

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

“Discovery” is an invitation—a summons to explore and examine our faith, our scripture, ourselves, and how all of that is revealed in our daily lives. God does not wish to remain hidden from us. Throughout history God sent teachers and prophets, performed signs and wonders, placed a star in the sky, and sent God’s only Son—all to reveal God to the world. God is an inviting and welcoming God. This is our opportunity to discover more about that God. God speaks to us through art, music, our experiences, animated conversations, and reflective silence. Here is the invitation: come and discover more about our loving God!

### About this Exploration

Prayer is a way to seek and find God. Rituals mark the time and space where we encounter God, and through those rituals we recall the story and share it with others. Prayer and ritual are expressions beyond ourselves. Prayer and rituals may go beyond words. From a fearful cry in the dark to the joyful laughter of celebration, prayer is an expression of our heart and innermost being. From the reflex of folded or outstretched hands in prayer to the many layers liturgy may have, ritual is a pattern etched into our lives.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24**  
**Psalm 23**

## Leader Preparation

“Discovery” is an invitation to explore and wonder. We are encouraged to turn to Creator God, the One who imagined everything from a platypus to the spiraling wonder of the Milky Way, and to open ourselves to God’s endless store of newness. There is no limit to what can be discovered when it comes to limitless God. This Exploration welcomes imagination, questions, and the courage to encounter new ideas. As a leader, think about famous explorers or “discoverers” who boldly went where no one had gone before. Here is a chance to wonder, to laugh, to create, and to ponder the wideness of God. All questions are welcome—how else can we learn something new? Enjoy these moments of discovery!

*Prayer: Creator and creative God, thank you for inviting me to open my heart, my mind, and my spirit to your endless source of love and compassion. Help me not to be limited by my understanding, but rather to allow myself to be surprised by the many ways you can reveal yourself to us. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 God Sightings (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 23.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles, several versions
- paper and pens

There are times when we can go away to a special place that is sacred to us or spend time in a retreat center, sanctuary, or a place set aside specifically for worship. More often, however, we spend time at work or at home. Waiting until we retreat to a special or distant place to find signs or reminders of God’s presence leaves God out of our everyday lives.

Invite participants to read Psalm 23 aloud from several different versions of the Bible. Psalm 23 is attributed to David, who was a shepherd. The psalm describes what a shepherd in ancient Israel would have seen in daily life—green pastures, quiet waters, dark valleys, and a shepherd’s crook or rod. He allowed those daily signs to speak to him about God’s presence.

Invite participants to describe a place they frequent on a daily basis, such as their work place, kitchen, garage, garden, senior center, or volunteer site. Ask: *What objects are present, or what do you see in those places that could remind you of God’s presence?* This could be as simple as a potted plant, a view out the window, a computer, or a family photograph. Invite each participant to make a list of his or her potential “God sightings.” Encourage them to be reminded of God’s presence and offer a prayer when they see this object or view each day

### 2 God Comes Alive in Stories

**Leader preparation:** Read Joshua 4:19–24. It is important to Joshua that stories of God’s faithfulness are passed down to future generations. One way children and adults learn is through books—either reading or being read to. Study the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson. What lessons do you imagine are being learned there? Bring one of your favorite childhood books, if possible. Invite participants to bring in a favorite book, either a book from their childhood or a book that they find helpful or enjoyable now.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “The Reading” by Wilson, <http://www.art.com/products/p10278691-sa-i852604/s-wilson-the-reading.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+reading+wilson>
- favorite childhood books or books that participants bring

Joshua commands the people of Israel to continually tell the story of God’s love and faithfulness. Sometimes our best teachers are the people who are with us on our life’s journey. Invite the group to share some of its collective wisdom with one another.

Look at the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson. Invite people to describe what they see in the picture and what mood is being portrayed. *What book might the woman be reading to the children?* If participants brought in books, invite them to

### 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.

briefly describe their book and why it is a favorite. Share the book you brought as well.

These questions might stimulate conversation:

- Who read this book to you?
- Why was this book so appealing to you?
- What lessons did the story contain?

Invite the group to name Bible stories they may have learned as children. Which ones are their favorites? As adults, we can learn from one another. As we seek new ways to discover God, we can learn from methods that are helpful to others. Consider these questions:

- What books or meditation guides do you use now that you find helpful?
- Describe how you feed your spirit on a daily basis.

### 3 Letting Our Children Know

**Leader preparation:** Read Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land and, in thanksgiving, erected stones commemorating the place as a place of God’s presence and activity in their lives. Obtain smooth small river rocks, or cut small stone shapes out of cardboard, two or three for each participant.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- stones, two to three small river rocks, or cardboard shapes for each participant
- permanent markers or paint pens

Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 4:1–7. Explain that Joshua had the people place stones from the Jordan as a reminder of God’s faithfulness in that time and place. The stones would be reminders to future generations of God’s actions and the people’s belief in God. Ask for another volunteer to read Joshua 4:19–24. Point out that the latter part of Joshua 4 particularly describes these stones as a teaching tool posing the question to the Israelites, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know . . .” (verses 21–22a). These stones were a tangible reminder of the lessons that the adults wanted to pass down to their children.

We have learned lessons from our faith and through life experiences. Ask: *If you could pass along two or three foundational lessons to the younger generation, what would they be?* Invite each participant to take a stone and write these words or phrases on it. When they finish writing, put their stones in a pile or a circle in the midst of them. Invite them to share what lessons they would like to pass along to future generations. At the end of the session, have the participants take their stones with them as a visual reminder of God’s faithfulness in their lives. Their stones can be a reminder to them to pray for wisdom and faith.

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities



## 4 Singing Our Faith (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 23. Remember that before this was a famous, beloved psalm, it was the personal reflection of David, a shepherd who experienced God's faithfulness. One way David reflected on God's actions was to write songs (the psalms were meant to be sung) about them. "The Love Round" is sung to a traditional tune. You can hear the tune at <http://www.musickit.com/resources/winmas/peacerd.htm#Anchor-37516> so you can lead the round.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- copy of handout "The Love Round" and "Four-Line Poem Examples," Attachment: Activity 4
- paper and pencils
- (optional) computer with Internet access

Read Psalm 23 together. Psalms were originally written as songs, although the ancient tunes have been lost. These songs were a way for people to share and express their faith. Suggest that the participants can also give voice to their faith using a simple song as a pattern.

Introduce "The Love Round." Give each participant a copy of the handout. This is a simple song that can be sung in unison, as a round, or simply spoken as a poem. Invite the group to read it together. If they know the tune, or if you can play the tune for them, they may sing it together. A song or a psalm is a way to convey a simple yet profound truth about God. Use these questions to ask them to consider what message is being offered with this song:

- Why do you think the song repeats the word "love" four times?
- Do you agree that "love" is the call of a Christian? How can that call be lived out?
- Which line of the song means the most to you? Why?

Anyone can be a songwriter. You don't need to be able to sing, but only to have a message to share. Divide the group into small groups of two to four people and invite them to write a simple four-line poem or song that expresses an important faith message. Give them the following meter, or syllable, count for each line.

Line 1—four counts  
Line 2—six counts  
Line 3—seven counts  
Line 4—four counts

To get them started they can review the examples on the handout. There are no "right" answers—only various expressions of our faith. Invite people to have fun with this and then come back together and share with the larger group.

### 5 So Many Different Ways to Pray!

**Leader preparation:** Watch the YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters” Liturgical Dance.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters” Liturgical Dance. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UBS1AEs\\_dg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UBS1AEs_dg)
- hymnals that include the song, or lyrics for the song: <http://www.just-somelyrics.com/823745/Oleta-Adams-Wash,-O-God,-Our-Sons-%26-Daught-Lyrics>

It is easy to get into a rut with our prayer life. We might pray the same way over and over again or even simply say the same words repeatedly. Because we worship a God of creativity and new life, we are invited to imagine the variety of ways that we can express our love, devotion, and need to God. We can remember some of the many ways that our biblical ancestors expressed their faith: David wrote songs, Miriam danced before God, a woman expressed her adoration for Jesus by pouring out scented oil on his feet, Joshua built a stone cairn as a physical reminder of God’s faithfulness.

Invite the group to read the words of the song together. Give people a moment to read the words of the song to themselves, then invite them to underline or make note of the phrases that they particularly like. If you have the music, the group could sing the song.

Watch the YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters” Liturgical Dance. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions:

- What appealed to you about the video? What surprised you?
- Can you imagine dancing before God in prayer? Why or why not?

### 6 Praying Stone by Stone

**Leader preparation:** Read Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. Think about how Joshua used the stones from the river as a reminder of God’s faithfulness. Many cultures use rock cairns to mark places of worship or to form an altar. The Western Wall in Jerusalem is the remainder of the early temple and continues to be a powerful place to offer prayers. Use an Internet image search engine to obtain pictures of the Western Wall in Jerusalem and a stone cairn.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- pictures of the Western Wall in Jerusalem
- pictures of stone cairn
- rock or brick for each person

Ask one volunteer to read aloud Joshua 4:1–7, and another volunteer to read Joshua 4:19–24. Explain that when Joshua directed the people to set up stones from the River Jordan as a monument to God’s faithfulness, he was intentionally choosing a material that would last for generations to come. Pass around or display the pictures of Jerusalem’s Western Wall and the stone cairns. Explain that the Western Wall is the only remaining part of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that was destroyed in 70 c.e. It is one of the most sacred sites of Judaism. The strength and endurance of the stones reflect the power of our eternal God. Invite the group to

build a stone cairn. If possible, it could remain standing for many weeks and the group could continue to use it as described below.

Invite everyone to hold a rock or brick in his or her hands. Encourage each to feel it and share a word or phrase about how the rock reminds him or her of God. Designate a place in your space where the group will create their cairn. This could be on a table, in the center of floor, or in a corner. Explain that as each person places a rock or brick, the group will ask the question from the scripture passage, "What do those stones mean to you?" The person placing the stone will respond by briefly telling of a time when he or she experienced God's faithfulness, or by simply saying, "I give thanks to God for . . ." Create your cairn.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Trusting Our Shepherd (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 23. Consider why this psalm is often used at funerals and is often the only psalm that even nonchurchgoers may know. What lines in this psalm do you consider to be the most comforting? Gather a variety of Bible versions, translations, and paraphrases. Check out your church library, the pastor's office (with permission), and several other learning areas. There may be different translations in the children's area and the youth area.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles: several versions, translations, and paraphrases

Invite participants to read aloud Psalm 23 from the different Bible versions, translations, and paraphrases. Ask: *Why do you suppose this psalm is so well known? Why do so many people find it comforting?* Invite them to share a favorite line that they find most meaningful.

The psalm describes life as a journey through both good and challenging times. God accompanies us on that journey. The psalm can inspire us to pray for people in various stages of life's journey. Invite the participants to use the language and imagery found in the psalm to express joys and concerns. Prayers might be: "I would like to pray for my friend who is experiencing a dark valley right now because of her illness," or "I give thanks for God's guidance for my cousin who had difficult choices to make. I believe she was led by God, just as a shepherd leads." When everyone who wants to share has had an opportunity, lead the group in prayer, giving a time for silent prayer and offering thanks for God's faithfulness.

### 8 Praying with the News

**Leader preparation:** Gather two or three daily newspapers and scan the headlines. Consider which events lift your spirits and which ones cause you concern. In Psalm 23, David is inspired by his daily circumstances. As a shepherd, when he looks around, he might see green pastures, dark valleys, and still waters. He might have experienced being the "good shepherd" who literally leads and tends his sheep. David's prayer comes out of his daily experience; our prayers can also be inspired by current events.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- two or three recent daily newspapers
- paper and pen for each participant

Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the group to envision David's daily life, considering what events, challenges, and joys might occur in the life of a shepherd. Ask the group what reflections of these activities and events they see in the psalm.

Distribute sections of the newspapers to the participants and ask them to scan the headlines. Invite them to find one story that offers hope and another that causes them concern. Discuss how the daily news, whether on TV, radio, Internet, or newspaper, can be understood as an invitation to pray. Give five minutes to write a short prayer about the people and situations named in the articles they chose. Invite the participants to read their prayers out loud.

### What Do These Symbols Mean?

**Leader preparation:** Read Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. Consider that when Joshua directed the people of Israel to place twelve stones from the Jordan River at Gilgal, he recognized that not everyone would understand their significance. Joshua knew that these symbols would need to be explained.

Consider the symbols that exist around your church. Are there symbols on the paraments, stained glass windows, the minister's stole, the communion table, the baptismal font, or other areas in your church that may contain meanings that are not known or completely understood by others? Locate these symbols, and familiarize yourself with their meaning. Plan a tour of the symbols found in your church for the group.

If you cannot tour the church, or if your church does not have many symbols, find different symbols using an Internet image search. Search for and print pictures of different types of crosses (Jerusalem cross, anchor cross, Eastern orthodox, and so forth) or other Christian symbols, such as the Chi Ro or Alpha and Omega symbol.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) pictures of Christian symbols

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. Joshua directed the people of Israel to erect the twelve stones as a symbol of God's faithfulness. Explain that future generations would not have had first-hand knowledge of the significance of these symbols, so they needed to be explained. Suggest that there are Christian symbols that may need to be explained so that they can be more fully understood. Lead the group on a tour of your church building and point out the symbols, or show pictures of Christian symbols. Ask people to describe the meaning of those symbols and be ready to add the information that you have learned. Invite the group to talk about which symbols are most meaningful to them and why.

## Reflect

What went well in this session? Where were the rough spots? What external factors affected the group today: weather, current events, personal situations? How were the group members able to be present to and for one another in this session? What did you discover about praying and ritual from the participants?

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Attachment: Activity 4

**The Love Round**

TUNE: <http://www.musickit.com/resources/winmas/peacerd.htm#Anchor-37516>

Love, love, love, love  
Christian, this is your call  
Love one another as God loves you  
For God loves all

**Four-Line Poem Examples**

Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy  
Let us all share our joy  
As we celebrate together  
We share our joy

Peace, peace, peace, peace  
God's my shepherd, I'll not fear  
Trembling, shaking, yet still sure  
God is right here

Sing, Sing, Sing, Sing  
We lift our voices to our God  
Sing God's praise with all our might  
For God is our hope

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Some adults can recite scripture passages that they memorized as children, some can relate a few familiar Bible stories, and others have no background or knowledge of the scriptures at all. Presumably, people gathering for this session of Faith Practices want to encounter the Bible, increase their familiarity with the scriptures, and possibly learn how to pray; that desire to learn is all that is necessary. Faith Practices offers an opportunity to experience the scriptures and discover ways to incorporate the teachings and wisdom in our everyday lives.

We can learn about prayers recorded in scripture by people who prayed thousands of years ago. Although their life experiences differed from ours in many ways, they knew the same range of emotions, the ups and downs of human existence, that we do. Using the Bible as a lens through which to view our lives and our world, we respond to God's call to come before God in prayer.

### About this Exploration

Scripture is filled with diverse and helpful models of prayer and stories of how faithful people make ritual. At the end of David's reign, in the presence of all gathered, he offers a mighty prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. The disciples watch Jesus and see how Jesus' ministry flows out of his prayer life. They ask longingly "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus provides them with a prayer that is still used by many people of faith today. We do not have to fear or wonder if our prayers are acceptable to God. We can know that God welcomes and delights in our conversation.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Luke 11:1-13**  
**1 Chronicles 29:10-18**

## Leader Preparation

Many people may be intimidated by reading the Bible and embarrassed by how much they don't know. Instead of emphasizing any lack of knowledge, we can approach the scriptures as an invitation to get to know God in a deeper, more meaningful way. We won't learn everything at once, but we will gradually discern the themes of hope, forgiveness, love, and presence that are offered to all of God's people.

It is important, as well as interesting, to read several versions or translations of the same Bible passage. An easy way to do this is to take advantage of Internet resources. Check out <http://www.biblegateway.com> or <http://www.bible.cc>. Both sites provide multiple translations and can show parallel passages (several translations of a passage on one page for easy comparison). Sometimes it is helpful for participants to have a single sheet of paper containing the Bible passage instead of trying to find the passage in the Bible. If you print out the passages ahead of time, you can also control the font size, which can be an important consideration when working with older adults. Many Bibles, particularly study Bibles, offer simple explanations and notes about books of the Bible and verses that can help put the selected passage in context.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Answers to Prayers (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 11:1-13. Consider times when you have prayed, but the answer seems to have been "no." How do you reconcile your disappointment with Jesus' encouragement to "ask and it will be given to you"? This can be a difficult topic to discuss, but it is an important one. This is an opportunity to ask hard questions about our faith and what the Bible tells us about prayer.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- pencils and paper

Jesus encourages us to ask, search, and knock and gives the assurance that these heartfelt prayers will be answered. Yet, most adults have had the experience of praying and either not receiving an answer they wanted or having the answer be "no." Ask them how they are meant to reconcile our loving God, the one who assures us that a good parent would never substitute a scorpion for an egg, with the hard reality that not all prayers are answered in the way we anticipate. Consider what people pray for: is it for being healed from a deadly disease, or having the strength, courage, and confidence that God is with you in this situation?

Have a volunteer read Luke 11:1-13 aloud. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions:

- What are your initial impressions of this passage?
- Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray?
- Jesus describes God as a friend one can turn to even at midnight. How would you paraphrase this description or put it into other words?
- What would be your two- or three-sentence description of God from this passage?

Distribute paper and pens or pencils. Invite the participants to write times they offered a prayer that was not answered as they had hoped or a prayer the answer to which was "no." Tell them that no one will see their answer, and they need not share their answer if they would rather not. Acknowledge that this can lead to painful memories, so encourage the participants only to delve as deeply in their memories as they care to. When they are ready, invite the participants to share as they are comfortable, and then consider the following questions:

- If you are unhappy with the answer to a prayer, how do you talk with God about it?
- Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you." He also taught his disciples to pray that God's will may be done. How do those statements contradict and complement one another?

## Praying and Making Ritual

Prayer: *God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, help us to encounter you in your living Word so that we may learn stories of the past and discover hope and assurance in our daily lives. Amen.*



### 2 Praying with the Calendar

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 11:1–13.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Praying with the Calendar,” Attachment: Activity 2

## 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). For each session leaders may choose from nine activities

- 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.

Jesus encourages us to persevere in prayer and not to be afraid to go to God with whatever is on our hearts and minds. Sometimes people worry that their concern might be trivial or unimportant to God, who hears the petitions of people across the globe. Yet Jesus reminds us to keep on knocking and asking.

Invite people to brainstorm circumstances or occasions when they are likely to pray. Ask for a volunteer to record these on newsprint or a whiteboard. This might include times of crisis (sickness, death, natural disaster) or moments of joy (birth of a child, anniversary, holidays). Give each person a copy of the handout “Praying with the Calendar.” Invite them to look at the calendar and consider what events or occasions take place, especially moments that might not usually be celebrated in the church. Suggest that any and every occasion can be an invitation to prayer; the calendar can remind us to turn to God with our petitions and thanks. Invite participants to read the handout and add their own personal monthly prayers in the space provided. These prayers can relate to personal special occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries, or may be prayers that particular seasons of the year bring to their minds.



### 3 Who Taught You Your Faith?

**Leader preparation:** Think about who taught you your faith as a child—was it a parent, grandparent, or special teacher? Take a moment to give thanks for that person.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- pens
- artwork: “The Reading” by Wilson, <http://www.art.com/products/p10278691-sa-i852604/s-wilson-the-reading.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+reading+wilson>

Invite the group to look at the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson, noticing as many details as they can about the expressions on the faces and the mood that is being set. Ask people to describe how they think the children feel and what the woman is experiencing. We are not born with all the knowledge that we need in life; we must be taught. Invite the participants to think back on two different periods of their lives. On a sheet of paper invite them to jot down some memories of when they were five or six years old and when they were fifteen or sixteen years old. Have them consider the following questions:

- Where were you living at that age?
- Did you attend church?
- Was someone teaching you about faith or prayer or belief in God? Who was that person?
- How did you learn Bible stories as a child?
- As you look at the picture, how does it compare to your childhood memories of learning and being taught?

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities

**4 Give Thanks Every Day, Everywhere (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. Think about the blessings in your life and times when you might want to give God thanks.

**Supplies:** None

Many prayers and psalms in the Bible begin with praise and thanksgiving. This is the easiest way to begin to pray; if we do not know what to say to God, we can always take a moment to consider the blessings that exist in our lives. Explain to the group that they will be invited to join in David's prayer of praise and thanksgiving. David took the time to recount who God is and what qualities God has; David then went on to recall God's many acts of faithfulness. Invite the participants to read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18 aloud.

Invite the group to walk together into the different rooms of the church or building where you are gathered. In each room, invite people to offer a word, phrase, or sentence in praise of God. The prayers might be inspired by what people see around them. In the kitchen they might give thanks for food and drink. Standing in the sanctuary might bring to mind a baptism or recent celebration that took place there or inspire people to give thanks for the congregation that gathers there. If you go by offices, the group might give thanks for the people who work there and ask for God's blessing on their work. Think about the fellowship hall, janitor closet, nursery, church school supply closet or cabinet, as well as other obvious or obscure places.

After the "tour" of the building, return to your meeting place. Ask people to consider what kind of prayers they might be inspired to say in their homes or in their workplace or in the place where they spend most of their time.

**5 Reach for the Stars!**

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. Think about a time in your life when you pursued a dream or challenged yourself with a lofty goal.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- stars cut out of paper or cardboard, two or three for each participant
- pens or markers

In 1 Chronicles 29:10–18 David exults in God's abundance, grace, generosity, and faithfulness. David can hardly contain his joy when he considers the many blessings in his life. He is almost embarrassed to offer God anything as an offering in return; after all, whatever David gives to God originated with God in the first place. Invite people to think about how they address God and what they dare to ask for from God. Take a few moments and discuss the following questions:

- Do we consider some prayers "off limits"? What might these prayers be?
- What are some concerns that may seem too trivial or some requests too mundane?
- How might we underestimate God's power and the depth of God's love?

Invite the group to dream and then to consider these questions:

- What dreams, wishes, hopes, or desires do you have that you have perhaps never shared with anyone or dared to even pray about? It could be anything that is important or meaningful to you—perhaps it's a new job, a chance to return to school, another child.
- What changes would you like to make in your life to make it healthier or more balanced?
- What new activity would you like to experience, or what new hobby would you like to attempt?
- Do you harbor prayers for someone close to you that you have not dared to utter even to that person? What might they be?

When people have had an opportunity to consider these dreams, invite them to write one, or more, on a star. Remind them that David reveled in God's extraordinary power and that we have the opportunity to entrust our very human desires and hopes with the Creator of the universe, from whom all blessings flow. Ask people to talk about how it feels to entrust God with our heart's desire. Encourage people to take home the stars and hang them in a place where they will see the stars on a regular basis. Every time they see a star, encourage them to lift up their prayer once more.

### ⑥ Lamenting before God

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 11:1–13. Take time to remember a period of sadness or loss in your life. If you have experienced a time when prayers seemed to be unheard or unanswered, how did you approach God?

#### **Supplies:**

- small box with a lid, or an envelope for each participant
- small slips of paper that fit easily into the box or envelope
- old magazines
- scissors
- glue sticks
- pens, pencils, markers

It is enjoyable to engage in rituals of celebration and a pleasure to mark occasions that lift up a happy event. As adults, however, we know that tragedy does enter our lives and that loss is part of living. Ironically, just at a time when we need God most, we sometimes turn away from God, mistakenly believing that we are being punished or that our prayers went unheard and thus were not answered. Times of sadness can be moments when God seems distant. Creating a ritual for such times can be both healing and serve as a reminder that God cries with us and wants to share our pain.

Invite each person to think about a time when a prayer was not answered in the way desired. Encourage each person to reflect on a time of loss or disappointment. Ask them to think about where God was in during that difficult period. Have each person decorate a box or envelope in a way that represents God's presence and love to her or him. Invite the group to cut out words or pictures from magazines and glue these on the box or envelope and/or use markers or pens to draw symbols or words that are meaningful to them.

When the boxes or envelopes are decorated, have each person write a word or phrase about a loss or disappointment on a slip of paper. Have them place their papers inside their boxes or envelopes. Explain that this represents that this time

of loss is in God's care. Some people suggest burning or destroying the paper to signify an end to the painful period. Explain that keeping these slips of paper intact can help us recall God's faithfulness in challenging situations as well acknowledge that losses we experienced in the past have shaped us into the persons that we are today.

### Sending & Serving Activities

#### 7 **Begin the Day with Prayer (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Think about any prayer rituals that you may have. Are there particular times of the day when you make a point to pray? Read Luke 11:1–13. Jesus asks us to persevere in prayer.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Many of us desire a richer or more disciplined prayer life. Sometimes our lives are so busy that we forget to pray or feel like we don't have time to pray. Jesus encourages us to persevere in prayer. One way to develop a richer prayer life is to have a morning ritual so that one's day can begin with prayer and one can be reminded throughout the day of God's presence.

Ask the group if they have any prayers that they regularly say or if they have any prayer routines. Ask them if there is a certain time of day they usually pray.

Read Luke 11:1–13 together. Ask the participants to name two times during the day when they might be able to take a few minutes to pray. This might be different for everyone, depending on schedules. Some people will have time in the morning, others might take some moments at noon, some during an afternoon walk or commute, and some right before bedtime. Emphasize that there is no "right" time to pray but that it is important to claim a time and then try to stick to it. Give people a few moments to reflect on their daily routines and then ask people when they will try to pray and what kind of prayer they will offer—it could be sung, written, recited, or simply spoken from the heart. Agree to check back in two weeks and see what challenges and learnings came from this exercise.

#### 8 **Praying for Ourselves**

**Leader preparation:** Read the words to the song "Standing in the Need of Prayer." Consider these questions: Amidst all the prayers that I offer for other people, do I ever take time to pray for myself? Could it be that when we pray for ourselves and experience God's love in our lives that we will be better equipped to serve God?

Watch the YouTube videos "Standing in the Need of Prayer" by Haitian children and "Standing in the Need of Prayer" Children singing with lyrics.

### Supplies:

- computer and Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube videos “Standing in the Need of Prayer” by Haitian children, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P2YEC-ochc&feature=related>, and “Standing in the Need of Prayer” Children singing with lyrics, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxfCVeCt\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxfCVeCt_s)
- “Standing in the Need of Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 8
- pencils

We are often asked to pray for others, especially in times of illness or struggle. We assure people, “You are in my prayers.” Sometimes we hesitate to pray for ourselves because our concerns or worries may not seem worth God’s time. We compare our circumstances with global tragedies and hesitate to pray about the worries that keep us at night. We might feel selfish thinking about ourselves rather than others.

Invite people to listen and watch the YouTube videos “Standing in the Need of Prayer” by Haitian children and “Standing in the Need of Prayer” Children singing with lyrics. Ask which version appeals to them the most and why.

Distribute copies of the song lyrics. Tell the group that they are going to sing the hymn with a pause between each line for a time for silent prayer. Hand out pencils for folks to write their prayers if they wish. Then invite people to sing the first line together—“It’s me, it’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” After 30–45 seconds, sing the next line and pause again for prayer time. Continue in this manner through the rest of the song.

After singing and praying, discuss these questions with the group:

- What it was like to go to God with prayers for yourselves?
- What are other songs that you can imagine incorporating into your prayer time?

### **Ⓞ ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.**

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. Make a poster with the following words:

- A doration
- C onfession
- T hanksgiving
- S upplication

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- prepared ACTS poster
- markers

The phrase “ACTS” is a common acronym for remembering a structure for prayer. It is not necessary that every prayer contains all these parts, but it can provide a helpful outline for prayer time.

Look at the poster together as a group. Explain that there can be four “acts” of prayer. This can be a helpful model for prayer. Invite people to talk about each

word and what it suggests to them in terms of praying. As each word is discussed, invite the group to give examples of this type of prayer. The list below provides some conversation starters, if needed.

- Adoration—Prayer can begin with adoration and praise; we can take time to simply praise God for the blessings around us and how we see God moving and acting in our lives and in the world.
- Confession—This is an opportunity to acknowledge those things we have done wrong and those things we have left undone (sins of commission and sins of omission) and hand them over to God. God wants to take the burden of sin and separation from us and awaits our confession.
- Thanksgiving—The miracle of God’s love tells us that God forgives us—now we can give thanks for God’s mercy!
- Supplication—The love and concern that we have for others originates with God. When we are worried about a person or a situation, we can lift that up in prayer to God’s care.

1 Chronicles 29:10–18 contains a beautiful prayer spoken by David; invite the group to read this out loud. Ask the participants to look at David’s words and see if they can recognize the four “acts” in David’s prayer. Invite them to write a short prayer together using the ACTS outline.

### Reflect

As you think back on this session, say a prayer for each person in the group. What did you learn about each one? In what ways did they reveal to you and the group their struggles, concerns, or joys?

Attachment: Activity 2

## Praying with the Calendar

These “prayer starters” are based on calendar events. Personalize this list by adding your own significant dates and occasions.

### January

- New Year’s Day. Pray for unknown future, those hoping for changes in their lives or circumstances in the new year.
- Martin Luther King Day. Pray for those working for justice and peace and for those who live with inequality in their lives.

### February

- Presidents’ Day. Pray for our leaders in local, state, and national offices. Pray for world leaders working for peace and improved circumstances in their countries.
- Valentine’s Day. Do you have someone who loves you? Give thanks for that person. Who are the people who are close to your heart? Ask for God’s guidance, wisdom, and protection to be with them. Remember also those who are mourning the loss of a loved one and whose hearts may feel empty on this day.

### March

- Saint Patrick’s Day. Pray for peace in Ireland and all countries torn apart by religious or cultural differences.
- First Day of spring. Pray for farmers and all those who depend on the earth to make their living.

### April

- Beginning of baseball season. Pray for professional athletes and also for all the children who will be participating in sports. Remember the parents and grandparents who will be providing transportation. Pray for balance in the lives of busy families.

### May

- Mother’s Day. Pray for mothers everywhere. Give thanks for your mother or whoever helped raise you as a child. Pray for motherless children in this country and around the world.
- Memorial Day. Pray for those in the military who are serving in this country and overseas. Ask God to give their families the strength and courage that they need.
- If you live in a country that enjoys freedom and liberty, give thanks for those blessings. Remember those who live under tyrannical regimes and people who wake up afraid every morning.

### June

- Father’s Day. Pray for wisdom, strength, and patience for fathers everywhere. Give thanks for your father or whoever raised you as a child. Pray for fatherless children across the globe.
- End of school. Pray for students who are graduating and beginning a new chapter in their lives. Pray for families whose schedules will change as school ends; ask God to be with single mothers, grandparents raising children, families who need child care, and those who can’t afford to provide safe care for their children.
- As more young drivers will be on the road, ask God to guide them and keep them safe.

Attachment: Activity 2 (*continued*)

**July**

- Independence Day (USA). Pray for your country, its leaders and citizens. Pray for peace among nations and greater understanding among cultures and religions.

**August**

- Be aware of the different seasons of the world. As the northern hemisphere is enjoying summer, the southern hemisphere is in the midst of winter.
- Pray for those affected by the extremes of nature—heat, cold, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, flooding, and so on.

**September**

- Beginning of school. Pray for teachers and all those who guide and influence young lives.
- Labor Day. Pray for those whose hard work makes daily life run smoothly. Pray for construction workers, day laborers, factory workers, and people whose labor is often unseen—miners, oil rig workers, deep sea fishermen, astronauts. Who else can you name?
- Rosh Hashanah. Pray for our Jewish brother and sisters. Ask God to help us live together in peace with people of all faiths.

**October**

- Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples' Day. Pray for original peoples in all countries, those who are often overlooked or exploited or forgotten and whose traditions and ways may not be respected or understood.
- Thanksgiving (Canada). During this harvest time, pray for farmers and farm workers.
- Halloween. Pray for children everywhere.

**November**

- All Saints Day. Take a moment to remember a loved one who is no longer living. Consider what a difference that person made in your life and give thanks for the difference that person made to you.
- Thanksgiving (USA). Make a list of ten things for which you give thanks. Think of someone who is struggling and consider what you might do to help that person.

**December**

- World AIDS Day. Pray for all those affected by HIV/AIDS and for their caretakers.
- Pray for all those affected by chronic illness and for their families.
- Christmas. Ask God to allow God's peace, love, and hope to be reborn in your heart. Think about ways that you can share the good news of the God who dwells among us.

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Attachment: Activity 8

**Standing in the Need of Prayer**

**Refrain** (*repeat after each verse*)

It's me (it's me), it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

It's me (it's me), it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

**Verses**

Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not the preacher, not the teacher, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not the preacher, not the teacher, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not my father, not my mother, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not my father, not my mother, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not the stranger, not my neighbor, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer

Not the stranger, not my neighbor, but it's me,

O Lord, standing in the need of prayer

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Discipleship is all about saying “yes” to God. As adults, we often yearn for opportunities to deepen our faith and delve more extensively into our beliefs. Discipleship invites us to put our faith into action. It is the challenge to “walk the walk” and not just “talk the talk.” Discipleship is an invitation to focus our energies on what we have discovered is important. Some activities and interests from our earlier years may take a back seat to our desire to touch and be touched by the eternal. We can practice and live out our faith, inspired by scripture and the example of the faithful who have gone before us.

### About this Exploration

The practice of prayer and ritual incorporate “being” and “doing” when applied to discipleship. Mentors in scripture and faith tradition have nurtured others in the art of praying. Paul calls us to prayer as part of life. The invitations to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances inform our daily discipleship. This attitude of prayer embraces the rhythm of life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing. Rituals have been handed down that followers continue to use and find meaning in, as well as interpret, and they create new ritual in contemporary contexts.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Deuteronomy 26:1–11**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:12–24**

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Discipleship is the “meat” of being a Christian. You are invited to reflect on what it means not to just proclaim one’s faith with words, but to live the faith in all aspects of life. We can be inspired to a life of discipleship by the reports of God’s faithfulness in Deuteronomy. Paul offers some “nuts and bolts” on Christian living when addressing the early church. His benediction and exhortations could be taped on the bathroom mirror as a reminder of how all of us are called to live our faith. Discipleship is not something we learn once; through life experience and God’s patient, continual invitation we grow in our understanding of what it means to serve God.

*Prayer: Faithful God, help us lead lives that reflect our desire to say “yes” to you. In all that we say and do, let us share the good news of your hope and new life. Amen.*

Session Development

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

 **1 Prayer Walk (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Consider what is meant by “pray without ceasing.” One way we can respond to this invitation is to incorporate prayer into all aspects of our lives. Plan a short walking route for the prayer ritual, keeping in mind any mobility limitations of participants. Choose a simple, short route to travel. The walk can be inside or outside. Plan three stops along the way where the group can gather for short prayers.

**Supplies:**

- (optional) a small bell or finger cymbals

Today the group will consider Paul’s words from 1 Thessalonians 5:15–18a, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” Invite the group to go on a short prayer walk. Explain that you will walk together in silence, make three stops along the way, and take an opportunity for silent prayer. Encourage the participants to reflect on what at each stop might move them to pray. *Who passes by that place? What happens at that place? What memory does this place stir?* Go on your prayer walk. At each stop, have a signal such as a bell to let the group know they are invited into the spirit of prayer. Offer the following prayer at each stop, “God, we gather in your creation and rejoice that you are with us. We give thanks for your abundant love, and offer you our prayers. [Allow 30–60 seconds of silence.] Amen.” After the prayer, sound the signal again and walk to the next stop. When you return to your gathering place, invite people to talk about their experience on the prayer walk.

**2 Learning from Our Ancestors**

**Leader preparation:** Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Much of the story reflects on God’s promises to the people of Israel’s ancestors. Consider stories of faith that have been passed down in your own family. Make copies of the Family Tree for each participant. Print a few extra copies for visitors or for those who make errors.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- paper and pencil for each participant
- copy of Family Tree for each participant, [http://genealogy.about.com/library/free\\_charts/Family\\_Tree.pdf](http://genealogy.about.com/library/free_charts/Family_Tree.pdf)
- computer with Internet access

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 26:1–11, and encourage the group to listen for references to “ancestors.” Explain that the people of Israel kept their faith in God because they knew that God had promised their ancestors that God would be faithful.

Invite each person to fill out a family tree, putting in as much information as they know. Ask them to add notes, if they know the information, as to where their ancestors lived, what hardships they might have endured, and what they know about their faith or beliefs. Ask the group to consider the influence that their history has on their lives and beliefs. Invite them to share any particular beliefs, personality traits, or traditions they may have because of the experience of their ancestors.

with supplies normally found at the church). For each session leaders may choose from nine activities

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



### 3 The Power of Words

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24.

**Supplies:**

- 1 Thessalonians readings, Attachment: Activity 3
- pens or pencils

Invite three volunteers each to read one translation of 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24 from the handout. Then invite participants to look for similarities and differences among the translations. Instruct them to circle the words that are similar and underline words or phrases that they think are different or convey a different meaning.

Explore the passage with the group using these or similar questions:

- To whom is this section addressed?
- What warnings do you hear?
- What commands or instructions are given?
- How does the meaning change depending on the translation used?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 That Was Then, This Is Now (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Think about the difficult circumstances from which the people of Israel escaped. Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Title the left side “That Was Then” and the right side “This Is Now.”

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Invite the group to name the terrible circumstances or hardships that the Israelites had experienced. Some examples might be slavery or wandering in the wilderness. List these on the newsprint or whiteboard on the side titled “That Was Then.” Ask the group to reflect on how those circumstances were changed. Some examples might be that Moses was sent as deliverer, God provided pillars of fire and cloud to guide them, or they were being led to promised land. List those items on the side titled “This Is Now.”

Invite the participants to consider a difficult time in their lives when it might have seemed like God was distant or there was no hope, but now, looking back, they can discern God’s presence or guidance with them. As people are willing to share, invite them to name their former circumstances (That Was Then) and the learning, growth or wisdom that came out of it (This Is Now).

### 5 Praying in All Circumstances

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Prepare a poster with the title “Give Thanks in All Circumstances.” Gather supplies.

**Supplies:**

- recent newspapers or magazines
- poster titled “Give Thanks in All Circumstances”
- scissors
- glue sticks

Invite the group to discuss the following statement: Paul tells us to “give thanks in all circumstances,” but clearly there are times and circumstances when this would be very challenging. Ask: *How do you react to a command or instruction in scripture that seems unreasonable or unrealistic?*

Invite the group to scan the newspapers and magazines, cut out headlines about recent tragedies or disasters, and glue these on the poster board. Review the headlines together and have a volunteer read them aloud. Engage the group in discussion with the following or similar questions:

- What emotions do you imagine these people are experiencing?
- List the ways that their lives may have changed.
- What does the future hold for them?
- How is it possible to give thanks in these circumstances?
- We are told to give thanks *in* all circumstances, but not necessarily *for* all circumstances. What is the difference?

Conclude with this prayer: *Holy One, you are the God of all people. You created each of us in your image and named us your beloved child. Thank you for your faithfulness even in overwhelming circumstances. Be with our brothers and sisters across the globe so that they may be strengthened by your presence and guided by your courage. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

### 6 Prayer Wheels

**Leader preparation:** Study the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor. Notice as many details in the work as you can. How would you describe the monks’ experience in prayer? How does that compare to what you experience when you pray?

**Supplies:**

- artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor, <http://www.art.com/products/p12370511-sa-i1740258/henry-savage-land-or-tibetan-yellow-monks-using-prayer-wheels.htm?sorig=0>
- scraps of fabric or construction paper, any shape or color
- permanent markers and/or fabric paint
- scissors
- single-hole punch
- yarn or ribbon
- (optional) Pinwheels of Peace (Pinwheel Instructions) <http://www.pinwheelsforpeace.com> (click on info & ideas for link to template)

Invite the group to look at the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer

Wheels” and describe what they see. Point out what the monks are holding. Invite the participants to examine the monks’ faces and ask them how they are different and how they are similar.

Share the following information about prayer wheels.

- Prayer wheels are used by Buddhists to cast prayers out into the universe.
- Often prayers are written on the individual arms of the prayer wheel, naming a particular concern or person in need of prayers.
- Every time the wheel is turned, either by hand or by the wind, prayers are offered.
- In the same way, colorful prayer flags represent blessings being offered as well as requests being made. When the flags are moved by the wind, it is believed that the prayers are released into the universe.
- The prayer flags can serve as a visual and physical reminder to pray.

Using construction paper or fabric pieces, invite the group to make prayer flags. Use the following directions.

- Choose one or more pieces of paper or fabric and cut it into a shape of your choosing.
- Write a prayer or draw symbols on each flag that you wish to lift up.
- Punch a hole in the top corners of each flag and string yarn or ribbon through the flag(s).

When all are finished, invite the group to share some of their prayer concerns. Explain that the movement of the flags may remind them of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Encourage the participants to place their prayer flags in their homes near a window so that they will move with the breeze. Whenever they go by the flags, they can touch them to make them move and be reminded that their prayers are filling their homes and the universe with messages for God.

If you would rather make prayer pinwheels, gather the appropriate materials. See Pinwheel Instructions to make the pinwheels. For an easier option, have the participants make paper prayer chains by linking together strips of paper on which they have written prayers.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Prayer Partners (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Consider how Paul encourages us to engage with one another—to admonish, encourage, help, and be patient.

#### **Supplies:**

- slips of paper
- pencils
- basket
- “Praying for One Another,” Attachment: Activity 7

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Paul ends his letter to the Thessalonians with a very active description of how they should engage in their faith. They are not called to simply think about their faith, but to put it into action by admonishing, encouraging, helping, and being patient with one another.

Distribute the slips of paper, and invite all to write their names on the slips. Place all the slips in a basket. If there are an odd number of participants, write your name on a slip of paper and add it to the basket. Draw two slips of paper at a time and read the names. Explain that these two people will become “prayer partners.” Once everyone’s name has been drawn, invite the partners to sit together and discuss the questions on handout “Praying for One Another.” Encourage the partners to check in with one another next week. If desired, this activity can be repeated for several weeks in a row using the same prayer partners in order to deepen the relationship.

### 8 Hold Fast to What Is Good

**Leader preparation:** Consider the phrase “Hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil” from 1 Thessalonians 5:21b–22. “Evil” is a strong word. Look up the meaning in the dictionary. An “evil” action can be something that is immoral or harmful to self or others. With this definition, some actions that we might not usually define as “evil” would qualify—being a workaholic or not taking care of ourselves. Instead of hearing this simply as criticism, Paul invites us to treat ourselves, and others, as people of God with great value and worth. Not to do so would be considered evil.

Write the following on a sheet of newsprint or whiteboard: “Hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21b–22) along with the definition of “evil”: adjective 1. morally wrong or bad; immoral; wicked: evil deeds; an evil life. 2. harmful; injurious.

#### Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper
- pens and pencils

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells us to abstain from every form of evil. Draw the participants’ attention to the prepared newsprint or whiteboard. Talk about the definition of “evil.” Ask people to name examples of evil, given the broad range of definitions. Write these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Invite people to talk about why these actions might be considered evil and why Paul tells us to avoid them.

Distribute paper and have the group write this phrase at the top: “Instead of ‘evil,’ I can decide to choose ‘good.’ Today I set a goal to replace an unhealthy practice with a healthier one.” Divide the paper into two columns. Title one column “Evil (unhealthy attitudes or behaviors),” and title the other column “Good (healthy attitudes or behaviors).” Invite the group to think of actions or habits in their own lives that may not be helpful or healthy. The action that they want to change can be listed under “evil;” the new or healthier action can be listed under “good.” Tell the participants that making changes in their attitudes or actions can be difficult, time consuming, and challenging. Ask them to identify specific steps they can take to begin to introduce healthier actions into their lives. Invite people to reflect together on what they have written, as they feel comfortable.

### 9 Faith into Action

**Leader preparation:** Watch the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray.” Consider that most of the scenes depicted in the video show people in the midst of an action, baptism or worship, inspired by their faith. What can your faith lead you to do?

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- computer and Internet access
- digital projector
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Before you show the video, encourage the group to be aware of the actions that they will see. Tell them that they will be talking about what the people were doing. Show the video “Down to the River to Pray.” Ask the participants which scenes they particularly liked or found touching. Ask if they have experienced anything similar to what was shown in the video.

Invite people into a discussion about what leads people into action, based on their faith. Ask the group to give examples of people they know, either personally or from news or history, who have been moved to action because of their beliefs.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Paul gives a list of actions that are encouraged. Ask the group to suggest faith-inspired concrete actions they can take. This might range from writing cards to the elderly, visiting in nursing homes, joining a local nonprofit group, supporting overseas disaster relief, and so on.

Show the video again and enjoy the music as you watch people putting their faith into action.

## Reflect

“Won’t you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?” asks the hymn by Richard Gillard, “The Servant Song.” Discipleship is our call to follow Christ and endeavor to be as Christ-like as possible in our work, social interactions, family life, and congregational living. How can we say “yes” to God today and offer ourselves as God’s servants? In what ways did this session encourage, challenge, and support participants in saying “yes” to God?

Attachment: Activity 3

**1 Thessalonians 5:12–24, various translations/paraphrases**

**New International Version**

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

**The Message**

And now, friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love! Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil. May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!

**New Revised Standard Version**

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Attachment: Activity 7

### Praying for One Another

*(Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24)*

Paul asks us to be engaged with one another's lives and to pray for one another. Below are phrases from 1 Thessalonians 5:12–24. Answer the following questions and then choose what information you will share with your prayer partner so that he or she can pray for you. If there are joys and concerns that you do not wish to discuss with your prayer partner, you can incorporate those items into your own prayer time, sharing it solely with God.

**Be at peace among yourselves.** Is your life peace-filled? What prevents peace from being a reality in your life?

**Encourage the fainthearted.** Do you need encouragement in some area of your life? Is there a challenge that you are facing or a dream that you wish to pursue?

**Help the weak.** We don't like to consider ourselves as being "weak" but there are times when we need a helping hand. Is there someone on your mind who is particularly in need of help or strength or direction?

**Be patient.** Are there people or circumstances that you find trying or annoying?

**Rejoice always.** What brings you joy? For what do you give thanks today?

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# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Traditions can be an important part of our lives that enhance and enrich our experience. As we look back on childhood or young adult experiences, we may not recall particular events or remember who exactly was present, but we will treasure the memories that remain from those repeated experiences. We find ourselves saying things such as, “In the summer, we always went to the pond,” or “Every Christmas, we hung up the same tattered Advent calendar,” or “In our family we took turns saying grace before meals.”

As time goes by and circumstances change, adults can decide which traditions continue to be life-giving sources of joy and which need to be altered or perhaps dropped altogether. As we worship God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we remember we also worship God who is creative and creating and has yet more light and hope to reveal to each of us. We can discover God through familiar and new traditions.

### About this Exploration

Christians pray and engage in rituals to draw closer to God and participate in God’s vision of a world of justice and peace. Christians across time and cultures stand in a tradition in which we receive God’s blessings and share that experience with others. Opening the treasury of Christian traditions can help us express our thanksgiving, laments, petitions, and celebrations. Prayer strengthens our relationship with God as we both speak and listen to the Divine. As we recall God’s acts of faithfulness in the past, we are encouraged that God is present with us today.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Matthew 6:7-15**  
**1 Corinthians 11:17-26**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Rituals in Our Church (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Know where the baptismal font or baptistry and communion table are located. Take note of any symbols, words, or items that are on or near these.

### Leader Preparation

Christian traditions invite us to intentionally set aside time (even just a few moments) to be aware of God’s presence. These traditions can remind us to offer a pray of petition or thanksgiving or simply be mindful that no matter where we are, God is with us. As believers, the key is to be aware of the traditions that already enrich our lives while being open to new expressions of our faith as we continue to discover our creative and living God. God wants to be found by us, God’s children. God encourages us to seek so that God may be found and knock so that the door may be opened.

*Prayer: Loving and holy God, remind me of your invitation to sit in your presence, be strengthened by your love, and with your courage and strength, share your never-ending hope. Amen.*

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the group to define the word “ritual.” Write responses on newsprint or a whiteboard. As believers or church members we engage in many practices, both formal rituals and repeated actions, that are familiar to us, but those rituals may not be understandable to a visitor. Invite the group to walk around your church and look for places of formal Christian ritual, particularly the baptismal font or baptistry and the communion table. (If you are not able to go to the sanctuary, describe these for the group before you ask the questions.) Notice the baptismal font or baptistry, and ask the group to describe any symbols, words, or items that are on it. Ask the following questions:

- What words are spoken and what actions take place during a baptism?
- How is the water used during a baptism?
- Who participates in a baptism?

Gather around the communion table and ask the group to describe any symbols, words, or items that are on it. Ask the participants the following questions:

- What words are spoken and what actions take place during communion?
- How are people served communion—in their seats, at the table, or at a communion rail?
- Who serves communion?
- What elements are used—a loaf of bread, bread cubes, crackers, or wafers? Wine or juice?

How are people invited to participate in these important rituals of the faith community—baptism and communion?

Then invite the participants to consider the informal rituals that exist in your church:

- When is there a time of fellowship where beverages or snacks are served? Before or after worship?
- What rules are there about who can help themselves to refreshments?
- How are people greeted prior to worship, or welcomed if they are visiting?
- How are children welcomed into worship?
- Are there parts of the church that are considered “off limits” to any particular age group?

### 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

Invite the participants to pretend that they are visitors coming to your church for the first time. Have them walk through the front door and imagine how it feels

to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). For each session leaders may choose from nine activities

- 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.

to see this place for the first time. Look at the worship bulletin. What practices might seem foreign to a newcomer? Think about reading a hymnal, singing the Doxology, passing the peace, and other rituals of your service of worship.



### 2 Baptism: More Than Getting Wet

**Leader preparation:** Watch the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray.”

#### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1FQqSGxBso>
- “Down to the River to Pray,” Attachment: Activity 2

Invite participants to take turns reading the verses of the song. Several lines of the songs are repeated frequently. Note that often when a song has repeated lyrics, the songwriter is trying to emphasize a point. Consider the following questions about the repeated phrases.

“Let’s go down”

- Who is being invited to pray?
- Why might we invite someone to pray?
- Whom would you like to invite to pray?
- Do you feel comfortable praying with other people, or do you prefer to pray alone?

“Good Lord, show me the way”

- When might you pray these words?
- When might we pray these words for someone else?

“Down to the river to pray”

- Do you have a special place to pray? What is it like?
- Water can symbolize cleansing and new life. What other places speak to you as a meaningful place to pray?

Show the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray.” Talk about the way the visual images tie in with the lyrics. Engage the group in discussion with the following questions.

- Which images do you find particularly meaningful?
- Sometimes a beautiful scene from nature, either in real life or on screen, reminds us of God’s presence in creation. Describe a place or scene that revives your spirit in this way.

### ③ Encountering God through Our Senses

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26.

**Supplies:**

- small loaf of bread or bread slices
- chalice or cup with juice or wine

Communion is a multisensory experience. In our everyday lives, we grow accustomed to using some of our senses (sight and hearing, for example) more than others. Our Creator God can engage us and communicate with us using all five of our senses. Through these senses we can allow God to speak to us in new and meaningful ways.

Place the bread and the cup in the center of the table so everyone can see it. Ask the participants to take a moment to think silently about celebrating communion. Invite people to describe the experience of the Lord’s Supper by using their five senses.

- When I taste the bread, I feel . . .
- When I sip from the cup, I feel . . .
- When I smell the bread or the wine/juice, I feel . . .
- When I hold the cup or the bread in my hand, I feel . . .
- When I hear the invitation to the table, I feel . . .
- When I hear the communion songs, I feel . . .

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Praying with Jesus (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Pray the Lord’s Prayer slowly, pausing after each line to consider the words you are praying.

**Supplies:**

- “Pray in This Way,” Attachment: Activity 4

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Because these words are so familiar, it can be easy to race through this prayer without considering its meaning. Give the participants a copy of handout and tell them that they have the opportunity to pray each line intentionally and allow it to speak to their lives and circumstances. Invite them to read the lines to the prayer silently and write responses to the questions provided.

After people have had an opportunity to work on the prayer and questions, tell them that Jesus’ prayer could be prayed every day, or even many times in a day! Suggest that when they pray this prayer, they can consider these questions. Jesus’ prayer is not meant to be simply words that are memorized, but rather a living experience with God. These questions might illicit a different response from them each time they pray, depending on their circumstances at the moment. Affirm that we can celebrate that God is present with us this day and every day.

### 5 Breaking Bread together

**Leader preparation:** Study 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Print copies of the lyrics of “Let Us Break Bread Together” if the song is not in your hymnal.

**Supplies:**

- hymnals with the hymn “Let Us Break Bread Together” (tune: Let Us Break Bread) or <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/e/letusbtt.htm>
- (optional) a loaf of bread to break and share
- pens and paper

Have a volunteer read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. The following questions may help the group discuss how communion is served at your church and their first experience of communion.

- How do people receive communion: standing or sitting, at a communion rail or in the pews?
- How does everyone eat the bread and drink the cup: at the same time or individually?
- Where did you first receive communion, how old were you, and what do remember of that experience?
- How was that practice similar to or different from how communion is celebrated at your church now?

Hand out hymnals or copies of the lyrics and have people turn to the hymn “Let Us Break Bread Together.” Invite the group to sing the hymn one verse at a time, briefly considering the following questions for each verse respectively. Share answers as people feel comfortable. Some people may prefer not to share the answers aloud and would rather write their answers.

Sing verse 1 of the hymn: “Let us break bread together on our knees.”

- When you sing these words, what images come to mind?
- If you could choose anyone, living or dead, to break bread with, who would it be? (Suggest that it could be someone with whom someone currently estranged or a person he or she hasn’t seen for a long time.)
- How can the action of sharing a meal be a healing moment?

Sing verse 2 of the hymn: “Let us drink wine (or share the cup) together on our knees.” Communion reminds us of the unity with God and one another made possible through the love of Jesus. Human beings can be divided by any number of concerns: envy, competition, thoughtless words or actions, and misunderstandings.

- Where is there brokenness in the world today, and who is especially in need of unity today?
- Name places and people in the world who suffer from a lack of unity and/or understanding.
- Is there a lack of peace or understanding among people with whom you are close? What prayer can you offer for them?

Offer a prayer of unity and understanding for your congregation, family, friends, or coworkers.

Sing verse 3 of the hymn: “Let us praise God together on our knees.”

Invite each person in the group to offer one or two reasons to give thanks to God today.

### 6 Tools for Prayer

**Leader preparation:** Display the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor so people may see it as they enter the room. Look at it and notice as much detail as you can. Be aware of how the painting makes you feel and what reactions you have as you look at it.

Read about prayer wheels. You can use the Internet by typing “Tibetan prayer wheels” in a search engine. The prayer wheel has a prayer (mantra) printed on it. The understanding is that when the wheel is spun, the work of the prayer increases as it is sent out to God and the universe.

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor, <http://www.art.com/products/p12370511-sa-i1740258/henry-savage-landor-tibetan-yellow-monks-using-prayer-wheels.htm?sorig=0>
- paper and pens or pencils

Draw the participants’ attention to the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor and ask them to look at the picture for a few moments in silence. Invite them to look for as many details as possible, including being aware of what the monks are holding and the expressions on their faces. After a few moments, invite the group to write two or three impressions or thoughts about the picture. Invite them to share what they see and how the picture makes them feel. Consider the following questions.

- What particular places help you pray?
- What visual tools remind you of the presence of God?
- How would you describe the monks’ emotions as they pray? What do you experience when you pray?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 A Ritual, Not a Rut (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Consider your daily routine and consider what changes, if any, you could make to feed your spirit a more balanced menu.

#### **Supplies:**

- paper, pens or pencils

What is the difference between a ritual and a rut? Sometimes we get caught up in doing the “same old thing” in our lives simply because it is easier than trying something new. It is said that the seven last words of a dying church are, “We have always done it that way.” Congregations, as well as individuals, can get into ruts.

Jesus instructed his disciples not to “heap empty phrases” when they prayed. This is an invitation to be mindful about how we live our lives and to be intentional about the words and phrases we use when we pray and speak.

Invite participants to write a draft schedule of a typical day. This can be as simple as making a list of the hours in the day, beginning with when they wake up and continuing until bedtime. Ask them to include as much detail as possible, includ-

ing meal times, work hours, time for errands, watching TV, and so on. Ask them to refer to their daily routine as they consider the following questions.

- Is every part of your day necessary? Chores, for example, may not be pleasurable, but are still needed in daily life.
- What are some activities (watching a particular TV show, for example) that you continue to do even though it does not bring much pleasure?
- Where in your schedule can you find a small block of time, perhaps 10–15 minutes, to place a substitute activity?
- If you could add one activity that might feed your spirit or refresh your soul, what would it be? Could you read a book for pleasure, take a short walk, talk with a friend on the phone?
- How can you break free of a rut and replace it with a life-giving ritual instead?



### 8 Come to the Table!

**Leader preparation:** Study the artwork “The Last Supper” by Crespi and notice the details of the hands and food that are depicted. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 where Paul expresses his concern that the meaning of communion is being lost because the participants are acting like gluttons without regard for the feelings or needs of their fellow participants.

#### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Last Supper” by Crespi  
<http://www.art.com/products/p12061746-sa-i1508087/daniele-crespi-the-last-supper-detail-of-the-food.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+last+supper+detail+of+food+by+crespi%09>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Before you display the artwork, invite the group to consider rituals and traditions they have shared around a table. This can be as varied as birthday celebrations to holiday gatherings to evening family meals. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Encourage people to talk about what makes those occasions memorable or special. It may be that it was not the food that was served as much as it was the company who shared it together.

Display the artwork and invite people to look carefully at the image of the Last Supper. Engage the group in conversation with the following questions:

- How would you describe the mood in this picture?
- If you could add sound to the picture, what do you imagine you would hear?
- Is this a scene that could take place today, or is it particular to its time period?

Explain to the participants that Paul was concerned that the early church was forgetting the significance and meaning behind the Last Supper. In our modern world, we can also lose sight of the importance of spending time breaking bread together. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions:

- Do you share meals and celebrations around the table now as often as you used to in the past? What changed? Why?
- What prevents people from gathering for shared meal times?

- What interruptions does our electronics-filled world insert into our daily lives?
- If you value being at table with someone, whether for an elaborate meal or a simple cup of coffee, what steps can you make to set aside time for this ritual of sharing and caring?

### 9 Preventing Prayer-stoppers

**Leader preparation:** Read Matthew 6:7–15. Cut an octagonal shape (stop sign) from cardboard or card stock for each person. Using red marker, write the word “STOP” in large letters on one side of the shape.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- prepared “STOP” sign shape for each person

The disciples express their desire to pray when they ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. Presumably, everyone who participates in this Faith Practice shares a desire to draw closer to God through rituals and prayers. Many of the disciples were educated and faithful men who already had a deep faith. *Why did they feel the need to learn more about prayer? Could it be that despite their desire, obstacles in their lives prevented them from having a rich prayer life?*

Invite the group to read aloud Matthew 6:7–15. Invite people to describe how they learned to pray. Was there a specific person who taught them to pray, a series of trial-and-error attempts at prayer, or some combination? Invite people to consider if they pray the same way that they did when they were younger or at different stages of their lives.

Give each person a “STOP” sign shape. While most of us have a desire to pray, we often have some obstacles that stop us from engaging in prayer time. Invite people to write on the blank side of their shape what stops them from praying. As a group, invite the participants to share some of these obstacles as they feel comfortable. Brainstorm together what can be done to remove or lessen the impediments to praying.

### Reflect

We are always invited and welcomed into God’s presence. How can traditions remind us to turn to God and be aware of God’s promise to be with us always? What rituals has your group established for its life together, such as gathering around coffee and tea and pastries, or having casual conversation as you gather, or opening and closing the session with prayer, or checking in with one another about the past week? In what ways do your rituals help form the character of the group? In what ways does this group follow or veer from the traditions of other study groups in the congregation?

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Attachment: Activity 2

**Down To The River To Pray**

*Refrain*

As I went down in the river to pray  
Studying about that good ol' way  
And who shall wear the starry crown?  
Good Lord show me the way!

O sisters, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
O sisters, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

*Refrain*

O brothers, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
Come on, brothers, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

*Refrain*

O fathers, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
O fathers, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

*Refrain*

O mothers, let's go down  
Come on down, don't you wanna go down?  
Come on, mothers, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

*Refrain*

O sinners, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
O sinners, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

*Refrain*

Attachment: Activity 4

**Pray in This Way**

Read each line of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and respond to the questions posed.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.**

“Hallowed be your name” is a way of giving God praise and recognizing that God is holy. Take a moment to offer God praise and thanks. Jot down two to four things for which you are thankful.

**Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Where would you like God and God’s power to be active?

Are there situations in your life or in places in the world where humans seem helpless and so God’s presence is especially needed?

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

This line can simply be about having enough to eat. If you have enough to eat for today, take a moment to give thanks.

This can also be a reminder to live in the moment and not to worry about what tomorrow might bring. Can you pray for this day and ask God to help you be aware of God’s presence in this moment? Then simply trust that God will be equally present in the days to come.

**And forgive us our debts,**

Write or draw symbols to represent those things in your life that need forgiveness and healing.

**As we also have forgiven our debtors.**

Whom do you need to forgive?

What anger and resentments do you carry with you?

Can you hand those over to God? This might need to be done every day or even several times each day.

**And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.**

What might be an issue in your life that is frightening you or causing you anxiety?

What is an area in your life where you feel weak or simply not up to the challenge and with which you would like God’s help?

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Context and mission invite us to explore how to put our faith into action and to wonder what our faith calls us to do at this stage in our lives. No matter what the age of the adults, there can be a lot of “context” to work with. We are encouraged to bring the depth of our life experiences into our study and understanding of scripture and faith. We bring our disappointments, losses, questions, and doubts as well as the joys, blessings, and miracles that we have experienced along the way. As adults we can honestly look at where we are in our lives and, depending on God’s grace and mercy, wonder how we are being called to serve God in our circumstances today.

### About this Exploration

Ritual helps us understand ourselves and our relationships—within our immediate and extended families, communities of faith, and the world. The prophet Joel reminds us that in a hurting and troubled world God calls us together in community and God’s Spirit is poured out among all people. The Holy Spirit aids us as we practice prayer and ritual. Engaging in prayer and ritual directs our focus away from ourselves and toward our communities, our global community, and God. When we embrace prayer and ritual in this context, we may experience God’s transforming power here and now.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**Joel 2:1–2, 12–17**  
**Philippians 1:3–4**

## Leader Preparation

Enjoy these two very different scriptures! Each one invites us into a deeper relationship with God. Whether we are confessing our sin and rejoicing in God’s mercy with Joel or giving thanks to God for the blessings of relationships with Paul in Philippians, these verses contain a wealth of material on which to reflect. This Exploration encourages us to realize that our actions can be our prayer; the rituals in which we engage can be the way we communicate with God and others.

*Prayer: God, please bless our time together as we explore the depth of your mercy and the boundless nature of your love. Help us to put our trust in you as we endeavor to live out our faith. Amen.*

## Session Development

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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Rituals in Our Church (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Write the verses of Philippians 1:3–4 on newsprint or whiteboard so that the participants can read it. Think about people in your life for whom you are grateful, and give thanks.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Have the participants read aloud Philippians 1:3–4. If the group has different Bible translations, listen to each translation separately. The group may hear three or four readings. Ask them to think about one or two people for whom they are grateful. One by one, invite each person to say this part of the verse, “I thank my God every time I remember . . .,” filling in that blank with the name of someone who has made a difference in his or her life. Then invite them all to say in three or four sentences just why their chosen person is so special and why they give thanks to God for that person. After everyone who wants to speak has had an opportunity, encourage the participants to contact the person the mentioned (or the person’s family if the person is deceased) to let that individual know just what a blessing he or she is.

### 2 Warning Signs

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. Joel tells the worship leaders to “blow the trumpet” and “sound the alarm” because Joel knows that the people have turned away from God, and God is not pleased. Now it is time for the congregation to gather and ask for forgiveness so that they may change their ways. Joel suggested very concrete warning signs for God’s people. This may lead us to ask, “How do we know when we are on the wrong path? What warning signs should we listen to?”

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- dictionary
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the group to read aloud Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. There is a sense of urgency in this passage; the ancient congregation is being invited to gather immediately for confession and repentance. Ask someone to look up the definitions of “forgiveness” and “repentance.” Write the definitions on the newsprint or whiteboard so that everyone can read the meaning of these words. Engage the participants in conversation with these or similar questions:

- What could a congregation do that would be so displeasing to God?
- How do we know when it is time to forgive?
- The people of Israel were called to repentance by the trumpet and alarm. What calls you to repentance?
- Does there have to be repentance in order for forgiveness to exist? If someone has wronged you, but never asks for your forgiveness, is it possible (or necessary) to forgive that person?
- Why do you think God forgives the people of Israel?

with supplies normally found at the church). For each session leaders may choose from nine activities

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

### ③ Rend Your Heart

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. In ancient Israel, people literally would tear a piece of clothing or material as an outward sign of internal emotional distress or sorrow. How do we ask for God’s forgiveness in today’s world? Is an outward demonstration of remorse necessary? Can it be helpful?

Watch the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” (optional). Check to see if this hymn is included in your church’s hymnal.

#### **Supplies:**

- song: “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” (tune: Beach Spring); lyrics: <http://www.justsomelyrics.com/823745/Oleta-Adams-Wash,-O-God,-Our-Sons-%26-Daught-Lyrics>
- small bowl of water
- towel or paper towels
- washable markers in light colors (yellow, gray, and so forth)
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- (optional) YouTube video Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Joel 2:1–2, 12–13. Joel invites the people of God to confess their sin before God so that they can be forgiven. Invite the group to read the lyrics of “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” one verse at a time. After each verse, invite the participants to reflect on the words with these questions:

- Which image speaks to you?
- How do the words of this verse relate to the Joel scripture?
- How would you describe the God being addressed in this verse?

After discussing all three verses, invite everyone to write the word “sin” on their hand with washable marker. Give them a few moments to reflect on something for which they would like to be forgiven; this does not need to be a major event, but can be as simple as neglecting to call someone, offering an unkind remark, or judging someone by appearances. Remind the group that God invites us to “return to God” to receive God’s forgiveness.

As you pass the bowl of water from person to person, invite people to dip the “marked” hand into the water and wash away the word “sin.” As this is done, invite the group to say together, “You are loved by God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

Sing the song if your group is familiar with the tune “Beach Spring.” Alternatively, you can say the words together or watch the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters.”

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities

 4 How Would You Describe God? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 and pay particular attention to the description of God given in verse 13 (God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and so on). Ask yourself how you would describe God.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Joel 2:13 to the group. Invite the participants to list the adjectives in this verse that describe God. Tell them that together you will compile a list of as many descriptive terms for God as you can. Challenge them to be as creative as possible. Write their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard. Ask them if any of the adjectives surprise them or if they disagree with any.

At closing, offer the following prayer of thanksgiving. “Dear God, you who are . . . [read the list of adjectives here], thank you for revealing yourself to us in so many ways. Help us to have open hearts, eyes, ears, and spirits so that we may encounter you in our lives every day. Amen.”

## 5 Called to Pray

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. Think about how people across the world are called into prayer.

Find pictures of a shofar, church bells, minaret, Buddhist gong, and Indian drums. You may find these doing an Internet image search. Save these images so they may be viewed by the digital projector or print them out to share with the group.

Think about what it means to experience a public call to prayer. Look at the YouTube videos <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sOgNA1f8Xw&feature=related> “Muslim call to prayer” and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkThNw210is&feature=related> “Jewish shofar” so that you are familiar with them.

**Supplies:**

- computer and Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube videos <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sOgNA1f8Xw&feature=related> “Muslim call to prayer” and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkThNw210is&feature=related> “Jewish shofar”
- pictures of shofar, church bells, minaret, Buddhist gong, and Indian drums

Joel addresses the congregation and informs them that they are being called to worship (and specifically, repentance) by the sound of the alarm and the trumpet. The invitation comes without regard to anyone’s schedule or plans. Joel announces that now is the time to come before God.

Across the world and in many cultures, there are many ways that people are called to worship. Some examples include the Muslim call to prayer from the minaret, the Jewish shofar blown on holy days, and church bells ringing on Sunday morning. Ask the group what traditions they are aware of in different reli-

gions and cultures and how they are called to worship. Show the group the pictures you gathered and the YouTube videos “Muslim call to prayer” and “Jewish shofar.”

Ask the participants if it would be helpful, in our busy lives, to have some concrete reminder that it is time to pray, even if it interrupts our activities. Some people set an alarm on their cell phone, computer, or other electronic device as a call to worship and a reminder to be aware of God’s presence. Invite the group to brainstorm methods that they could use to be called into worship.

### 6 An Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. Think about some of the spiritual disciplines mentioned in this scripture. Joel describes worship, fasting, confession, and prayer. These can be used as a way to approach God.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Joel tells us that God is gracious and merciful so we can approach God with confidence. There are a number of ways to pray and be aware of God’s presence.

Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 together. How many spiritual disciplines or ways to approach God can the participants identify? Ask people to consider what the value of fasting might be. The idea of “doing without” may put us in solidarity with those who experience hunger not by choice, or it may be a way for us to experience a practice that Jesus used.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Embodied Prayer (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 1:3–4. Practice leading the following prayer with hand motions until you are comfortable enough to say the prayer with the hand motions and without looking at the instructions.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Philippians 1:3–4 to the group. There are many ways to pray. Invite the group to get out of their “heads” and into their “bodies.” Some people find it easier to memorize prayers or scripture when there are physical actions that accompany the different parts of the prayer. Lead the following prayer exercise. Invite the participants to repeat each line after you and to follow your motions.

- I thank my God. (*Lift up both hands, arms extended, toward heaven.*)
- I remember and pray for you. (*Hold out your hands as if ready to embrace someone.*)
- If desired, pause here and name people or situations that you wish to offer in prayer.
- I pray with joy. (*Clap your hands and name something or someone that brings you joy.*)
- Repeat as often as desired.

This exercise can be used with any variety of prayers or psalms. Invite the participants to experiment with parts of Psalm 8, 23, 46, 121, or any favorite of theirs. If there is time, each participant could choose a scripture and create her or his own prayer movement to teach to the group.

### 8 Come into God's presence

**Leader preparation:** Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. Joel invites all God's people—the sinners and the saints—to come into God's presence. Think about what it's like when your congregation gathers for worship and what kind of atmosphere exists when the people of God are together. Consider how other people are invited to join in the worship and work of your church.

#### Supplies:

- artwork: “Guatemala: Processions” by Betty LaDuke, [http://www.bettyladuke.com/index.php?set\\_albumName=latin&id=aab&option=com\\_gallery&Itemid=&include=view\\_photo.php](http://www.bettyladuke.com/index.php?set_albumName=latin&id=aab&option=com_gallery&Itemid=&include=view_photo.php)

Invite the group to spend a few moments looking at the artwork “Guatemala: Processions” by Betty LaDuke. Encourage them to notice the colors and the expressions on people's faces. Invite people to describe what they see; allow individuals to point out particular details of the painting that speak to them or catch their eye.

In Joel and in many parts of the Bible there are both commands and invitations to worship God. Consider the following questions together.

- What kind of atmosphere is portrayed in the painting?
- How would you describe the atmosphere in worship at your church?
- The painting depicts people of many ages and color. How are people of various ages and background made to feel welcome in your congregation?
- If you had to give someone a reason for coming to worship in your church, what would it be?
- What other pictures or paintings remind you of worship?

### 9 Putting Faith into Action

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 1:3–4. Think about people whom you especially would like to remember in front of God. Obtain a list of people in the congregation, shut-ins, elderly, or others who might enjoy receiving a “thinking of you” card from your group.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- list of elderly or shut-ins from your congregation and addresses
- “thinking of you” or blank greeting card, envelope, and stamp for each participant, and a few extras

Read Philippians 1:3–4 to the group. Ask them to describe the feelings or emotions spoken or elicited by these verses.

Every congregation has a prayer list, whether it is a formal written list or simply people known to the congregation who are especially in need of God's care. In response to the scripture, the group will “remember” these folks before God. Invite each person to choose at least one name on the prayer list. Distribute greeting cards and have each write a card to that person, including the verses from

Philippians. The participants can either mail the cards or, if possible, deliver the card to the recipient in person.

Pray for the people on the list using the following prayer: *Loving and caring God, you who know each one of us by name, we lift up to your care these people. Surround them with your courage, strength, and healing presence so that they are reminded of their infinite value in your sight. We give thanks for each person on this list and ask that you touch their lives with your joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

### Reflect

“I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love” (Mother Theresa). It can be difficult to put our faith into practice. Mother Theresa seems to encourage everyone to place confidence in God, who is love. God’s love can transform us as well as the circumstances we encounter along life’s journey. In what ways did the group connect context and mission with praying and making ritual? How might you continue to help the group members broaden their context and engage in mission? Sometimes, when we can’t physically participate in a mission activity, we can pray for that mission.

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Thinking about the future can be empowering. It reminds us that we are not locked into a rut, but rather we have choices about our actions, attitudes, and relationships. To think about the future with God, creator of the universe, is especially exciting. Our unlimited God invites us to envision what life with God can be like. No matter our age, we are always invited into a closer relationship, deeper prayer life, and more active discipleship. God is never “done” with us. Whether we are young adults or senior citizens, God has more to offer and teach us. We worship the God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We can face the future unafraid because God’s presence and grace already fills it.

### About this Exploration

The practices of our faith are happening within us and around us. Through awareness and attentiveness, we may be beckoned toward a new vision for the future in our relationships with both the Divine and with one another. An openness to and discovery of the things going on around us will focus us upon the spiritual conversations already taking place. By exploring prayer and ritual in the present we can find new ways to build a vision for a future grounded in God’s love and faithfulness.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**2 Samuel 7:18–29**  
**Philemon 1:1–9**

## Leader Preparation

The future is filled with possibilities when we go forward with our eternal God. Think about your hopes, dreams, and concerns about the future, and then remember Jesus’ reassurance to be with us always, even until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Consider your future. What will the next days, months, and even years hold for you? What changes can you anticipate? Whether the changes we expect cause us joy or concern, God promises to journey with us. And when the unexpected happens, God’s grace will be more than sufficient for us. This is an opportunity to offer your dreams to God and to be open to God’s direction for you and your life as you go into the future.

*Prayer: God, there are many decisions to make in our individual lives, in our faith community, and in the world. Thank you for knowing what is the best for now and for the future. Pour wisdom into my mind. By the power of your Holy Spirit, let me touch the lives of others for good, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I speak, or the life I live. 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 Serv-

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Remembering God’s Greatness (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read 2 Samuel 7:18–29. Notice that much of David’s prayer is remembering and recounting God’s acts of faithfulness. David is humbled by realizing how much God has done for him and his people. It is good for us to remember how active God is in our lives and how much we have to be thankful for. Take time to consider the blessings in your life. We are invited to be in awe of God’s greatness.

On a whiteboard or sheet of newsprint write “God, you have wrought all this greatness!”

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- prepared newsprint or whiteboard
- markers

Read aloud 2 Samuel 7:18–29, and invite the group to listen to David’s beautiful prayer. Notice how much time he devotes to thanking God for God’s actions in the past. David recounted historical events that had taken place hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Give the participants a few moments to consider some blessings in their lives; these can be blessings as current as the family they live with, or as ancient as God’s generosity in sharing Jesus with us. Invite people to speak these blessings out loud as a volunteer records them on newsprint or a whiteboard. Once the list is created, join together in singing the Doxology or another song of praise and thanksgiving familiar to your group.

### 2 The Gift of Music

**Leader preparation:** Prior to meeting, invite the participants to bring examples of a song or hymn that is meaningful to them. The song can be on a CD or mp3 player, or, if desired, the person could volunteer to sing part of the song or teach it to the group. Music can be a powerful way for us to pray. Music can help us communicate our joys, our desires, and a wide range of emotions. Think about a song or hymn that helps you express your faith. What is it about that song that speaks to you?

**Supplies:**

- CD player
- speakers for an mp3 player

There are many ways to communicate with God. We can speak, dance, write, or sing. The Bible includes examples of King David doing all of these. Invite the participants to share their music with the group. Encourage them to describe how their chosen song speaks to them, what it means to their faith, and how it helps them communicate with God.

This activity could be shared with the young people in the congregation. It can be an interesting exercise to have young people explain “their” music to an older generation, and vice versa. This can be a way for adults to learn more about what young people are thinking and give teens an opportunity to gain some insight into the “old fashioned” songs that speak to their elders.

ing.” 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). For each session leaders may choose from nine activities

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

### ③ I Remember You in My Prayers”

**Leader preparation:** Watch the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Kraus. There are scenes showing rivers with great power, quiet water scenes as well as stunning images of water birds in flight. In what ways do these views reflect or expand your understanding of God? What other images would you choose to illustrate this song?

Read Philemon 1:1–9. Consider the line “I remember you in my prayers.” Think about a person or people for whom you often pray, and commend them once more to God’s loving care.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Kraus  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1FQqSGxBso>

Read aloud Philemon 1:1–9. Ask the group to consider the line “I remember you in my prayers.” Encourage them to think of the person or people for whom they pray most often.

As you prepare to watch the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Kraus, encourage the group to notice the images used. Show the video. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions:

- What part of the video stays in your mind or left the most powerful impression?
- Which images in the video did you enjoy and/or find most powerful?
- How do these images give you insight into your understanding of God? If you were creating a video, what other images might you choose to illustrate this song?
- Paul says that he remembers Philemon in his prayers. What do the images depicted tell you about the God to whom we pray?

Watch the video again.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Writing a Letter (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Philemon 1:1–9. Can you remember a time when people wrote letters instead of e-mails? Notice Paul’s concern and personal involvement. Does his display of compassion remind you of a letter or card that you might have received?

**Supplies:**

- “A Letter à la Paul,” Attachment: Activity 4
- pens or pencils

Tell the group about the Paul's letter to Philemon: Paul writes a letter of concern and instruction to Philemon. In it, he offers both encouragement and prayers for Philemon. We can use Paul's example as a way to pray for particular situations or people. As we lift them up in prayer, we trust that God's concern for those addressed is far greater than our own.

Invite the participants to think about a person or a situation that is on their hearts and minds. Give each participant a copy of handout "A Letter à la Paul" of Paul's letter to Philemon. Invite them to try to follow the form that Paul used and write a letter to this person, knowing that this letter will never actually be delivered. This gives one the freedom to pour out personal thoughts and deep desires. Before they start to write, ask them to consider the following questions:

- Paul begins the letter identifying himself. Who are you in relationship to the person being addressed?
- What is your prayer for this person?
- What encouragement would you like to offer?
- What are your concerns, and what kind of help do you ask God to provide?

After writing the letter, encourage the participants to keep the letter in a safe place and refer to it occasionally, once a week or more, so that they can continue to pray for this person.

### **Inspired by Others**

**Leader preparation:** Read Philemon 1:1–9. Consider the line "I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus." Think of a faithful person whom you admire, perhaps a mentor in the faith for you, or someone who simply reminds you about what it means to live a faithful life. What have you learned from that person, or what does that individual inspire you to do?

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible

Invite someone to read aloud Philemon 1:1–9. Consider the phrase, "I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus." Invite the group to think about a person from the past and a person that they know right now whom they admire and who teaches them about living the faith. It may be that the person has not spoken to them about faith, but instead models a Christian life simply by their actions. Ask the participants to describe this person and what it is that they admire about him or her. Invite each person to complete this phrase, "I would like to live a life that shows my faith in Jesus. This person inspires me to . . . (name the action) as a way to demonstrate God's love and faithfulness."



### **How Do We Pray?**

**Leader preparation:** Read aloud both translations on the Attachment: Activity 6. Consider which words or phrases "jump out" at you or particularly catch your attention. Circle those words or phrases that are meaningful to you. Spend a few moments thinking about why those words speak to you. Consider which translation is clearer or more poetic. Create a prayer using the words you identified.

#### **Supplies:**

- "2 Samuel 7:18–29," Attachment: Activity 6
- pencils

David is not only well known for his songs recorded in the book of Psalms, but also for prayers found throughout the Old Testament. Give each person a copy of Attachment: Activity 6. Have the participants take turns reading aloud these two translations. Ask them to spend a few moments circling words or phrases that “jump out” at them or are confusing or especially seem meaningful to them. Engage the group in conversation with the following questions:

- Which words or phrases did you circle? Why?
- Which translation do you prefer? Why?

Invite them to create their own prayer using the words they identified. Ask those who are willing to read their prayers to the group.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Pausing to Notice God (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** David is well known for his psalms and prayers. Some of his most beautiful prayers are descriptions of what he sees all around him (for example, Psalm 23 or Psalm 121), or a detailed retelling of what God has done and where God’s faithfulness can be observed (2 Samuel 7:18–29). In our often hectic lives, we are sometimes too busy to notice God in our midst. Think about events that deserve to be lifted up in prayer. This can be anything from the “everyday” (a good report card, losing a tooth, saying grace before supper, a baby’s birth) to the more complex events of our lives (mourning the loss of a loved one, moving to a new home, starting a new job). Think about what events in your own life deserve to be noticed and lifted up to God.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Although we have some rituals in our lives, we can always create more. On newsprint or a whiteboard have the group list rituals that already exist in their lives. These can include times such as holiday celebrations, family traditions, or any action that makes a moment seem more special.

In our often hectic lives, we are sometimes too busy to notice God in our midst. The psalmist David recorded God’s actions in the past as well as the discovery of God in the midst of his life and in the beauty of God’s creation. Invite the participants to brainstorm moments and events in their lives that might be meaningful to them, but too often remain unnoticed because they are busy rushing on to the next event in their lives. Invite them to discuss both simple and complex events that are worth noticing and lifting up to God in prayer.

### 8 Strengthening Our Churches

**Leader preparation:** Paul’s many letters are a collection of his thoughts, instruction, and encouragement for the early church. He sent these caring epistles to the new churches with their collection of “baby” Christians as a parent nurtures a young child who must be guided and taught. The letters are an expression of Paul’s concern and compassion. With this in mind, read Philemon 1:1–9. Think about your own church and congregation.

Which people or groups are in particular need of help or encouragement? How could you share God's spirit of hope with them?

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- pens
- "Certificate of Appreciation," Attachment: Activity 8

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Philemon 1:1–9. Encourage the group to imagine what obstacles the early Christian church faced—persecution, lack of role models (each church was the first of its kind), isolation (very few Christian churches existed at the time). Ask: *What kind of instruction and encouragement Paul provide in his letter?*

Invite the group to consider their own church and particular circumstances, including as many factors as possible, such as congregation size and age, ages of participants, location, and economic factors. Ask: *What challenges might the congregation be facing? Who in the congregation is working on addressing these issues?*

Once the group has identified people or groups who are working hard on behalf of the church, invite them to complete a "Certificate of Appreciation," Attachment: Activity 8, for these folks, thanking them for their efforts. Have the group think about when they might present the certificates. They might wish to invite the recipients of the certificates to the group, or these could be awarded during coffee hour or some other informal, public occasion. Invite the group identify ways they could be helpful to those efforts on behalf of the church. Conclude this activity with a prayer asking God to bless the people and groups working on behalf of the body of Christ.



### 9 Rituals Bring Us Together

**Leader preparation:** Look at the artwork "Guatemala: Processions" by Betty LaDuke. Think about what you see in this painting. How does it remind you of any rituals that you have participated in, either at church, at home, or at other events?

**Supplies:**

- artwork: "Guatemala: Processions" by Betty LaDuke  
[http://www.bettyladuke.com/index.php?set\\_albumName=latin&id=aab&option=com\\_gallery&Itemid=&include=view\\_photo.php](http://www.bettyladuke.com/index.php?set_albumName=latin&id=aab&option=com_gallery&Itemid=&include=view_photo.php)

Invite the group to take a few moments to study the artwork "Guatemala Processions" by Betty LaDuke. What rituals do they see depicted there? What rituals have they experienced that might be similar to those pictured? Engage the participants in conversation using the following questions:

- What is the power of a shared ritual?
- Describe a favorite ritual that is meaningful to you.
- Describe rituals in church that you remember that no longer take place.  
How do rituals change and evolve with time and societal changes?

## Reflect

"We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a physical experience" (Teilhard de Chardin). This quote invites us to be aware of God's presence in every aspect of our lives and to incorporate prayer and ritual alone, in church, with family and friends. How can you celebrate being a spiritual being today?

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Attachment: Activity 4

**A Letter à la Paul**

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and co worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother. For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

**Your letter**

From:

To:

Greeting:

Message:

Attachment: Activity 6

**2 Samuel 7:18–29**

**New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD; you have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. Therefore you are great, O LORD God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out before his people nations and their gods? And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people forever; and you, O LORD, became their God. And now, O LORD God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised. Thus your name will be magnified forever in the saying, ‘The LORD of hosts is God over Israel’; and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house’; therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed for ever.”

**The Message**

King David went in, took his place before GOD, and prayed: “Who am I, my Master GOD, and what is my family, that you have brought me to this place in life? But that’s nothing compared to what’s coming, for you’ve also spoken of my family far into the future, given me a glimpse into tomorrow, my Master GOD! What can I possibly say in the face of all this? You know me, Master GOD, just as I am. You’ve done all this not because of who I am but because of who you are—out of your very heart!—but you’ve let me in on it.

“This is what makes you so great, Master GOD! There is none like you, no God but you, nothing to compare with what we’ve heard with our own ears. And who is like your people, like Israel, a nation unique in the earth, whom God set out to redeem for himself (and became most famous for it), performing great and fearsome acts, throwing out nations and their gods left and right as you saved your people from Egypt? You established for yourself a people—your very own Israel!—your people permanently. And you, GOD, became their God.

“So now, great GOD, this word that you have spoken to me and my family, guarantee it permanently! Do exactly what you’ve promised! Then your reputation will flourish always as people exclaim, ‘The GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will remain sure and solid in your watchful presence. For you, GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies, Israel’s God, told me plainly, ‘I will build you a house.’ That’s how I was able to find the courage to pray this prayer to you.

“And now, Master GOD, being the God you are, speaking sure words as you do, and having just said this wonderful thing to me, please, just one more thing: Bless my family; keep your eye on them always. You’ve already as much as said that you would, Master GOD! Oh, may your blessing be on my family permanently!”

Attachment: Activity 8



# *Certificate of Appreciation*

Presented in appreciation of

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With sincere thanks for

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Awarded on: \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)