don't talk about it."*)

Then Elijah told Elisha to stay in Jericho. "I'm going to Jordan," said Elijah.

But Elisha said again, "No way! I will not leave you." (*Have the children shake their heads "no" and repeat this phrase with you.*) So Elijah and Elisha went to Jordan together.

When they reached the Jordan River, Elijah took off his coat, rolled it up, and struck the water. The water divided. Elijah and Elisha walked to the other side on dry ground. Elijah then asked Elisha, "Before I am taken from you, what can I do for you?"

Elisha said, "I want to be just like you. I want my spirit to be strong like yours."

Elijah said, "That's a big thing to ask. But if you are watching when I am taken from you, you will be given what you ask. But you must be watching."

As they walked along, suddenly a chariot and horses of fire appeared. The two prophets were separated. Elijah went up into heaven in the mighty wind.

Elisha cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" Then he didn't see Elijah any more. Elisha was very upset and tore his clothes. He picked up Elijah's coat. Sadly, he walked back to the Jordan River. He stood alone at the side of the river looking at the swirling water. Then he called out for God. He struck the water with Elijah's coat, and the water divided. Elisha crossed to the other side of the river on dry land.

Attachment: Activity 9

I Make a Commitment

To: _____ (caregiver/parent's name)

I want you to know that I want to do this.

Every day I want to grow closer to Jesus. I want to love him and act like he did. Every day, I want to help Jesus by

_____.

Love from,

I Make a Commitment

To: _____ (caregiver/parent's name)

I want you to know that I want to do this.

Every day I want to grow closer to Jesus. I want to love him and act like he did. Every day, I want to help Jesus by

_____.

Love from,

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are very rapidly learning skills and new information. They are probably aware of ways they are growing and changing. Some may also have younger siblings they help teach to walk, eat, or talk. Help the children become aware of their ability to be learners and to be guides for others as they grow in their experiences with scripture and their relationship with Jesus. What do they already know that they can share about Jesus with someone else? It is also important to help them learn to maintain safe boundaries with strangers as they learn from and share with others.

About this Exploration

For the Christian, discipleship includes servant leadership. As Christians, we believe that scripture makes a difference in our living. Engaging with scripture is one way we discover how to live in Christ's way. As we hear, read, and interpret scripture, we listen for God's word. We discern how to live into its teaching. And as we respond to scripture, we learn the practices of our faith, mentor others, pass on the sacred texts, and learn more about living with compassion, hope, and love.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ruth 1
Acts 8:26–40

Leader Preparation

In both Bible Focus Passages for this Exploration, the characters have people who mentor them into an understanding of the faith. Remember in prayer the people who have helped you enter into faith. Name them individually. How did they guide you? Who have you helped to lead to faith? How are you leading the children in your group? Pray for each child in your group and the possible visitors who may come. Ask God to help you identify one thing each child needs to know at this time in his or her faith journey.

Prayer: Thank you God for those who have taught me about faith. I am grateful for each one who has walked with me through good times and hard times. Help me to be fully present with the children today and aware of your Holy Spirit working in our midst. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Act Out the Story of Philip and the Ethiopian Official (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official from Acts 8:26–40. Read the attachment and plan how you will guide the children as they act out the story.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- “Philip and the Ethiopian Official,” Attachment: Activity 1

Show the children where Acts is in the Bible. The second part of the Bible is called the Christian Scriptures or the New Testament. Tell them the Christian Scriptures are all about what happened to Jesus and those who followed him. Either read aloud Acts 8:26–40 from a children’s Bible or from the attachment. If you are using the attachment, invite the children to make motions. If you choose to read from a children’s Bible, stop each time a character does something the children could act out or make motions.

Ask the children questions such as: *What do you think Philip thought about going on a road far away from others? Was it hard for Philip to catch up with the man riding in a chariot? How do you think the man felt when Philip ran after him and asked if he understood what he was reading? When the man saw the water, he wanted to be baptized. What would it feel like to be baptized in the water? Why do you think Philip went away so quickly? The man was happy even though Philip left. What do you think the man did next?*



2 Explore the Painting of Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah

Leader preparation: Reflect on the painting “Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab” by William Blake. What feelings and thoughts do you believe the characters portray? Display the artwork so the children can easily see it.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab” by William Blake <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=1590989&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>
- “Ruth Helps Naomi,” Attachment: Activity 2

Invite the children to look quietly for a moment at the painting “Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab.” Ask the children: *What do you think the people in this picture are doing? Where do you think they are?* Point to the older woman in the picture. Ask what the children think she is feeling. Point to the woman on the far right. Ask the children what they think she is feeling. Point to the woman holding on to the older woman. Ask the children what they think she is feeling. *Do you think anyone or anything is missing in this picture? If Jesus were in the picture, where would he be?* Encourage them to come up to the poster and point to where Jesus might be in the picture. Ask what Jesus would be doing if he were there.

Read the story about Ruth and Naomi from the attachment. Have the children stand and make a circle with you. Ask the children to pretend they are Naomi.

- 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.

Ask them to stand or sit like Naomi. *How do you feel pretending to be Naomi?* Now ask them to stand or sit like they think Orpah might want to do. *How do you feel pretending to be Orpah?* Invite the children to stand or sit like Ruth. *How does it feel pretending to be Ruth?* Then ask them their feelings about the whole picture. *Which person would you like to meet? What could help Naomi feel better? What do you think Ruth did to help Naomi?*

3 Identifying People Who Help Us Know Jesus

Leader preparation: Plan how you might tell the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official. Find a Bible storybook with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, read the attachment from Activity 1, or read Acts 8:26–40. Plan how you will tell the story in your own words. Think of people in your life who have helped you grow in the faith. Who are some of the people you think help the children? You may wish to invite a teen or young adult in the church to come as a guest. Ask your guest to share who has helped her or him get to know Jesus.

Supplies:

- note cards
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and markers or crayons
- children’s Bible storybook or “Philip and the Ethiopian Official,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read or tell the story of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–40). Use the attachment from Activity 1, a children’s Bible storybook, or your own words. Ask the children who helped the Ethiopian to learn about Jesus. *What were some things Philip did or said? Can the children think of other things Philip might have done?* If you have invited a guest, ask the guest to share with the children how he or she got to know Jesus. *Who helped you understand who Jesus is?* Ask the children who has helped them know Jesus. Write the names of these people on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the children to identify specific ways these people have helped. If possible, identify some ways the children have helped you to grow in faith. Ask each child to select one person who has helped him or her and then color a picture for that person. Either help them write a short thank you note to the person or have each child dictate to you what he or she wants to say in a thank you note. Send these notes home to parents and caregivers with a request for help in having the children deliver their thank you notes.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Identifying Times to Go (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Both Bible stories in this Exploration—the story of Ruth and the story of the Ethiopian official—are about journeys. Naomi travels from Bethlehem to Moab and back again; the Ethiopian travels to and from Jerusalem. People come and go. There is departure and loss. Consider a time you said goodbye or had someone you loved say goodbye to you. How did either or both of you know it was time to leave? How did you feel? Think of an experience from your life that you might share with your group of children.

Supplies:

- Bible
- colored pencils, crayons or markers and paper
- “Ruth Helps Naomi,” Attachment: Activity 2

Read the story “Ruth Helps Naomi.” If you have already read the story, have the children help you retell the story. Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi had said many goodbyes to loved ones. Tell the children about a time you said goodbye to someone. Where were you? What happened? What were some of the things you were feeling? Ask the children to tell you about a time they said goodbye. It may have been saying goodbye to a parent dropping them off at childcare. It may have been when changing classes or preschools. It may have been saying goodbye to grandparents or friends on vacation. Some of the children may have already experienced difficult goodbyes, such as major moves or the death of a loved one. Whatever their experiences of saying goodbye, acknowledge their feelings.

Ask the children to consider where God is when we say goodbye. It is very hard to understand how God can be everywhere. It is like feeling the air all around us, or imagining we are being held in a gigantic hug. Invite the children to close their eyes, wrapping their arms around themselves in a gentle hug. *Take a slow deep breath. Feel the air go in, deep, deep inside you. Feel the air go out very slowly. Feel the hug. Feel how God is holding you and hugging you and loving you. Feel how God is as close to you as your breathing. Take another deep, slow breath.* Pause for a few seconds of silence. Ask the children to draw pictures of themselves and God. Invite each child to show the group the picture if he or she would like to.

5 Sing Together

Leader preparation: Learn the song “Guide My Feet,” or invite someone in the church or community to come and teach the children the song. Musical instruments such as a tambourine, shakers, and other rhythm instruments can add to the fun. Cut out footprint shapes from colored construction paper and place them like a path of footprints where someone has walked.

Supplies:

- colored construction paper and scissors to make footprint shapes
- tape
- song: “Guide My Feet,” (tune: Guide My Feet, 8.8.8.10.) <http://www.hymn-site.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>
- (optional) “Ruth Helps Naomi,” Attachment: Activity 2

Read or recall the story of Ruth and Naomi, using the attachment from Activity 2 as a guide. Ruth had to trust God to guide her in her decision to go with Naomi. *Do you think Ruth might have been afraid?* It must have been difficult to go some place she had never been before, leaving her family behind. Yet Ruth did it. *Sometimes we have to trust God to guide us when we are not sure where we are headed. It helps to know that God is with us on the road.*

Sing the song “Guide My Feet” for the children. Explain that this is an African American spiritual. It came from a time when people were being hurt and abused as slaves. The slaves did not know where they were going or what would happen to them, but they believed God would help them. You may need to explain that slaves were people who were bought and sold and could not choose to go and do what they wanted to do. *What would slaves have hoped for God to do?* Sing the first verse together. When the children are comfortable with the words, make a circle together and dance or walk in one direction as you sing. Follow the path of footprints that you made. Add each verse and encourage the children to enjoy the

rhythm of the song. Ask the children to think about scripture stories they know. *What was something God led the people to do?* You may need to name some stories you have recently explored together. Help the children create additional verses with their ideas. Encourage them to share the song with someone today.

6 Baptism Exploration

Leader preparation: What do you see in “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West? Identify the form(s) of baptism your church uses. You may want to ask the pastor to come and show your children the baptismal font or baptistry and talk with them about baptism. If you do not know if the children in your group have been baptized, find this out from their parents or caregivers, if possible.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1282230595?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- access to your baptismal font or baptistry
- Bible or “Philip and the Ethiopian Official,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian from the attachment for Activity 1, or tell the story in your own words from Acts 8:26–40. If you have already told the story today, invite the children to retell the story with you. Show the children the painting “Baptism of Jesus.” Ask them to look at it for a few moments and then tell what they see. The artist, Pheoris West, was creating his view of Jesus being baptized, but this could also be a picture of the Ethiopian man who wanted to be baptized. *How does our church baptize people?* Go to your baptismal font or baptistry. Give the children time to touch the items. If possible, pour some water in the font and have the children touch the water. *Who do you know who has been baptized? Have you seen a baptism? What questions do you have about baptism?* If your pastor is available, this may be a wonderful opportunity for him or her to talk with the children about baptism.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Make Notes for Children (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Identify someone in your church who is saying good-bye in some way. Perhaps a senior adult moving into a retirement residence or care facility, or perhaps someone is moving or has recently moved. You might also know of a shelter, school, food pantry, or other agency that would have children who have recently had to move. Prepare to tell the story of Ruth and Naomi from the attachment in Activity 2, or plan to have the children help retell the story together. Preview and plan to watch the video version of Robert Munsch’s story, *From Far Away*.

Supplies:

- card stock paper or regular paper cut and folded as cards
- markers and crayons
- children’s Bible storybook or “Ruth Helps Naomi,” Attachment: Activity 2
- the children’s storybook *From Far Away* by Robert Munsch <http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/books/From-Far-Away-Munsch-Askar-Martchen-ko/9781550373967-item.html>
- video: “From Far Away,” <http://www.nfb.ca/partial/player/popout/28843/?ct=0>
- Internet access and equipment to show an online video

Tell the story of Ruth and Naomi from Ruth 1. You may choose to use a children’s Bible storybook or use the attachment for Activity 2. You may also choose to have the children tell the story. *Who in the story was saying goodbye? Who was leaving? Why? How did the women say goodbye?* Talk with the children about times they have moved or they know someone who has moved. Show the children the video “From Far Away” or tell the story from Munsch’s book of the same name. *What are some of the things that are hard about moving? I wonder what we could do to help someone who is feeling sad that they have to move.*

Tell them about the person or the agency you have selected. Explain to the children that they will make cards to show that they care about this person or someone at the agency. Have the children draw on the outside of the card a picture of something that makes them happy. Write what each child dictates to you on the inside of the card. Say a prayer together, having them repeat short phrases: *Thank you God for helping us make these notes. Be with the person who receives them. May that person feel you close by and know your love. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.*



8 Build a Chariot

Leader preparation: Find a large box, possibly a refrigerator box, and cut out the form of a chariot. See the attachment for a simple design. Make it large enough for two children to stand behind it. Obtain a second box to create a horse (if you have time and space). If a box is not available, use newsprint or poster board on which to draw the chariot, and then tape pieces together. Gather a few pictures of chariots from books or the Internet.

Supplies:

- refrigerator box or other large box, or tape and newsprint or poster board
- water-based paints and brushes
- (optional) markers
- pictures of chariots from books or the Internet
- “Chariot,” Attachment: Activity 8
- children’s Bible storybook or “Philip and the Ethiopian Official,” Attachment: Activity 1

Show the children pictures of chariots from the attachment. *Have any of you seen a chariot in a movie or museum?* Read or retell the story about Philip and the Ethiopian man using either the attachment from Activity 1 or a children’s Bible. The Ethiopian is riding in a chariot and reading. On very bumpy roads this would not have been easy. When he invites Philip into the chariot to talk, the two men ride together as Philip tells the man about Jesus. They stop only when the Ethiopian official sees water and asks to be baptized.

Invite the children to paint or decorate the chariot you have cut out from a refrigerator box or drawn on newsprint. If you are painting, be sure the paints are

water-based and you have coverings for the floor. Small adult shirts worn with the buttons in back will help to protect clothing. Depending on your group, you may need to designate what areas each person will decorate. When the chariot is finished, have the children take turns “riding” in it. Another child may enjoy pulling it and pretending to be a horse.

Ask each child to name one thing he or she knows about Jesus to tell someone when it is his or her turn to ride in the chariot. *Do you think the Ethiopian man Philip helped will tell others about Jesus? When they first met, Philip did not know the man. If you wanted to talk to someone about Jesus, what would be a safe way for you to do that?* Most children have heard at home and school about what precautions they should take around strangers. Encourage them to teach you what they know about keeping themselves safe. Could they ask an adult to come with them? Could they talk to the person with others present or nearby? Close this activity by thinking about people that the children know they would like to tell about Jesus. Plan how you might tell or retell the story of Ruth and Naomi.

9 Moving Relay

Leader preparation: Gather supplies for a relay. If necessary, reserve a larger area for the activity or take the group outside.

Supplies:

- 2 backpacks or small suitcases
- 2 sets of six items, including things children might want to take if they moved, such as a toothbrush, a stuffed animal, a comb or brush, a jacket, a pair of shorts, a shirt, or a book
- 10 feet or more of open space
- children’s Bible storybook or “Ruth Helps Naomi,” Attachment: Activity 2

Tell or review the story of Ruth and Naomi in Ruth 1. You may want to use the attachment from Activity 2 or a children’s Bible storybook. *What do you imagine Ruth and Naomi took with them when they moved? What would be the most important things? How much could they have carried without help? If the children needed to pick things to move with them and had to take only what they could carry, what would they take? Would it be hard to decide?*

Separate the children into two groups for a “moving” relay. Number the children 1 or 2 to avoid having the children pick teams. Place “items to pack” at one end of your space. The first child runs carrying the empty backpack or suitcase to the other side of the room. The child must pack each item in the bag, close it, and return to the group before the next child takes the bag, runs to the other side, unpacks it, and returns to the line. Repeat until each person has had a turn. As an alternative, have all the children be on one team. Each child runs to either pack or unpack the bag. Time the total group. If you have time, repeat the relay and see if the children can move the items even faster. If children with physical challenges are a part of the group, consider a variety of ways to alter the activity so each child can fully participate. Perhaps the activity could be done sitting at a table and passing the bag, or maybe children could work in pairs.

Talk with the children using these or similar questions:

- Have you gone to a new school or childcare?
- Has your family ever moved?
- Has someone you really liked moved?
- What is fun about moving? What is hard?
- When we go someplace new we meet people we did not know. Is there a child at childcare, school, or in the neighborhood who might like to play the moving game with you?

Invite the children to listen for God this week and notice people who might need a friend to welcome them into a new place or situation.

Reflect

What did the children identify as things they know about Jesus? How did your exploration give them an opportunity to share these things? What questions or insights did the children raise? What new insights or ideas did you gain from them? What were some joys of this time together? What were some challenges? Give thanks for each child in your group.

Attachment: Activity 1

Philip and the Ethiopian Official

Based on Acts 8:26–40—An Action Story

Invite the children to do the actions described in italics.

An angel spoke to Philip. *(Pretend to be Philip speaking to an angel. How would Philip stand or sit? What might he do?)*

The angel told Philip to walk to a road without many people at noontime. The road went from a city named Jerusalem *(say "Jerusalem!")* to a place called Gaza. *(say "Gaza!")*

Philip got up and went. *(walk around the room, or walk in place.)* Philip met someone from a country in Africa called Ethiopia. *(say "Ethiopia!")* The man was in charge of lots of money for the Queen of Ethiopia. Her name was Candace. The man was riding in a chariot *(bounce and hold your arms out to guide the horse with pretend straps)* and reading the prophet Isaiah. *(hold a scroll to read)*

Philip felt the Holy Spirit encourage him to run after the chariot and climb in. As he ran, Philip could hear the man reading a part of Isaiah Philip knew, too. Philip got an idea! *(put your hand up to your head like you had a new thought)* Philip asked the man, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

The man answered, "How can I understand without some help. Will you come into my chariot and help me?"

Philip and the person from Ethiopia read from Isaiah together. The Ethiopian man asked Philip to tell him who Isaiah was writing about. Philip knew this was his chance to tell the man about Jesus. So he did! The man listened to him carefully. *(show a way someone listening might look)*

After he listened and learned, the man saw some water. *(make a wave with the arms to show water)* He said, "Here is some water. Why can't I be baptized right now?" The man ordered the chariot to stop. *(say "Whoa!")* Both the man and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized him right then. *(bend your knees and pretend you are going under water; hold your nose)*

When they came up out of the water, Philip left quickly with the Holy Spirit. The man never saw him again. *(shake your head "no")* But the man was still happy! *(smile)* Philip had taught him about Jesus! That was what he really wanted. He went on with his trip. *(do the chariot motion)*

Philip went to other towns and to many villages. He told even more people about Jesus on his way to Caesarea.

Prayer: Thank you God for people who want to learn about Jesus! *(say Thank you, God.)* Thank you God for people who tell others about Jesus! *(shout Thank you, God!)* Thank you God for . . . *(point to each child and leader in the group and say his or her name).*

Attachment: Activity 2

Naomi and Ruth

A long time ago in Bethlehem, no food grew in the land. Everyone was very hungry. A man from Bethlehem named Elimelech (eh-lihm-eh-lek) moved to another country—the land of Moab (moh-ab). He took his wife, Naomi, and sons, Mahlon (meh-lahn) and Kilion (kill-ee-on). They wanted to make a new home there.

After awhile, Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons. The sons married women from Moab. One married Orpah (or-puh), and the other married Ruth. They lived in Moab for 10 years. Then both of Naomi's sons died. Naomi had no husband, no sons and no grandchildren. She did have her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

Naomi was very sad. Finally, she decided to go back home to Bethlehem. She had heard that the harvest was good again and there was food. God was blessing the people there. Naomi wanted to go to Bethlehem alone, but Ruth and Orpah wanted to go with her.

Naomi said, "Go back home to your mothers. May God be kind to you. You have been very good to me and to my sons. May God give each of you a new home and a new husband!" She kissed them and they all cried.

Both Orpah and Ruth said, "No, we will go with you to Bethlehem."

But Naomi was firm, "Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you want to come with me? I cannot give you new husbands. I am too old. I have lost my husband and my sons and I have nothing. I am bitter and sad. I feel like God has turned against me."

The women all cried again. Then Orpah kissed Naomi goodbye. But Ruth held on tight to Naomi.

Naomi said, "Look, Orpah is going back home to live with her own family."

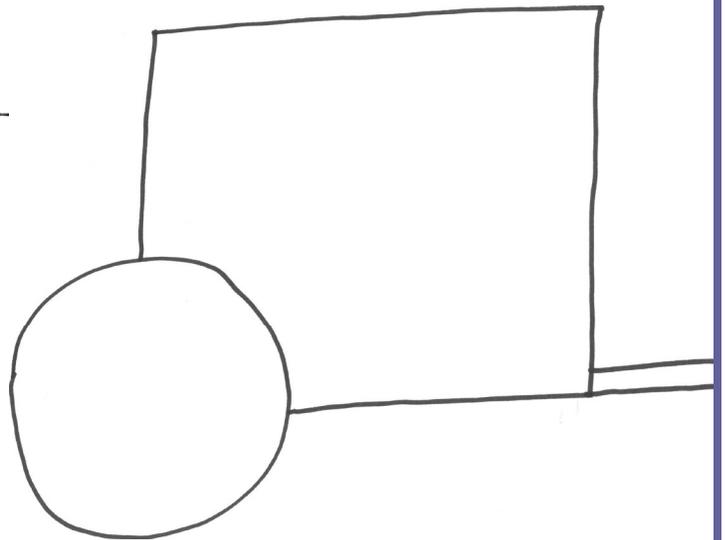
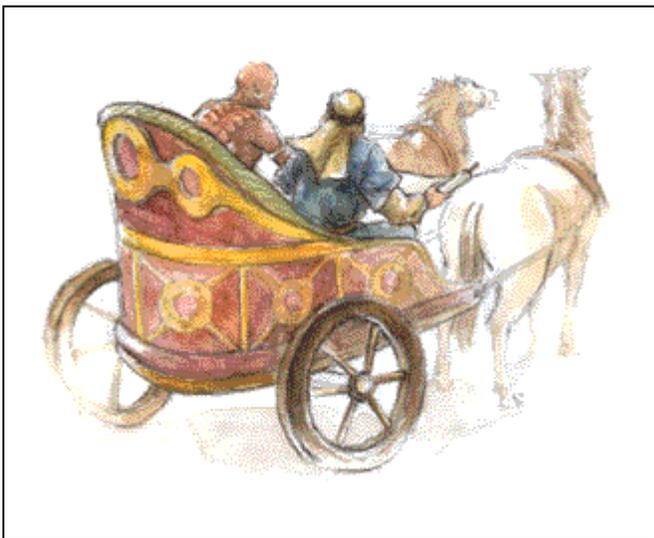
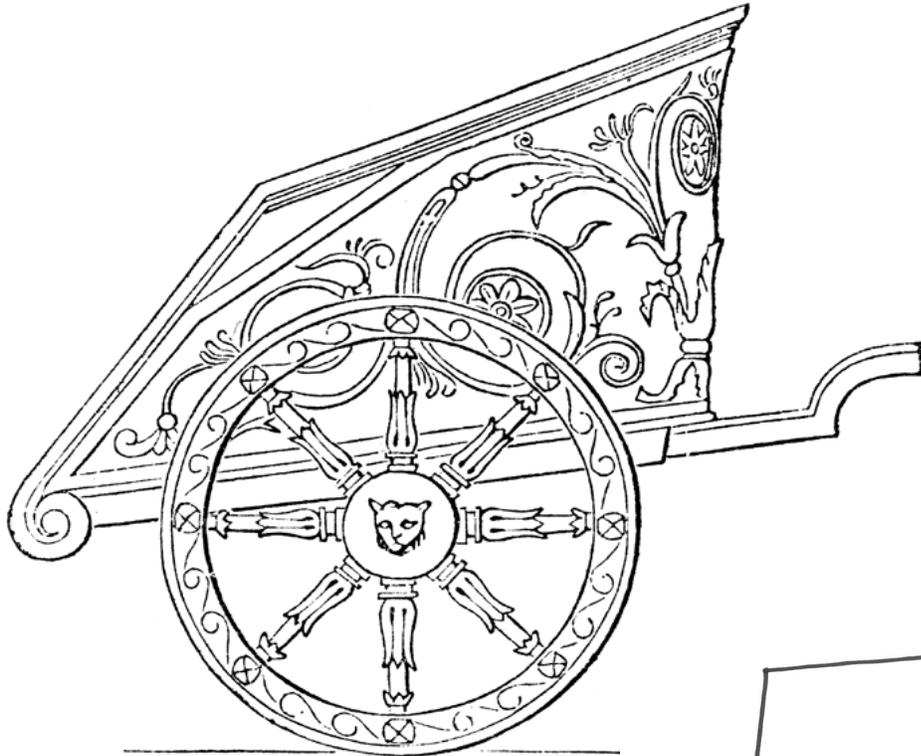
Ruth said, "Please do not make me leave you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people. Your God is my God. Where you die, I will die. That is where I will be buried. I promise this to God. Not even death will come between you and me!"

Naomi saw that Ruth with all of her heart wanted to come with her mother-in-law. Naomi finally agreed to let Ruth come with her to Bethlehem. They walked for days and days. Ruth took care of Naomi on the long journey. When they arrived in Bethlehem, people began to talk. They asked, "Is this really Naomi? She has been away for so long!"

Naomi told them not to call her Naomi anymore, because "Naomi" means pleasant or happy. "Call me Mara," she said. "Mara" means bitter. Naomi told them she had left Bethlehem happy. She had her husband and sons. Now she was coming back home with nothing but the clothes on her back. Naomi and Ruth lived together and helped one another. They began to make a new life in Bethlehem. All the people talked about Ruth. "Ruth is so loving and kind to Naomi," they said. "She is like a daughter!"

Attachment: Activity 8

Pictures of Chariots



Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Small children are interested in knowing stories about people in their families, particularly stories about the childhood of older family members. Children are very attentive to how their family celebrates, how family members interact with one another and with other families, and what their family holds dear. They notice not what people say but what they do. In the same way, they begin to understand Christian tradition by noticing how people of faith live out the traditions of the faith. Children connect with biblical stories in the context of the larger practices and activities of their family of faith.

Young children love repetition and ritual. They value continuity and appreciate participating in traditions and celebrations that are familiar. Consider what rituals and patterns you can create in your group. Simple things such as lighting a candle or gathering in a circle to welcome one another when you meet can be very important to young children. Children need and want to participate in the wider faith community. As they join in activities and celebrations, they grow into more mature faith and understanding.

Children this age are increasingly capable of sharing what they learn with others, and they enjoy doing so. They are becoming adept at learning and retelling narratives—stories of their own experience and stories they hear. Some children are able to read, a skill that increases their access to the stories of the Bible. However, for many children learning to read is a source of anxiety and difficulty. Children may be embarrassed that they are not able to read fluently. Being asked to read may reinforce a sense of shame or inadequacy. Gently encourage beginner readers, but be careful not to put them on the

spot or push them beyond their comfort level. Consistently affirm children’s worth not for what they do but for who they are as beloved children of God.

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 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

Consider what parts of the Christian tradition are most important to you. What beliefs, practices, worship, and prayer styles do you most value? How did you come to see the importance of these traditions? As you explore with the children, be aware of things they have already claimed as a part of the Christian tradition for themselves. How do these things help them? What are some traditions and rituals you currently enact with your group of children? What might you or they like to add?

Prayer: Dear God, help me to be aware of those traditions that strengthen your church and those that have caused us to lose sight of you. Help me listen to your voice speaking through these children, and help me speak and think in ways that please you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Identify Teachers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Timothy 1:1–14. Identify who the teachers are in the story. Some possible teachers are Paul, Lois, Eunice, and God. You may identify others. Print the following letter and place in it an envelope addressed to Timothy. You may even want to add a stamp.

Dear Timothy,

I am writing to you as I work for Christ. I am telling everyone I meet about Jesus and about God’s love for us. I love you so much, Timothy. You are like my own child and I miss you a lot.

I pray for you a lot, and I thank God for you. We both cried when we had to say goodbye. I can’t wait to see you again.

When I think about you, I remember what wonderful faith you have! Your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, taught you all they knew about faith and about living. When I prayed for you, you received some special gifts that will help you love and care for yourself and others. Be sure you use these gifts and keep them strong.

Don’t be embarrassed to stand up for Jesus or for me. Sometimes it will not be easy. We know that God will help us. God called us to have faith and to share it.

Remember, God’s love is always with you!

Love,
Paul

Supplies:

- Bible
- letter to Timothy
- (optional) envelope and stamp

Ask the children: *What do teachers do? What are the names of some of the people who help teach them?* Show the children where the book of 2 Timothy is in the Bible. The book contains a letter to Timothy. Show the children the envelope with the letter inside. Invite one of the children to open it. Read the letter to the children. Ask the children to identify who was teaching Timothy. You may need to reread the letter and ask them to watch for who was teaching. When finished listing teachers, ask the children who each of these teachers helped others to know about.

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.

Play a game with the children, inviting each of them to teach the group a song, a rhyme, or a body motion. Whatever the child does, the others are asked to try to learn from them and to repeat what they have learned.

2 Enjoy Psalm 96

Leader preparation: Locate Psalm 96 in a contemporary English version of the Bible, such as *The Message* or an online version of the Bible. Read the psalm in one or two different versions, and hear the depth of the praise the writer proclaims from all creation.

Supplies:

- *The Message* or other version of the Bible in contemporary English; online versions can be found at <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/> or <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>

Invite the children to stand in a circle. As you read Psalm 96 from the Bible, stop to shout, sing, applaud, bow, or act out each verse as you read. For example, the first verse is about singing to God. Sing a simple “La!” in all tones and sounds, or sing a song your group enjoys. In verse 2 shout out the phrase “God is great!” Have fun with this passage, and encourage the children to come up with ideas to show what the verse is saying to them. At the end, ask the children about the last verse. *In what ways does God want us to “set everything right” and “treat everyone fair”?* *How can you do that in your group and at home?*

3 Explore Family Traditions

Leader preparation: Look at the painting “Two Women and a Child” by Diego Rivera. What do you see in the picture? What feelings do you have? Think about the children in your group. What do you know of their family traditions? Be aware of the variety of experiences the children may have. Look at the letter to Timothy in Activity 1. Consider placing the letter in an envelope addressed to Timothy. Use a stamp if you wish. Plan for the children to open the letter with you if they have not yet done so.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Two Women and a Child” by Diego Rivera <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=1813781&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>
- (optional) globe or map
- Bible
- printout of the letter to Timothy from Activity 1
- envelope with stamp

Show the children the painting “Two Women and a Child.” Ask them to describe what they see in the picture. *Who do they think the women might be? What do they think the women are talking about? What do the children think the women will tell the child the one woman is holding? What is important for the child to learn?* Listen carefully to their answers. Tell the children about the artist who painted the picture. His name was Diego Rivera. He lived from 1886 to 1957 and was born in a country called Mexico. If you have a globe or map in your room, help the children locate the country in which you live. Then find the country of Mexico (if it is not your own).

Diego Rivera spent his life working to show people how important it is to be fair and just. He loved to paint large murals on fresh plaster to help people remember

Mexico's history and the importance of each person. His artwork could be seen by everyone who passed by the wall. Rivera knew it was important for people to learn from their history in order to grow stronger, wiser, and kinder. He wanted so much to pass this message to others that he used his paintings to help people remember. In families, children are taught to remember things too. Sometimes these are called traditions. Ask: *What are some things your family does when they eat, go to sleep, celebrate a birthday, and celebrate Christmas or other holiday?* Help the children pick a specific example.

Read the children the letter to Timothy from Activity 1, and explain it is based on a Bible passage, 1 Timothy 1:1–14. *Who taught Timothy about Jesus?* Ask the children who in their family shows them how to follow Jesus. *What do we do in our church family and our group to help us learn and remember about Jesus? What are your favorite things to do at church?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Make a Family Picture (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a picture of your own family following the directions below. Consider how you will lead this activity with your group. Be aware of children who may live with their grandparents or who are cared for by people other than their parents. Recognize the diversity of families in your group, including blended families and families with a single parent or same-gender parents. Prepare to tell the children the story of Jesus in the temple from Luke 2:41–52, using your own words. Say a prayer of thanks for your own family.

Supplies:

- letter to Timothy from Activity 1
- small sticky notes or pieces of paper (2 × 2 in) and glue, roughly eight pieces per child
- construction paper sheet for each child
- markers or crayons

Families come in all kinds and sizes—some are large, some small. Some have one adult, two adults, or many adults; some have lots of children or just a few. Some are birth families, and some are families chosen. Talk with the children about who is in your family. Ask who is in their family. In the Bible there are many families who help to teach one another about God. Read the children the letter to Timothy from Activity 1, or recall the letter if you have already read it today. Ask them to notice what family members helped to teach Timothy about the faith. The letter mentions a grandmother named Lois and a mother named Eunice. If you have recently talked about scriptures where other Bible characters had a family member help them to learn about God, remember these together.

As we read the Bible together, we learn how others learned about God. Jesus learned about God from his parents, but he also talked with people in his faith community. Tell the children the story of Jesus in the temple from Luke 2:41–52. Invite the children to notice who is in Jesus' family. We know he had a younger brother named James and probably other brothers and sisters. Ask each child to draw him- or herself in the middle of a piece of construction paper. Then invite them to draw family members on the small pieces of paper or sticky notes—one family member per note. Some children may want your help to write names on the notes. Then invite them to place the pieces of paper on the construction paper around the picture of themselves.

5 Interview Guest

Leader preparation: Select a person in your church who has been involved in church for a long time and enjoys small children. Invite the guest to talk with the group about what church was like for him or her as a child or younger person. If he went to Sunday school as a child, what was that like? If she has a Bible or a book of Bible stories from childhood, have the guest bring these along. If you have a childhood Bible or old family Bible, bring this to show as well.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- thank you note

Before your guest comes into your room, explain to the children who will be coming to visit. The children's job is to ask the person about what church was like when he or she was a child. Help the children think about questions to ask. If you have young children, keep the questions simple. Encourage each child to ask one question, though remember that some children may be shy or reluctant to speak to someone they do not know well. So do not force a child to speak if he or she is uncomfortable. Welcome the guest and begin your conversation together. Supplement questions as needed. If your guest brought a Bible or Bible story books, look at these items together. Finish your activity by having each child draw on or sign a thank you note for your guest.

6 Praise with Music

Leader preparation: If you have a person available who enjoys praising with song and musical instruments, invite him or her to come to the group. Ask your guest to share two or three songs or hymns of praise that are full of praise and to talk about the songwriter(s).

Supplies:

- rhythm instruments
- *The Message* or another easy-to-read version of the Bible

Read Psalm 96:1–2 to the children. Introduce your guest. Invite your guest to sing and play for the children two or three songs of praise. If the children know the songs, encourage them to sing or play rhythm instruments. After each song, have the person tell some information about the songwriters. Invite the children to say what they heard and felt in the song. If time permits, invite the children to choose songs they would like to sing that give praise to God.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Show Praise in Art (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider some of the ways you praise God. What happens inside of you when you praise? Have you ever praised when you were afraid or sad?

Supplies:

- paper, crayons or markers
- Bible

Talk with the children about what the word “praise” means. When we praise, we

are saying we like something or someone. We can praise by saying “Well done” or “Wow, that’s great!” or “That’s amazing!” *How do we praise God? When do you praise God?* Invite the children to praise God through making a picture. When the children are done, invite them to tell you or the group about the picture and how it shows praise for God.

Close by reading Psalm 96:4–6 to the children. At the end of your reading, you may want to add: *We praise God for . . .* [List one idea or color from each child’s picture.]

8 Scrolls and Ancient Bibles

Leader preparation: Think about the first Bible you owned. What was it like to hold that book in your hands? Was it a gift? If so, who gave it to you? If you have a childhood Bible or old family Bible, plan to bring it to show the children. Search for pictures of old Bibles and scrolls on the Internet, and bookmark the pages so that you can show these to the children. Search online using terms such as “old Bible” or “Bible, scrolls” or “codex” to find images of old Bibles. Ask if anyone in the congregation has an old Bible he or she is willing to show your group. Also make a sample scroll using a dowel or pencil and strips of paper.

Supplies:

- old Bibles
- pictures of old Bibles from the Internet, from such sites as <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah>, <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2009/07/worlds-oldest-bible-hits-cyberspace/>, and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Family-bible.jpg>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles in different translations including a Bible translation in French or Spanish, if possible
- lengths of dowel or pencils, about 6 inches long
- transparent tape
- paper cut in strips 6 inches wide
- glue sticks
- (optional) brown paper bags and an iron

Invite children to look at pictures of old Bibles or scrolls or the Bibles and Bible storybooks you brought. Ask the children how old they think the books are. The Bible is a very, very old book that has been copied and recopied many times over. The oldest parts of our Bible were written on scrolls nearly 3000 years ago, but many of the stories are even older. The books of the Bible were scrolls written in Hebrew and Greek. Later people hand copied the scrolls into parchment books using pens made of feathers dipped in ink. Today Bibles are printed by machine in dozens of different languages. Invite the children to touch and look at the Bibles you brought.

Help the children make small scrolls by rolling the ends of a strip of paper around dowels or pencils, gluing the ends of the paper in place. Roll the scroll from both sides into the center. Leave a portion of the scroll open in the center to write on. Invite the children to write a short text from the Bible on their scrolls, such as “Love your neighbor” or “Love one another” or “God is love” or simply “Love.” Children can draw a picture on their scroll, if they wish.

If you wish to extend this activity, have children cut open the sides of brown paper bags (such as lunch bags) so the bags lie flat. Crumple the paper, then smooth

it flat. Have an adult helper iron the paper with a medium-warm iron. The result will be an appearance like old leather parchment. Tape together strips of the ironed paper, and use this paper to make a scroll.

9 Make an Instrument and Sing

Leader preparation: Gather toilet-paper tubes or paper-towel tubes, one for each child. If not available, a small plastic glass will also work. Find large marbles, rocks, or large beads, enough for each child to have 10–15 in a tube. Be careful to use items that are too large for the children to swallow. Learn the song “We Are Dancing Sarah’s Circle.”

Supplies:

- song: “We are Dancing Sarah’s Circle” (tune: “Jacob’s Ladder,” 8.8.8.5.)
<http://www.theinterpretersfriend.org/songs/w-r-dncg-srh%27s-crcl.html>
- a toilet-paper or paper-towel tube for each child
- (optional) plastic cups
- markers to decorate the tubes
- construction paper and tape to cover ends of tubes
- large marbles, rocks, or large beads
- Bible

Read aloud Psalm 96:4a. Talk with the children about ways people give praise to God. One way has been through creating and playing instruments. Ask them to name some instruments with you. Invite the children to make an instrument to use in praising God. The first step is to decorate the tubes (or plastic cups). Then cover one end of each tube with construction paper and secure with tape. Help each child count out marbles, rocks, or beads. Place these objects in the tube. Cover the other end with construction paper to create a shaker instrument.

Sing the first verse of the song “We Are Dancing Sarah’s Circle” to the children. It uses the tune of “Jacob’s Ladder.” Explain that Sarah was married to Abraham. Together they left their home and followed God to a new land. Sarah had to learn how to trust God, just like we do. She had things that made her both happy and sad, just like we do. Just like us, Sarah kept learning more and more about God, just as we do. Sometimes people say, “You are just like your mom” or “You are just like your dad.” “Dancing Sarah’s Circle” means that we are growing to know God more and more, too, just like Sarah did. We are taking steps of faith. Have children use their shaker instruments, and sing the song together. You may want to walk or dance in a circle as you sing. If time permits, sing verses 2 and 5, and invite the children to come up with a verse of their own.

Reflect

What Christian traditions do your children recognize or find important? How are they coming to understand the stories of the Bible as part of our Christian heritage? What are some traditions you may want to emphasize in your time together? Think about the small patterns and rituals of your time. What rituals are you creating in your group that may become part of children’s faith practice in the future?

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Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

The scriptures are full of people who are sent to serve others. There are children, like the boy who brought the loaves and fish to Jesus to help feed the 5000 people. There are women, like Esther, who risked her life to save her people. There are men, like Paul who traveled from town to town teaching others about Jesus, and many more. Young children generally enjoy hearing stories of people who do good things for others. Sometimes it can be difficult for them to see ways they can be like these people in the Bible. They may find it hard to see how they can help in your group, in the larger church, and in their homes and schools. Helping them to identify the things they already do to make a difference in your life and in the lives of others can help them to see themselves as serving like the people in the scriptures. It can also help them to explore new ways they can be challenged by the scriptures to serve.

Young children like to help and to be included in the rituals and routines of your group. Consider ways you can draw on children's gifts. Assign them responsibilities that are within their capabilities, such as helping care for the space by tidying up, gathering and distributing supplies, helping arrange a worship center, or leading a line of a prayer. Encourage older children to assist younger ones, but also ensure that all children have a chance to take small leadership roles in the group. Encourage participation in conversation. Invite children to tell you about their experiences, their interests, their joys and their struggles. Help the children listen to one another and take turns talking. Sometimes, go around the circle and have any child who wishes to add an idea or share an experience. Avoid praising children for what they are good at—this sets up comparisons and can make children feel they have to be particularly accomplished to be of value. Instead, affirm who

children are as individuals. Notice their differences. Value the uniqueness of each child’s personality, learning style, perspectives, experience, and interests.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 4:26–34
Esther 4:1–17

Leader Preparation

Think about the context or experience of your group in their time together. Identify some of the boundaries, opportunities, and challenges children in your group may experience. What are some ways the children have found to serve in your group and outside of your group? What gifts do you see in each child? Encourage children to share their gifts with others. Read the two Bible Focus Passages for this Exploration. Find time to read and contemplate the full story of Esther. Ponder what messages from God you hear in this story. How does the story speak to or connect with your life? With events in your community or the world?

Prayer: God, help me to see these children as you see them: precious, full of energy, gifted to be a part of your work now and in the future, unique, beloved. Guide our time together. Let each of us be empowered by the scriptures to serve you better. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Take a Stand (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read “The Story of Esther” from the attachment to learn a shortened version of the story of Esther. Practice telling the story comfortably so that you are not tied to the page. Or use a children’s Bible storybook with illustrations. With the support of other people, Esther finds the courage she needs to take on a risky mission. She is able to persuade King Xerxes to help save the Jewish people. Esther, like Deborah and many other biblical women, stepped out of her traditional role and was able to serve and act in extraordinary ways. In what ways does her story challenge or encourage you? How will children in your group identify with Esther’s story? Are there refugee children in your group or in your church community? Consider how important this story may be for communities that have encountered genocide, ethnic cleansing, or violence.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1
- (optional) children’s Bible storybook with illustrations
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Show the children where the book of Esther is in the Bible. Esther is one of two books in the Bible named for women. Point out that the other book is Ruth. Show them where the book of Ruth is found. Read or tell the story of Esther to the children using the attachment or a children’s Bible. Ask questions such as: *How do you think Esther felt when Mordecai asked her a second time to talk to King Xerxes? What do you think you might have done if you were Esther?* Invite the children to guess what happened when Queen Esther went to the king. Then read the conclusion of the story.

Sometimes it is hard to stand up and help others. Esther wasn’t sure at first she could do it. What are some of the things the children know that are important to stand up for and to say or do in order to help others? Brainstorm a few ideas together, and make a list on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the children to stand up and say, “I stand up to . . .” [something from the list]. Ideas might include: helping someone who is scared or alone, taking turns with toys, giving money to buy food for those who are hungry, getting adult help when someone is hurt.

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.

2 Plant Seeds

Leader preparation: Gather the supplies needed to give each child the opportunity to plant a couple of seeds. If possible, plant a seed two weeks in advance and another one week in advance so the children can see the growth. If that is not an option, bring a plant you have and a sample of a seed for that type of plant.

Supplies:

- easy-to-read Bible, such as a children’s Bible storybook
- cardboard egg cartons, cut apart (two egg holders per child)
- bean seeds or another type of seed that grows quickly
- a plant already grown (with a sample of its seed), or a bean seed you planted two weeks ago and one you planted one week ago
- potting soil
- watering can or plant sprayer
- access to the outdoors or a cloth or drop sheet to protect the floor

Read Mark 4:26–34 to the children. Name with the children the different things that happened to the seeds to make them grow. *If you were a seed, where would you like to be planted? What kind of seed would you like to be? When people talk with us about God, or we talk with them, we can all grow stronger in our faith.*

Help the children plant two seeds, one in each egg-carton holder. Have them spoon potting soil into the holder first and make a little hole with their finger for the seed. Place the seed in the hole, and cover with soil. Water lightly. Invite the children to watch the growth of the seed over the next several days and to think about their faith and love for God growing too. Depending on your group’s consistency in attendance, either send the seeds home with the children today or have them watch the seeds grow over the next few weeks and then invite them to take them home later.

3 Meet Esther

Leader preparation: Invite someone who is good at storytelling to dress up as Queen Esther. She will need to read the story from the attachment for Activity 1 or read the book of Esther from a children’s Bible storybook. Ask your guest to be prepared to answer questions the children may have.

Supplies:

- thank you note or sheet of paper and pens and markers
- children’s Bible storybook or “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1
- fancy clothes and a crown

Seat the children together where they can comfortably listen to your guest. Introduce her as Queen Esther, the Queen of Persia. She has come to tell the children how God helped her to save her people from trouble. When Esther tells her story, have her emphasize it was not easy to decide to go to the king. She needed others to pray and fast for her. Give the children time to ask questions. When Esther leaves, ask the children what surprised them about Esther. *Is she someone they would like to introduce to their family? Why or why not?* Close this activity by making or writing a thank you note together to Esther. Include comments from the children about what they enjoyed about her visit. If your children enjoy coloring, consider having each child make a picture for your guest as a way of saying thank you.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Send Messages (Easy Preparation)

 **Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the story of Esther. If you have ever done a prayer fast, recall what the experience meant to you. If you have not fasted, speak to someone who has done so to understand more of the personal spiritual benefits as well as benefits to the larger faith community. Make a tin can telephone with two clean, dry tin cans and string.

Supplies:

- “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1
- 2 clean, dry tin cans and string to make a telephone
- “Tin Can Telephone” (instructions), <http://www.dsokids.com/athome/instruments/telephone.aspx>

Tell or read the story of Esther from the attachment for Activity 1, or help the children recall the story together. Notice how Mordecai and Esther sent messages back and forth to each other. *What was in their messages? What did Mordecai want Esther to do to help the Jewish people? What did Esther want Mordecai to do to help her?* Esther and Mordecai didn’t use paper and pencil or letters or telephones for their messages. They used a servant to carry their words. Divide children into two groups—Group 1 and Group 2—and have the groups stand about 15 feet apart. Ask Group 1 to plan an action they want the other group to do (such as jump up and down). Take turns using a tin can telephone to send a message. Then ask for one volunteer to be the messenger. Group 1 sends the messenger to Group 2 with the message about what to do. Group 2 does the action and then sends the messenger back with an action for Group 1 to do. Repeat until all the children who wish to have had a chance to be the messenger.

If God wanted to send a message to people, how might God do that? The stories in the Bible can sometimes help us hear messages from God. I wonder if there are messages from God in the story of Esther. What might some of these messages be? Examples: “Don’t be afraid when you have to do something hard.” “When you have to do something hard, it helps to have other people pray for you.” “Don’t let bullies hurt other people—tell someone what’s going on.” “One person doing something can make a big difference.”

5 Play a Matching Game

Leader preparation: Gather supplies needed. Read the story of Esther. Consider what new things you hear in this story today. Reflect on the many ways in which children and youth make a difference in our world. Go to sites such as “The International Children’s Peace Prize,” <http://childrenspeaceprize.org>, and “Children/Youth as Peacebuilders,” <http://www.childrenyouthaspeacebuilders.ca>, for examples of ways children are making difference. Arrange to show your group the video “Thandiwe Chama from Zambia.”

Supplies:

- video: “Thandiwe Chama from Zambia,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHe91ewt7ts>
- Internet access and equipment to show an online video
- 3 × 5 cards or pieces of paper cut to approximately that size (enough for each child to have two)
- markers
- (optional) copy machine
- (optional) safety scissors
- children’s Bible storybook or “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read the story of Esther, or review it with the children if you have already read it today. *What did Esther do to help her people? Can you think of other Bible characters that helped God by being loving, just, and kind? If so, what did these people do?* Introduce the story of Thandiwe Chama from Zambia. Thandiwe was only eight when her school in Zambia, Africa, had to close. She took all 60 children from her village to another school so they could continue to get an education. Show the children the video. Ask the children to think with you of some additional things people do for God. You may need to stimulate their thinking by suggesting specific scenes. *If someone is without food, what would you do? Is lonely? Is struggling to walk upstairs? Is learning a new game? Is living in a village without a school?*

Give each child two blank cards. Explain that you need everyone to help make a new game for the group to play. Have children use markers to draw a picture of someone helping someone else. Each child will need to draw the same picture on both cards, using the same colors and the same drawing. You might show them how to draw stick people for greater ease in this project. When finished, lay all the cards face down on the table and shuffle them around. Invite a child to pick up one card. *Can you find the card that matches it?* If the card chosen matches the first card, he or she keeps both cards. If it does not, both cards are again placed face down. Encourage all the children to watch and remember what is on the face of each card. Invite another child to pick up a card and try to find a match. If it matches, he or she keeps the both cards and the next player starts. Continue until all the children have had a turn, or all the cards are gone. The goal is to match all of the cards and play the game again.

If a copy machine is available, lay the cards on the copier and make a set of cards for each child. Cut the sheets of cards for the children, or give them safety scissors to cut for themselves. The children could play the game individually or in pairs in your room, and then they could take the cards home. If you are able to make copies, invite the children to consider who they might play the game with at home or in the neighborhood.



6 What Else Do You See?

Leader preparation: Study the picture “Hidden Depths.” As we connect with the people and events in our lives, there is much we do not know by what we can see on the surface. Helping the children to be aware of this through concrete examples can help them to be open to a growing relationship with God that is always changing.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hidden Depths” <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=416482&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>
- kaleidoscope (several, if possible)
- three stuffed animals
- Bible

Use the picture “Hidden Depths” to start a conversation. *What do you see? If the photo had not been able to show us above and below the water, what part would you have been able to see? Which part is larger?* Show the children the outside tube of a kaleidoscope. *What do you see? What happens if you look inside?* Pass the kaleidoscope(s) around, and let the children look. Each time it is turned, even more new things appear. Have three stuffed animals in paper sacks. Slowly pull out one part of the stuffed animals until the children can guess what kind of animal it is. Explain to the children that what we see and know is only a tiny part of what there is.

Jesus taught in parables, such as the one in Mark 4:26–34, to help people understand God and God’s ways. Read the parable of the seed in Mark. Sometimes it takes a long time and a lot of looking to uncover meaning in a parable. *What do you think Jesus was trying to tell people?* Talk together about what the parable might mean.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Be the Seed (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider the way a seed grows. How does it change? Have fun with the children as they act out the growth of a seed with you.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Mark 4:26–29 to the children. Jesus used the description of a seed to describe what God’s realm is like. He knew people would only begin to understand if he told them parables or stories. Pretend with the children that they are the seed and you are the sower. Stand in front of the children and ask them to curl up on the floor in a ball. Tell the children you are a sower (planter or farmer). Use a word familiar to them. Pretend you are sowing seeds and then going to sleep. Tell the children that while you sleep the seeds are slowly uncurling. (With younger children you may need to pretend to be a seed now as well, or have another adult act with the children.) *The soil and the sun and the rain help them to grow. As they uncurl, the seeds begin to grow* (go from a ball onto your knees). *The seeds grow and reach up to the sky* (stand up and stretch). *As they grow, branches begin to stick out* (reach out arms). *What was a seed now grows fruit* (hold hand with fingers circled to pretend it is a fruit)! *When the fruit is ripe, the sower (planter) goes around and gathers the fruit* (pretend to collect a fruit from each child). *It is time for the harvest! There is a great celebration!* The children may want to take a turn being the sower or following the actions a second time.



8 I Can . . .

Leader preparation: Read “I Can . . .” from the attachment. Consider possible ideas for each scenario. As you talk with the children, they may know of people in this same situation. Encourage the children to share their stories and ideas.

Supplies:

- “I can . . .” Attachment: Activity 8
- children’s Bible storybook or “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1

Reflect

What activities helped the children to engage with the scriptures? What do you want to be sure to have available to you next session that will help you? What are some ways the children showed you they understand the importance of mission and serving? How might you help them connect with the mission or outreach work your church? Say a prayer for the children in your group, thanking God for their faith, their gifts, and their love and care for others.

Read or tell children about Esther. If you have read the story today, have the children help you to retell the story. *What did Mordecai do to help others? What did Esther do? Do you think it was easy or hard for them to do what each of them did?* Read the first two paragraphs from “I Can . . .” Start with the scenario that is most likely to be familiar to the children. You may want to create a scenario of your own. Invite the children to think about things they could really help do in this situation. *Who else might you want to ask for help?* Select at least one local situation and one from outside your community.

9 What Is Needed?

Leader preparation: All of us need help to grow in our faith and serve God. Sometimes it is hard to know what we need. Think of some ways people help you to serve God. What has been helpful to you? In what ways have the children helped you? In magazines or online, find five to ten pictures of people from a variety of nationalities, ages, gender, physical challenges, and socioeconomic status. You may already have in your room pictures of these various people.

Supplies:

- pictures from magazines or online that show a wide variety of people in different situations
- children’s Bible storybook or “The Story of Esther,” Attachment: Activity 1

Read or review with children the story of Esther. *How did Mordecai help Esther to do the brave thing that saved her people?* (prayed for her, encouraged her, asked her to help) *What did Esther do to help her people?* (prayed, went and talked to the king) Show the children one of the pictures you have chosen. Invite them to imagine who this man, woman, or child is. *What might he or she need?* Answers could include material things, love, someone to help teach them, and so forth. *How might he or she be able to love and serve God?* Encourage the children to be creative. Use pictures of different people, young and old. *What do you need this week? How might you love and serve God this week? Is there someone you can to help you?*

Close this time with a prayer, giving the children the opportunity to repeat after you short phrases. One option is: *God, thank you for letting us serve with you. Help us to know when to speak. Help us to know when to help. Help us to know when we need to share. We love you, God. Amen.*

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Attachment: Activity 1

The Story of Esther

Based on Esther 4:1–17

A very long time ago the King of Persia chose a beautiful young woman to be his wife. He picked a Jewish woman named Esther. Esther's cousin Mordecai (MOR–dih–kai) was very happy. Mordecai had adopted Esther as a little girl and taught her about God's ways. He made Esther promise not to tell anyone she was Jewish because some people didn't like Jews and would hurt them.

One day, Mordecai found out that someone was plotting to kill the king. Mordecai told Queen Esther, and Queen Esther told the king. The king was very pleased with Mordecai and Esther. He told his scribes to write everything down in the official record book.

A man named Haman (HAY–man) was the king's special assistant. Haman hated Jewish people. He told the king lies about the Jews. He argued and persuaded until finally the king let Haman write an order that all Jews should be killed. This order went out to all the people. Everyone knew about Haman's plot—everyone except Esther. No one at the palace had told her about Haman's plans. No one knew she was Jewish.

Mordecai was very upset about Haman's plot to kill his people. Mordecai tore apart his clothes and put on old itchy cloths. He covered his head with ashes and walked through the city and cried out in sadness and anger. He stopped and sat at the palace gate. Jews all over the country were crying, fasting (not eating), and praying. Queen Esther was in the palace. Her servants told her about Mordecai.

Esther did not know what was wrong. She sent Mordecai clean clothes, but Mordecai refused to put them on. Esther sent her servant to find out what was wrong. Mordecai told Esther's servant about Haman's order to kill all the Jews. Mordecai gave Esther's servant a message: "Esther, you must go to the king. Beg him to save our people." The servant went at once to Queen Esther and gave her the message.

Queen Esther sent a message back to Mordecai: "Mordecai, the king has not asked me to come to him. If I go without being asked, the king could kill me. It is the law. I am afraid to go."

Mordecai was very upset. He sent a message back to Queen Esther: "Esther, if Haman gets his way, none of our people are safe, not even you. Maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!"

Queen Esther thought and prayed. She sent Mordecai this message: "Get all of our people together. Tell them to fast (not to eat) and pray for me. Do this for three days and nights. My servant girls and I will be fasting and praying too. At the end of the three days, I will go to the king, even though it is dangerous. But I have to try."

Mordecai left the gate and did everything that Esther asked him to do.

What do the children think happened next?

Esther went to the king. She was afraid the king would be angry and have her killed. But the king asked Esther what she wanted. She invited the king and Haman to come to a special feast. Haman and the king enjoyed the dinner very much. The king was very pleased with Esther. "What would you like?" the king said. "Ask, and it is yours!"

"Please save my people," Queen Esther answered. "We are about to be killed." Esther told the king about Haman's order to kill her people. The king remembered that Mordecai and Esther had once saved *his* life. He was angry with Haman.

The king stopped Haman from killing Esther's people. Thanks to brave Queen Esther, the Jewish people were saved!

Attachment: Activity 8

I Can . . .

God calls us to grow in our faith. Part of growing is learning to serve and to act. God specifically asks us to serve and care for those in this world who are not strong and powerful. Part of our faith is learning how to act as God's hands and feet with those in need. For each of the scenarios below, have the children think of ideas of ways to act as God's hands and feet.

These scenarios may cause the children to think of people they know. Be sure to help the children consider safety issues in the ideas they develop.

1. A new child moves into your neighborhood (or school). The other children don't want to include him (or her) when they are playing outside. What do you do?
2. You and your family learn about children in Africa who do not have a school to go to. What do you do?
3. There is an older person in your church. She usually sits alone and seems sad. What do you do?
4. There has been an earthquake in a very poor country (such as Haiti). People are without food and shelter. What do you do?
5. A neighbor is sick and can't work. What do you do?
6. One of your friends is having a hard time learning her (or his) letters and reading. What do you do?

How do the children think God feels about the ideas they have come up with today? Consider whether any of the ideas discussed are actions your group is called to pursue together. Encourage the children to follow up with any ideas that are important to them.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Children sometimes like to dream about what things will be like when they are older. Some children have a very clear sense of what will they do, where they will live, or what kind of family they will have. Others are more oriented to the present. For some children, the future may be tomorrow or next week, while others may be looking forward to adulthood. Most children like to play games that help them imagine themselves as adults. Dressing up or playing with cars, tools, toy kitchen sets, doctor's kits, or dolls are all ways that children develop skills and a vision for their future. Help them to see that God is also working to create a future and possibilities with us. Encourage the children to see God as active in the past, present, and future. Help them to see that scripture tells of God's activity throughout the ages. It reminds us that God is active in our world today. And it tells of God's visions and hopes and possibilities for the future.

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. Engagement with the Bible nurtures our faith community from generation to generation.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Scripture is full of stories and ideas that cast a vision for the future. How we respond to these visions and those God casts today depends greatly on our faith and the relationship we have with God. In what ways has your relationship with God helped you to move into the future that God is imagining? Be aware of the varying age spans in your group. Very young children may not be able to project very far into the future. You may discover some children who have a spiritual awareness that helps them imagine God's possibilities well into the future. Be open to the Spirit at work in your group.

Prayer: Wonderful God, you are the God of our ancestors, the God who has been present throughout the ages. Compassionate God, help me to know your presence here with me now. Holy One, lead me into your visions for the future—for my life and for our world. Help me to listen to the children in this group and to hear your voice. May I love the children and feel your heart. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Session Development

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



1 Choose Life! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20. What does the command to "choose life" mean to you? Read the paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20 below. Prayerfully consider God's invitation to be fully alive. You may want to create some additional situations that you know the children would be familiar with to add to those suggested in this activity. This is a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20:

Pay attention, everyone. Today, you have a choice—a choice between good and bad, between life and death.

Here's what you need to do to live life to the full: Love God. Walk in God's ways, and do what God wants us to do.

Feel how good it is to be loved and blessed by God.

That's living the good life, really living! So choose life today. Choose life!

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and markers for each child

Show the children where Deuteronomy is in the Bible. If possible, use a large Bible and show them where chapter 30 is as well. Not all of the children will know their numbers, but this allows them to begin to understand that there is a system to find stories in the Bible. Read aloud the paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

A word for making a choice is "decision." When you make a decision, you make a choice. Ask: *What are some choices or decisions you make? How do you think we can ask God for help making decisions?* Sometimes when we make choices, one choice helps us feel close to other people and to God. A different choice makes us feel far away from God or from other people. Some choices bring joy, and some bring sadness. Help the children make a sign on a sheet of paper that says "Choose Life!" Younger children may need help to write these words. Invite the children to decorate their sign.

When children are finished making the signs, read aloud the following situations and invite the children to think about what choices may bring joy or a feeling of being close to God and other people. *Which choices might make people, including you, sad or might make you feel further away from God or other people?* Read the description again of a situation that children have identified as making people sad, and have the children raise their signs and cheer "Choose Life!" Create some situations of your own. The children may enjoy creating some examples as well. Be careful not to imply that there is only one right answer in these situations. Some examples are:

- Someone asks you to share your chips with them.
- Your mom or dad (or a caregiver) asks you to help clean up after supper.
- You are afraid to say hello to some friends who are visiting your family.
- You can watch TV or go for a walk with the dog and some friends.
- There's a scary movie on TV, and Uncle Martie (or Dad, your sister) says it's too scary for you to watch.

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.

- Two of your friends are having an argument about which of them is the best ballplayer.
- The worship leader at church says, “Let’s pray . . .”
- You’re told you can have an apple or carrot sticks for snack, but what you really want is cookies or chips.
- Your grandma says it’s time for to get ready for bed, but you are busy playing.



2 Remember Bible Characters Who Trusted God

Leader preparation: Consider what the word “faith” means to you. Think of some of the Bible characters whose stories touched you with their faith and actions. Are there some the children frequently talk about with you? Review Hebrews 11:1–16. Familiarize yourself with the stories about each character. The children may or may not want to pursue more information about each, but it will be helpful to you to be familiar with each character. Read the summaries about each on the attachment “Faith Is . . .” Relevant scriptures are also listed if you would like to read more. Familiarize yourself with the use of a concordance to find information about characters the children may mention.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Faith Is . . .” Attachment: Activity 2
- a concordance or Bible dictionary or computer with Internet access
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- blindfold or scarf

Read the children the paraphrased version of Hebrews 11:1–16 on the attachment. When a character with faith is named, write his or her name on newsprint or a whiteboard. If you have children as young as three years of age, you may want to spell the names as you write them and invite the children to join in if they like. *What do you remember about any of these characters?* Depending on their past experiences, children may recognize one or two or none of the names. You may choose to tell a little bit about some of the characters. See the attachment for brief summaries of the characters. *What did God ask each person to do? Do you think it was hard for them to trust God and do what God wanted?*

Who are some other Bible characters you know that trusted God? After the children have named a few people from the Bible, show them the concordance. Even children who do not yet read will begin to learn to understand that this tool can help them to find people and passages in the Bible. Tell the children you pick a person’s name or a word from something they said in the scriptures, and you can find the chapter and verse by looking for it alphabetically (in the order of the alphabet). Pick an example and show the children how a concordance works. Six- and seven-year-olds may like to use the concordance on their own. If you are using an online Bible search tool such as “The Bible Gateway,” <http://www.bible-gateway.com/>, simply type in the name. Or use a search engine (such as Google) to find information about Bible characters.

Faith is trusting God even when we don’t see God. Ask the children to stand in a circle (or to sit in a close circle if there are some who have difficulty standing). One at a time, have the children stand in the middle of the circle and put on a blindfold. Gently turn them around a couple of times. Say that he or she can find a way back to his or her place in the group. Others will stand firmly and will gently help the child find his or her spot in the circle. Encourage others to help

guide the blindfolded child by putting their hands out and touching the person's shoulders. Give each child a turn being blindfolded. *Trust or faith is knowing that other people and God are there to help us even when we can't see them.*

3 Make God a Valentine

Leader preparation: Use red paper, stickers, lace, and other craft items available to make valentines. Create a sample valentine for children to see. As you read the scripture to the children, help to connect loving God and living in God's ways. What does loving God and following God's ways mean to you at this time in your life? What might it mean for children in your group?

Supplies:

- red paper, markers, lace, markers, and stickers
- paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20 from Activity 1

Before you begin reading, ask the children to raise their hands each time they hear the words "love" or "life." Read the paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20 from Activity 1. *What are some ways we can choose life and do what God wants? Affirm that when we really love someone, we want to let that person know. We want that person to know we care.*

Who do you love so much that you want to make them happy? Do we love God? If we do, then we will want to follow God's ways for us. We want to let God know how much we love God. Valentines are one way to show someone you love that person. Today we are going to make some to show God how much we love God. Encourage the children to be creative. Help them to write a message to God about their love. Younger children may simply write "I love you," while others may want to write more on their card. Place the completed valentines on a bulletin board in your room as a reminder of the group's love for God.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Dream with God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about some of the dreams and hopes God has for the world. How do you recognize these dreams as God's visions? As you dream with the children, encourage the children to listen to one another and to respect what others have to say. If the weather is good, you may want to take the children outside and let them lie on a blanket or in the grass so they can see the clouds and God's creation as they dream.

Supplies:

- (optional) blanket for dreaming outside
- *The Message* or another version of the Bible
- paper and markers or crayons

Ask the children about dreaming. We dream at night, but sometimes we dream or imagine things that have not yet happened and may never happen. Ask: *Do you think God dreams and imagines things? Why or why not?*

Read Ephesians 3:20 from *The Message*, or read this simplified version:

God can do absolutely anything! God can do more than we can ever dream or imagine! If we take our biggest wish or our most amazing dream, God can do even more than that!

If God is able to do more than we can ask or dream of, it is important for us to take time to imagine what God hopes for and wants. We can try to imagine or think about things that will make God smile. Or we could think of things that we think Jesus would enjoy. Invite the children to lie on the carpet or a blanket in your room or outside on a blanket, or simply to sit quietly for a few minutes and think about things God would like to see happen. Ask one or all of these questions, and let the children respond:

- What might God want for the children of the world?
- What does God want for you?
- What do you think God would like to have happen for your school?
- What does God hope will happen in our church?

The children may also enjoy creating questions. When you are finished, ask the children to draw a picture of one thing they think God would like to see happen in the world. This can be anything you have already discussed or something new.

5 Make a Faith Collage

Leader preparation: Gather magazines that have pictures of lots of different kinds of people demonstrating faith by their actions. Try to find pictures of people of different nationalities, genders, and ages. You might want to cut out lots of pictures beforehand and then let the children choose from the pictures. This saves time and helps the children keep focused. Have safety scissors available for your group.

Supplies:

- “Faith Is . . .” Attachment: Activity 2
- Bible
- magazines with many pictures of a variety of people demonstrating faith, or pictures you have already cut out of magazines
- safety scissors
- construction paper (one sheet per child)
- (optional) one large sheet of poster board (if you choose to do one collage as a group)
- glue sticks

Read or review the abbreviated version of Hebrews 11:1–16 with the children from the attachment “Faith Is . . .” from Activity 2. Ask the children to identify what they know about the people listed in this scripture reading. If you have not yet done so, use the descriptions at the end of the attachment to tell children more about these biblical characters. *Who are some people we know who show they have faith in God by what they do?* Choose a few of the people and characters with whom the children are very familiar.

Invite the children to look through the magazines or the pictures you have provided to find people who are showing they have faith in God by helping others. As the children look, talk with them about how they see these people doing things that are helping to build a better future for themselves and others. You may choose to have each child do a collage on construction paper or have the children work together to create a group collage on poster board.

6 Build a Firm Foundation

Leader preparation: Locate wooden blocks of different sizes and shapes, if possible. You may also use a Jenga game or something similar. Cardboard building bricks would work, as well. Think about your own faith. What are some of the foundation beliefs you have that makes your relationship with God strong?

Supplies:

- easy-to-read version of the Bible, such as *The Message*
- building blocks
- pillow
- ball

Read Hebrews 11:1–16 to the children. Help the children understand the concept of a foundation. *What kind of foundation helps a house or building to be strong?* Show them with the blocks the importance of building a firm foundation by first asking their help to build a tower on top of a ball. Ask: *How well does a ball work as a foundation?* Then try to build a tower on a fluffy pillow. *How firm and steady is the pillow for a foundation?* Invite the children to come up with other ideas for a foundation. If they have not already suggested it, use a table or the floor as the foundation for a tower. *What makes the table or floor a good foundation?* In our relationship or friendship with God, it is important we have a strong foundation. *What are some things we need to know for sure about God?* Listen carefully to their responses. Some ideas you may want to add are that God always loves us no matter what. God forgives us. God wants us to help God by loving others. Continue to enjoy building and talking with the children about ideas they would like to share.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 I Spy God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We can see God at work with people in the scriptures. How often do we notice God at work in our time and lives? God is always engaged with the world, but sometimes we do not always notice. Developing an expectation that we will see God at work and intentionally looking for God multiplies our relationship and experience of God.

Supplies:

- paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:15–20 from Activity 1
- (optional) magazines

Read children the simplified version of Deuteronomy 30:15–20 from Activity 1. As we choose to follow God, we begin to notice what God is doing more and more. We see God in a sunset, or we see God when someone helps us, or we see God when we choose to help someone. The more we choose to follow God’s ways, the more we can feel God almost everywhere we are. Invite the children to play a game with you to help all of them notice where God is. The game is somewhat like “I Spy.” Play “I Spy” with the children first. To begin, pick something in the room and say, “I spy with my little eyes, something that is . . . [say the colors of the object, or, for older children, the letter that begins the name of the object].” Invite the children to guess what the object is. The child who guesses takes a turn picking an item and repeats the game.

After enjoying the game, tell the children you would like to try a different way of playing “I Spy.” You would like to play “I Spy God.” You can do this remaining in

your room, or you could go for a walk in the church or neighborhood. Whenever the children see something or someone that reminds them of God, they say “I spy God” and tell the group what they see. If the weather is bad, you could use magazines to increase the options the children can see.

Invite the children to go home and play “I Spy God” with people at home this week. Challenge them to see if they can spy God in someone or something each day.

8 Where Will You Go?

Leader preparation: Read the book *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* by Dr. Seuss to familiarize yourself with it before reading it to the children. Or, prepare to show an online version to the group. Even if you can’t show children the video, watch the online version to give you a sense of the storyteller’s art. If you know someone who enjoys reading dramatically, you may want to invite him or her to come and share the book with your group.

Supplies:

- “Faith Is . . .” Attachment: Activity 2
- book: *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* by Dr. Seuss, or
- video: online version of *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQRWeZy-S8Q>
- Internet access and equipment to show online video
- paper, crayons or markers

Gather the children on a carpet or comfortable area where they can enjoy hearing a story and seeing pictures easily. Read or recall the paraphrase of Hebrews 11:1–11 on the attachment. What actions did they take? Read the book *Oh the Places You’ll Go!* by Dr. Seuss. When finished reading, invite the children to talk about their favorite parts of the book. Talk together about some things you think they or others may do in the future. Encourage them to use their imaginations. You may want to tell them about something like a cell phone or a computer that people could not even have imagined when you were their age. Now those devices are everywhere and can do amazing things.

Invite the children to draw a picture of something they want to do with God in the future. Leave the time line for the future up to each child. Talk about the picture with each child as he or she is drawing. Gather all the pictures together on a table. Ask the children to hold their hands over the pictures without touching them. Pray together, with the children repeating after you the short sentences. A prayer might be: *God we give you today. We give you tomorrow. We give you our whole future lives. Help us to help you create a better world for everyone. Amen.*

9 Play the Parachute Game

Leader preparation: Borrow a play parachute, or bring a king-size sheet. This game requires that the children work together. As we look into God’s future and God’s ways, we know that community is required. We must work together. Through the game, help the children to experience this reality together. Arrange for a large room or an outside space in which to play. If you have primarily three-year-olds, you may need additional adult help for the games with the parachute.

Supplies:

- children’s illustrated Bible storybook
- parachute or king-size sheet
- (optional) ball

Reflect

How do the children understand the idea of future? How has this session helped them to experience God's presence with them? What hopes or possibilities have they imagined for themselves or the world? Reflect on how children inspire hope and faith in you. How will you continue to help this group grow in faith and knowledge of God? How are they helping you? Give thanks for this time and for God's continual and faithful presence.

Ask the children to name a Bible character they really like. If they can't think of anyone, remind them that there are stories in the Bible about Jesus and his family. Recall other Bible characters whose stories you may have shared in the group, such as Esther, Timothy, Ruth, Abraham and Sarah, Noah, Elijah, and Elisha. It is fine if children all pick the same character. Be prepared to share one or two of your favorite characters to get the conversation going. The children may want to look through a children's story Bible with pictures to remind them of characters and stories they know. Ask: *What did the character do for God or to help others? Did he or she need any help to do that? Who helped? How did others help?* Explain that as we live in God's ways, we will find ourselves playing and working with lots of different kinds of people. *Our group right now comes together to help us all love God and learn more about who God is.* Tell children they are going to play a game with a parachute (sheet) to help them play together as one group.

Lay the parachute (or sheet) flat on the floor or ground. Ask the children to sit down around the parachute. Space them evenly apart. Depending on the number of children, you may either number them in order as they stand around the parachute as 1s and 2s or as 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s. Ask the children to slowly stand and lift the parachute high over their heads. Now bring it back to the ground. Do this a few times and enjoy watching it billow. Have the children set down the parachute. Explain that this time they will raise the parachute as high as they can and when you say "Ones," the 1s are to run across underneath the parachute and change places with someone else. After the children have been successful, call out another number. If you have numbered to 4, you may call two numbers at a time (after the children have gotten the idea). See if the children have additional ideas they would like to try with the parachute. One idea is to try to keep a ball moving around on the parachute (or sheet) without it falling off (or falling down the hole in the middle of the parachute).

Say a prayer. *God, thank you for helping us play today. Help us have fun and play with others this week. Help us look for You. Amen.*

Attachment: Activity 8

Faith Is . . .

Paraphrased and abbreviated from Hebrews 11:1-1.

Faith is knowing for sure that what we hope for is real. Faith is knowing that what we can't see is really there. Without faith we can't please God. It is impossible! We must have faith to know that God exists.

People in the Bible did great things, and God was proud of them. It is by faith that we know God made the whole world and the universe, too.

Because of his faith, Abel gave a gift to God that pleased God. The gift was from the very best thing that he had. Enoch made God very happy because he had great faith.

By faith, Noah built an ark and saved his family and the animals.

By faith, Abraham left his home and went to a new place. He had no clue where he was going, but he went anyway. By faith, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had a baby son, Isaac. You wouldn't believe how old they were!

All these people had faith. They believed God's love and promises were real even though they couldn't see them. You can see why God is so proud of them.

Notes on the Bible characters named above.

Abel (Genesis 4:1-7) Abel, one of the sons of Adam and Eve, was a herdsman. He brought an offering to God from the best part of the animals of his herd. This pleased God. His brother, Cain, was a farmer. He brought an offering to God from the produce of the farm, but not the best that he had. This did not please God.

Noah (Genesis 6:9-22) God told Noah to build an ark in the middle of dry land because a great flood was coming. Noah was obedient, even though others thought he was crazy. He followed God and saved his family and the animals from the flood.

Abraham (Genesis 12:1-6) Abraham left the place he was living when God called him to go to a new land. He had many adventures along the way and learned to follow God.

Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 21:1-8) Sarah and Abraham were too old to have children. God had promised them that they would have children, but that hadn't happened. Now, when they were in a time of life when having a child was "impossible," God gave them a son. They named him Isaac, which means "laughter." Sarah laughed when she first heard she would have a baby and thought others would laugh, too (Genesis 18).