

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Older children love stories. They have figured out how to appreciate the beginning, middle, and end of stories and will excitedly recall detailed tales from their own lives. They are not self-conscious about making faith claims about their lives, but they do sometimes need encouragement to recognize their everyday actions as part of God's work. When the faith stories of others, near and far, are shared with this age group, these learners are capable of deep and imaginative empathy. In this Exploration, older children will experiment with searching for God's presence in the world and will learn ways to share stories of God's love.

About this Exploration

We are a people of story, built on the witness of our Bible and rooted in the testimony of our communities. Discovering the power of giving witness and testimony means recognizing that we each have a valid story, indeed, many stories, and that we can identify God's work within those stories. It takes courage to share one's own story; it takes openness to fully listen to the stories of others. Claiming this practice involves shaping a common language. Sharing our testimonies celebrates enriching traditions of communities and the particularity of personal experiences of grace.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Genesis 24:34–67
Acts 16:16–34

Leader Preparation

As you prepare for these activities, pay attention to the stories all around you—from radio and television, from books, from conversations. What story do you hear when you peek inside another shopper’s cart at the grocery store? What does a large collection of bumper stickers tell you about the person in the car in front of you in traffic? Think of the story you broadcast. How much of it gives witness to your experience of God?

Prayer: My Creator and Author, grant me wisdom to notice your story tangled up with my own. Grant me curiosity to listen for your voice in the swirl of stories that surround me. Grant me clarity to share the stories I find. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 A Listening Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Before sharing this exercise, reflect on the top five highlights and five low points of your week. Which of these ten moments would you be willing to share with this group? In this Exploration you will help give learners the opportunity to recognize where they have noticed God in their own lives, to listen to the stories of their friends, and to tell their stories in prayer.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils

If possible sit in a circle. Starting with the person on your right and moving around the circle, ask every participant to describe one highlight from the past week. Ask the learners to listen especially closely to the person on her or his right. If you begin with the person on your right and work your way around the circle, then each learner will remember the person speaking next, so when the learner is done telling his or her own story he or she can concentrate on the next learner’s story. If it would be helpful, provide paper and pencils for the children to take notes. After each has spoken, make sure they all remember what the person on the right said. Then repeat going around the circle, this time sharing one low point from the week. These do not have to be the absolute best and worst parts of the week, just one good and one bad part that each feels comfortable sharing. Again, end by making sure everyone remembers what the person to the right said.

Then begin a prayer, and ask each one to pray for the two events shared by the person to the right. This can be a very simple prayer, such as: *Dear God, thank you for Tasha’s joy when she scored a goal in gym class, and please take care of her sick grandma.*

2 You Have a Story

Leader preparation: Cut pieces of cash-register tape to use as time lines. Make one long piece for the group to record Abraham’s story (Abraham was over 100 when his story in Genesis happened, so his piece could be 10 times as long as your learners!), and one shorter piece (about 2–3 feet) for each participant.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) children’s Bible storybook
- markers
- cash-register tape or any long strip of paper

In Genesis 24, particularly verses 34–41, the servant gives testimony to God’s work in Abraham’s long life. The story catches the ears of Rebekah’s family because the servant clearly says where God has been at work in both the ordinary and extraordinary events of Abraham’s life. As a group, write out a time line of the events of Abraham’s life as described in this story. Children who know parts of Abraham’s story can fill in details. You may turn to a concise children’s Bible (Abraham has a long story!) to fill in the rest.

Then invite the learners to take a piece of paper to record their own time lines. Theirs might be shorter than Abraham’s, but they have experienced important milestones. If the children get caught up recording every detail of their lives, ask



them to write down three big events where God was present and three everyday events where they remember feeling God was near.

Look back at the time lines and point out where God was at work in Abraham's life, and where God is at work in your group member's lives. When do members of your group tell stories from their lives? Wonder together about ways they could recognize God's work when they tell these stories.



3 From Where I See It

Leader preparation: Display the painting where it can be easily seen. Set out construction paper, drawing supplies, and scissors for the group.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Blind Feeling" by Diana Ong <http://tinyurl.com/fp-apdo>
- construction paper in several colors
- colored chalk or oil pastels
- scissors
- tape
- (optional) posterboard

Display "Blind Feeling" by Diana Ong. Invite the group to wonder quietly as you read the following questions. Read slowly, giving time for reflection.

- How many people are in this picture? Which eyes, noses or mouths belong to each person?
- How are these people related? Are they friends or family, or strangers who happen to be near one another?
- What are these people looking at? Do they see the same things or different things? Do they see the same things in different ways?
- Who are some of the people you are often near? Is there someone you are assigned to sit next to in school, a friend you like to spend time with, or a sibling you share a room with?
- When you are close to someone, what experiences do you share? Do you share some memories?

Giving witness means noticing when God is at work, and sharing the story. *Are there times that you notice God when people around you don't? Are there times when people around you talk about God's presence?*

Ask each learner to draw the outline of a face that reaches from the top to the bottom on a piece of construction paper. As in the painting, the face may be looking forward or in profile, but the face (and hair and neck) must reach all the way from the top of the page to the bottom. Ask each learner to cut out his or her face. Colored chalk or oil pastels show up brightly on construction paper and can be used to add eyes and other features. While the learners are working, have different learners introduce his or her face—telling about the color chosen, who this person is, and what the face might be looking at.

Arrange the group's faces together into one piece. Use tape to fasten them together. You might want posterboard to serve as a base. As the people are joined, talk about how this changes their experience. *What will these people talk about? How can these people help one another notice God at work?*

Introduce the terms "testimony" and "witness." The church uses these words to describe how people see God from a personal perspective and have a story to tell.



Who are the learners in your group “stuck” next to? How is what they witness the same or different from the people around them?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Heroic Stories (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This age group enjoys true-life stories about people who have conquered adversity and fantasy stories in which characters go beyond what is humanly possible. The language of “heroes” may be more familiar to your group than words like “testimony.” This language also encourages the group to think about how their own stories and actions influence others.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and markers

Stories inspire us—we are influenced by what we see other people do. Ask the children to share a story, a “testimony,” about a person they would call a “hero.” Point out how heroes can be real or fictional and famous or relatively unknown. As each finishes a story, pull out examples of one or two traits the group found inspiring in the hero’s story. *In what ways has this story inspired you to action?*

Tell the story of Paul and Silas in jail, as told in Acts 16:16–34. *How did these two men act as heroes? How do they inspire us to act? Your group might notice that the story Paul and Silas told of their hero, Jesus, inspired the actions of the guard!*

The members of your group can be heroes themselves. Invite them to tell stories of times when they acted in inspirational ways. *How did your actions influence other people? How did your actions give testimony to God?*

If you were a team of superheroes, what symbols would be on capes capes? Your symbols should tell something about what you inspire in other people. Draw these symbols with markers on paper. Display your symbols in your meeting space as a reminder of the power of their testimony!

5 Eyewitness News

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the video camera you will use. Read Genesis 24:34–67 beforehand so that you’re ready to answer questions and keep the filming on track once the session starts. If you’re unsure of your camera skills, invite a helper to be your camera operator. For easy costuming, dig out your church’s stash of Christmas pageant costumes, or use some old choir robes.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) children’s story Bible
- video camera
- Bible-times costumes

The term “witness” in a Christian context comes from the same word’s wider meaning: to observe and tell what you saw. Children may be familiar with “eyewitness” reports on the evening news. The story of Abraham’s servant meeting Rebekah’s family, found in Genesis 24:34–67, contains many characters with different viewpoints. Abraham’s servant tells where he has seen God at work in



Abraham's life and his own. It would be interesting to know how the other participants saw the situation.

Tell your group they will be filming a segment on the upcoming marriage of Rebekah and Isaac for a local news show. For background research, read the passage from a Bible together, and review or tell highlights from the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah (with help from a children's story Bible). You will need volunteers to play several of the characters in the story, as well as reporters and, if you have enough time and learners, anchors for the newscast. If you have access to costumes, these can add to the storytelling. Because one witness will tell his or her story at a time, learners can play multiple roles.

You might work with your group to write a list of questions before you start filming, or the conversation between reporters and witnesses can unfold as you go. Either way, encourage the learners to tell what each character witnessed and to tell where they saw God at work in his or her life.

Share your video with another group or with parents. After filming, or after watching, consider with your group how many different accounts there are of this one story, and the importance of each. *Why, with so many witnesses, is it important for you to tell stories from their lives?*

6 Observation Research

Leader preparation: It is sometimes easier to recognize God at work in others' lives than in our own. Before leading this activity, take your own observation walk around your church (or your home or workplace) and offer thanks for the signs you see of God's presence. This activity gives your learners practice observing and talking about God's presence around their church, if not in their own personal lives. The role-playing elements (clipboards, binoculars, and so forth) add fun to the activity and can add seriousness to the learners' work as they get into character.

Supplies:

- notebooks or clipboards
- pens
- "research equipment" (magnifying glass, binoculars, tape recorder, safari hats and sunglasses, and so forth)

To witness is to observe. We are almost always looking, but sometimes we don't pay attention to the ways that God is at work in our world. Today your group will collect research by observing clues to God's work around your church. *Like wildlife researchers, you are going to witness churchgoers in their natural habitat.*

Have the learners suit up for the part by picking out notebooks or clipboards for taking notes and by wearing safari hats, sunglasses, or binoculars. *Observe only—do not talk to anyone. If asked what you are doing, simply say you're doing research.*

Depending on the activity level in your church, your group can research together or in smaller groups. Some places they might conduct their research include the fellowship hall, the nursery, other meeting spaces, the sanctuary, or outside the front door. If this activity is taking place during the service of worship, you may choose to have them observe worship from an unusual perspective—in the balcony, from the choir loft, in the "staging area" where supplies are kept. Have your learners watch quietly for at least five minutes.



Watch the people in the places where you observe, and take notes on where you see God at work. Pay attention to how the people interact. Also, look at what's in the space—bulletin boards, hymnals, an access ramp—because these things can also give clues to God's presence.

When everyone returns to your group's space, compare notes. Where did you see God at work? Do you think the people in these spaces noticed God at work? Your group could give testimony to what they found by sharing their observations with their families or the larger congregation.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Spread the Good News (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Scout out a few hiding places for statements of affirmation before you meet. You may also want to warn the pastor and the church's custodian of your project so that your work is not "cleaned up" by mistake.

Supplies:

- paper and pens
- scissors

When we talk about giving witness and testimony, we are talking about sharing the "Good News." What is this good news? Sometimes it is simply stated that Jesus Christ is alive and at work in the world! But more specifically, what does that mean in the lives of individuals? Ask your group how they could explain this good news to friends, family, or the congregation.

A fun way to share the good news is to write down some of your ideas as affirmations for others to find. This takes away some worries of how to start the conversation, and your affirmations are sure to bring smiles to the faces of those who unexpectedly come across these slips of testimony. Using small slips of paper, write statements of good news. The only rule is that each statement must include the word "you." This ensures that statements will be addressed toward the finder ("Jesus loves you") rather than general statements ("God is love.") Encourage specificity and variety; the more ideas the learners write down, the more likely they will hit on some deeper ideas. There is room for humor in these statements as long as all statements are positive.

Hide these slips of paper around the church for the congregation to find. Some good hiding places might be in the hymnals, near frequently used supplies, taped to the doors of bathroom stalls, and around the hospitality coffee.



8 Decide to Testify

Leader preparation: Print out the attachment and then cut the several scenarios into strips so the learners can work with one scenario at a time. If you know of any decisions members of your group are facing, you may want to add a few of your own scenarios, or ask the group to help come up with some to work through decisions they're trying to make.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Scenarios for Giving Witness and Testimony," Attachment: Activity 8



In Acts 16:16–34, Paul and Silas could have escaped prison, but they chose to stay. This couldn't have been an easy choice for Paul and Silas, but with their choice they were able to save the guard's life, and the guard witnessed the love of Jesus Christ. They had been preaching with words during their entire stay, but their actions convinced the guard to join the church. *We know what it is like to make tough choices. How can you “preach with actions” in your daily life?*

Pass out the scenarios, and ask the children to take turns acting them out. Make sure different learners have a chance to be the decision maker in different situations. Take note of how each decision would give witness to Christ's love and how the testimony will be seen by the different people affected by the decision. Please remember that the “right choice” isn't always clear cut. Learning to say why the learners would make a choice is more important, in this exercise, than giving the right answer.

After each role play, consider the following questions:

- Who saw Christ's love in this choice?
- Was anyone hurt by this choice? Where does the hurt person see Christ in this situation?
- Would you be happy with yourself if you made this choice?

After discussing the scenarios on the worksheet, the group members may be interested in sharing their own stories. How have these learners given witness through their real actions?

9 Long-Distance Witness: Amnesty International

Leader preparation: Our work as witnesses is not limited to our own experiences. We can listen to stories from far away and continue to testify to them by acting on what we learn. Before you meet, browse the Amnesty International website to find an “urgent action” request that will work for your group. Amnesty International puts out calls for letters for a variety of situations, and you can usually find one that would be of interest to children and in line with your congregation's understanding of justice. Their website provides background information, sample letters, and contact information for sending your witness through mail or e-mail.

Supplies:

- an “urgent action” request from Amnesty International, <http://www.amnestyusa.org>
- paper and pens
- envelopes
- stamps
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Introduce to the group the “urgent action” request from Amnesty International. For children this age, working together as a group to write a letter is a way of letting them show their understanding of an issue and letting their voices be heard. They can all sign the letter written by the group, or each learner can make a copy of the letter to send.

When we are having a bad day, it can seem like no one notices. Today there are still people, like Paul and Silas, who are put in jail unfairly, even though they haven't done anything wrong. Such people must feel very lonely, as if no one hears their story. Amnesty International works to make their stories public. They learn about people unfairly incarcerated, tell the world, and get volunteers to write letters to governments asking for these prisoners to be set free. This publicity often shames governments into freeing prisoners. By witness-



ing to a situation far away, volunteer letter writers let the prisoners know they are not alone and let the governments know they cannot get away with injustice.

An alternative to writing a letter for an “urgent action” request is making cards to send to persons in prison. Each Christmas season, Amnesty International sends cards of hope to those still in prison. These cards require less background work and are fun for children to decorate and send. Information about this project usually is online throughout the fall, because cards need to be sent early to arrive during the holidays.

Reflect

In your group’s time together, what connections did you see forming between the ideas of story and testimony? Think of specific times participants noticed God at work in their own stories, or when they pushed past listing the events of a story to consider God’s presence. What did you learn about your group members through the stories they told? In your own prayers, retell the stories they shared with you, recognizing the variety of gifts and insights your group has to give through their testimonies.

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Attachment: Activity 8

Attachment: Activity 8

Scenarios for Giving Witness and Testimony

Scenario 1

You are talking with three friends at school. Two friends begin teasing the other friend. You know they are just joking, but you can also see that the teased friend is upset. What do you do?

Scenario 2

Your friends are complaining about one of your teachers, and one friend starts talking about how “retarded” the teacher is. You don’t like the teacher much, but you also don’t like the friend’s language. What do you do?

Scenario 3

Your friend looks in his book bag and realizes that he doesn’t have his homework. He asks if he can quickly copy your homework. This will be the third time he’s forgotten this week, and you know he’ll be in trouble if he doesn’t turn in something. What do you do?

Scenario 4

Your friends are telling scary stories at a sleepover. You don’t think the stories are that scary, but you notice one friend looks uncomfortable. That friend suggests that you all watch a movie instead, and someone suggests watching a horror movie. What do you do?

Scenario 5

Your science partner pulls out his half of your homework and it is ripped and muddied. You can’t even read what he wrote, so you ask what happened. He mutters something about getting picked on at the bus stop. You are frustrated that the work can’t be turned in like this. What do you do?

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Older children are just beginning to explore adult Bibles, yet they still enjoy more comprehension when stories are presented through picture books or group activities. Basic Bible familiarity at this age builds a sense of ownership of the library of testimonies available in scripture. Creatively working with a specific story builds the skills of recognizing witness in the scripture. In this Exploration older children will seek and tell stories directly from the Bible, and they will look at how the particular story of Jesus healing a blind man can be taken as an example of testimony that still speaks today.

About this Exploration

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God's larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren't perfect, which invites us to tell our stories in response. In John's account of Jesus and the blind man, the man's witness sparked a process that touched on people's relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man's testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation. Similarly, our stories may shape other people's responses to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1–41**Psalms 116**

Leader Preparation

Remember your first Bible. Think of when you received it and what the pages felt like, and remember some of the first pictures you looked at or passages you read. Now think back on the first time you claimed the Bible as your own. Perhaps this meant recognizing a name or a scripture passage and feeling comfort in the tradition, or maybe it meant standing up for your understanding of the Bible when you heard a verse used in a hurtful way. The Bible testifies to and through us. We are a part of the living story of scripture.

Prayer: *O God, you are the Word in flesh, the story come alive. May I claim my spot in the story like a child entranced by the storyteller's voice. Let your stories come to life through our hearing and our telling. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Telling Our Own Stories (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The blind man in John 9 is young and, like your group, is just learning to tell his own story without help from his parents. Use the questions below to explore the ways that parents pass along their testimony and the ways that children can tell their own testimonies as well.

Supplies:

- Bible

Discuss ways your group hears and tells stories within their families. Use the following questions as starters:

- What stories do your parents, or other adults in your family, tell about you from before you can remember?
- What stories do your parents tell about times that you can remember? Do they remember everything, or do you help them remember?
- What stories do you remember about your parents?
- What stories do your parents tell you about God? What stories about God have you told your parents?
- Tell a story of a time your parents told a story about you, but they didn't quite get it right.
- Tell a story about a time you were scared to speak and your parents spoke up and took care of it for you.

Read John 9:1–41 with your group, paying particular attention to verses 18–23. *In this passage the young man's parents refuse to tell his story for him. They say he can tell it himself. How might the young man have felt when his parents asked him to tell his own story?*

② Fingertip Witness

Leader preparation: This activity uses an unusual book about colors. Its pages are plain black and contain raised images to be felt with the fingertips. The words describe colors from the viewpoint of a child who is blind, telling how each color appeals to the other four senses. The fun of this book is in the touch. If you have a large group, consider bringing more than one copy of the book.

Supplies:

- Bible
- *The Black Book of Colors* by Menena Cottin, illustrated by Rosana Faria, and translated by Elisa Amado <http://tinyurl.com/3pg7rmo>

Read John 9:1–41 together. *How would the man who was blind have described Jesus before his sight was restored? He could not have seen Jesus' face, hair, or clothing, but what did he hear, touch, taste or smell?*

Bring out *The Black Book of Colors* and read it together. Allow your group to feel each page.

Outside of the Christian context the word “witness” often implies seeing, but we can witness with more than just our eyes. Ask your group how they witness Christ in our world with their senses of hearing, taste, touch, and smell.



Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.



3 Remembering the Story

Leader preparation: Find a way to display the painting so that it can be easily hidden. This activity plays with your group’s memory skills as they try to recreate the story told in the picture, and illustrates how many people can witness the same event differently.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder <http://tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

The story of Jesus’ birth is one of the most well known and loved stories of our scripture. It is told from two perspectives by the authors of Matthew and Luke. Brueghel, however, paints a huge crowd around baby Jesus. Ask your group to observe the painting closely for about two minutes. Encourage them to try to remember as many details as possible, especially details about the different people witnessing Jesus’ birth.

After the two minutes, cover or turn over the picture. Using the newsprint or whiteboard, work together to recreate the picture. Take turns adding figures to the picture, and focus on remembering the many witnesses rather than on perfectly recreating the scene. *What details do you remember? Do you remember in different ways?* If you have time, give the group another minute to look at the picture, and then continue your reconstruction.

When we think about all the people who have witnessed God’s work through all the years, it is amazing that our Bible is not ten times as long! While all the people in Brueghel’s painting might not have really been present at Jesus’ birth, they do remind us of all of the people who have been touched by this well-known story have remembered the story for themselves and have passed the story along.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Tell Me Again (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make copies of John 9:1–41 on which each learner can write. If possible, use a copier to enlarge the type, or copy and paste from an online source so that the print is bigger and easier to work with.

Supplies:

- copies of John 9:1–41 for each participant
- highlighters or markers of many colors

Pass out copies of John 9:1–41 to your group. As you read it together, have them highlight in one color the words said by the man who was blind and in another color the questions asked to him or about him. *Looking at your colored sections, count how many people questioned the man who was blind. Count how many times someone asked him what happened—some people ask more than once! Count how many times the man answers. What is the same or different about his answers?*

The passage tells us that the man was “of age,” meaning he was legally an adult. But because his parents are included in the questioning, we might assume he was young, perhaps a teenager. Ask the young people in your group to describe experiences when they felt adults weren’t listening, or where they were telling the same story over and over. Consider the following questions:



- Is it easier to tell our stories to kids or to adults?
- Is it easier to tell about things that happen every day or things that are special?
- How many times would this man need to tell me his story before you would believe it?

5 Scripture Speaks in Worship

Leader preparation: In this activity your group will illustrate the scripture used in worship. You will need to plan ahead a few weeks so their work can be incorporated into the bulletins. If your church follows the lectionary, you can easily look ahead and use the coming verses. If not, speak with your pastor about his or her plans, or use the scripture for this Exploration (John 9:1-41) to make a “Testimony” themed worship bulletin. Check with your church secretary about the colors and sizes that you will be able to use in your artwork.

Supplies:

- worship bulletins
- Bible
- paper
- black markers and pens in various sizes
- (optional) other art materials

In many of our Christian traditions scripture provides the focus for testimony in worship. The story of scripture is heard and experienced throughout the service—in the readings, of course, but also in the sermon, the music, and through familiar phrases in the prayers. Gather a few of your church’s worship bulletins and highlight the places where scripture “speaks.”

Let your group know that they have an opportunity to help the scripture speak in the coming week. Share the scripture you will be using for your upcoming bulletin covers. If your bulletins are normally produced in black and white, then provide white paper and black pens in various thicknesses. If you have access to color copying, you might get out colored markers or paints.

Work with the pastor and church secretary to insert the artwork into one week’s bulletins. You may choose to combine your group’s artwork into one cover, to use artwork throughout the bulletin, or to print several different cover options featuring different artists. If bulletins are not an option, you might find other ways to share the artwork, such as projecting PowerPoint slides in the sanctuary or displaying the original pictures on the walls.

6 Take Home Testimony

Leader preparation: Our scripture is full of testimonies, so full that it can be hard to know where to start. This activity helps learners discern which Bible stories contain testimonies they would find interesting and encourages them to read some of the Bible on their own. If possible, bring your group to a computer in the church office or bring in a laptop to use Internet resources. (If your church does not have Internet access, it is possible that a member has a handheld or notebook computer with a cell phone plan that gives them access anywhere—ask around!) Cut card stock into simple bookmark shapes so the group can take home their favorite verses.

Supplies:

- Bibles (one for each learner)



- children’s story Bibles (several, different versions if possible)
- Internet access
- Oremus Bible Browser, <http://bible.oremus.org/> (or another Bible browsing website)
- concordance
- blank bookmarks
- markers

Our scripture contains a group of stories about God that people long ago wished to share and that many people over the ages have found meaningful. We hear their witness when we read the scripture, and we continue their testimony when we share these stories with others. Talk with your group about how to discern which passages of the Bible offer testimonies—stories that show God at work. Perhaps they will hear references to stories in pop culture, or in sermons at church. Sometimes they might face a situation in their own lives and want to look up that feeling (anger, loneliness, fear) to see how God worked through the lives of others in a similar situation. When they are curious to learn more about the people of the Bible, there are tools to help them find the stories.

One helpful tool is a concordance. In a concordance you can look up a word or topic, and the concordance will give you every book, chapter, and verse where this word is found. Ask your learners to think of a word and give it a try. You might use either a print version or a free online concordance, such as the Oremus Bible Browser.

If your group isn’t sure where to start, let them page through a children’s story Bible to get ideas. Let the learners pick out a story that interests them in the children’s Bible, and then ask them to find that story in the regular Bible.

Once your group is getting the hang of looking up verses, they can each make a bookmark of an interesting testimony. They can use these bookmark reminders with their own Bibles to read the entire testimony at home.

Ask the participants to share the verses they have written on their bookmarks. *What did you find interesting about the passages you picked? Whose testimony do you think you will find when you read the whole story? What might this person’s story teach you about God?* Encourage them to follow through on their reading and to share the stories they find with you and their group when you see them again.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Emergency Contact Cards (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity you will compare how we can call on God for help in times of trouble. Praying to God is a good way to ask for help, but it is also worth noting that sometimes God works through other people. Often it is prudent to both pray and ask for help from an adult—it may be that the prayers will be answered through that human helper.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and markers
- scissors



Who is your emergency contact? Who would you call if you were sick or in trouble? Where can you find these numbers? Are they posted near your phones, carried in your bag, or memorized? The author of Psalm 116 was sick and in trouble. Read aloud verses 1-4. What might be wrong that is causing the author distress? Why does the author believe that God will listen to him or her? The scriptures tell us about how normal people turned to God with their problems and encourage us to do the same.

In verse 2, the psalmist declares, “I will call on the Lord as long as I live.” The psalmist has God’s number on hand, and like the people in your learners’ lives who help them, the psalmist trusts that God will be there when needed. Use this verse to make an “Emergency Contact Card.” If your learners have a place where they keep phone numbers by their phone or in their school bags, they can cut the paper to size so it will fit. Have learners write on the card “In Case of Emergency: I will call on the Lord as long as I live.” As they work, discuss the sorts of emergencies where God can help. *How would a person place a “call” to God in these situations? Have you ever asked for God’s help in a rough situation? How did you know when God was helping?*

Often we think of giving witness as telling of the great things God has done. How is it also an act of witness to ask for God’s help when things aren’t going so well? Make extra cards with Psalm 116:2 to share. Your group could share these cards by giving them to members of the congregation or by handing them to friends or family members who are in need of some assistance.

8 Back to Normal

Leader preparation: Follow the link to view the film *The Drop* and figure out a way to show it to your group. You may need to create a login name and password to access the free site. The film tells a true story of Marcus, a man who lost his sight when his car was hit by a drunk driver. At the end of his training to live in the world without sight, he was dropped off at an unknown place and needed to find his way back on his own. The story is compelling to this age group, but the tension created when Marcus is left alone may also be frightening to children in your group. Please explain to your group beforehand that Marcus was an adult, and that completing “the drop” was a choice—he asked to take on this challenge, and he was not abandoned.

Supplies:

- Bible
- *The Drop* <http://www.thedropmovie.com/>

The Drop is a short film that tells the story of Marcus Engle, a man who lost his sight when his car was hit by a drunk driver. Marcus takes on a challenge—he asks to be dropped off, alone, and then he has to find his way back home. This could be a difficult enough task for any of us, but Marcus wanted to do it because when he finished this task he knew he could be independent again, and he could get back to the dreams he had for his life. Use these questions as you discuss the film with your learners.

- How is Marcus’s story like the story of the man who was blind in John? How is it different?
- What sort of things do you think Marcus might have wanted to do after he finished the program?
- What sort of things did the biblical blind man want to do after his sight was returned?
- Where was God in the two stories?



Today, Marcus is an author and speaker. He tells this story and more about learning to live without his sight to children, college students, and hospital patients around the country. He helped make this movie so more people could hear his story. *What do people learn from his testimony? What does he get from telling his story? How does his story empower us to tell our stories?*

9 Books on CD

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the audio recorder you are using. You may wish to make copies of Psalm 116 so that your learners can mark which lines they will be reading.

Supplies:

- Bibles, or copies of Psalm 116
- pencils
- audio recorder

Reading the witness of scripture is central to our churches, but reading with the eyes isn't always an option. Braille is one way that those with sight impairments can read, but Braille can be hard to learn for people who lose their sight later in life. These folks often turn to books on CD and other recordings to hear information they might otherwise have read.

Several organizations coordinate volunteers to record readings of everything you might read—newspapers, novels, school books, and so forth. Your group can do a smaller version of this work by recording Psalm 116.

Pass out Bibles or copies of the Psalm. Decide how to divide up the reading, perhaps taking turns reading lines or reading responsively with the whole group reading some lines. If a learner does not want to read, he or she might operate the recorder.

Ask your pastor how you can share your recording. There may be people with impaired sight in your congregation who would enjoy hearing this scripture. There may also be folks who can see but cannot travel to church who might enjoy hearing the scripture from young voices. Psalm 116 speaks of healing and so may be of interest to folks who are kept away from church because of illness.

Reflect

Reflect on your session, thinking of the Bible as a member of the group. At what points did the Bible speak out while the rest of the group listened? At what points did the group ask questions of the Bible? Remember stories that were told by the Bible and by the young people together, with each adding pieces of the testimony. Give thanks for the stories shared by the Bible and by each individual participant.

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Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Older children are beginning to choose how they define themselves through their interests and personalities. They are learning skills and responsibility through music lessons, sports teams, increased homework, and household chores. They'll readily tell you about their favorite class, their favorite television show, and their best friend. This is a time to learn discipleship, not just as another in a long list of activities, but as a choice that can be practiced throughout all the others. In this Exploration older children will practice discipleship as listening for God in their lives and sharing what they find through their own particular mix of words, skills, and actions.

About this Exploration

When giving testimony and witness, a disciple becomes both learner and leader. In response to God's prompting, disciples serve the community through speaking and acting faithfully.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 8:27–38**Psalm 25:1–10****Leader Preparation**

How do you answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" This question cuts to the heart of giving witness. Spend time with this question in prayer, considering both how you want to answer and how you give witness to your answer through your own words and acts of discipleship. There is room in this question for solid answers like Peter's as well as for doubt. Both may be a part of the message you wish to share about who Jesus is in your life.

Prayer: Loving Guide, be with this group as we discover the power of testimony. As a disciple, let my witness ring true and clear. As a leader, let me open doors without expecting pat answers. As your child, grant me the courage to speak my own beliefs and the humility to listen to the stories of your many disciples. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Ex-

Exploring & Engaging Activities**1 Who Am I? (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: In Mark 8:27–30 Jesus asks the disciples about his own identity, "Who do people say that I am?" Knowing how to say who we are is a first step toward telling who Jesus is in our lives. Pray for your group before this activity, and ask for insight into your members that can help you encourage your group to discern personal characteristics that have discipleship potential.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Mark 8:27–30 to the group. Ask them how they might feel if Jesus said to them, "Who do you say that I am?" Sitting in a circle, go around asking each participant to say one "I am . . ." sentence about him or herself. If someone is stuck, the group can help come up with an idea. Set a goal of how many times you want to go around the circle. If the learners are new to one another, three times might be a good goal. If the group members know one another well, they might shoot for ten times!

Discipleship can mean using who you are to tell the story of God's love. Ask the participants to think of one of the statements they made about themselves and to think of how they can use that characteristic to pass on God's love.

2 String Labyrinth

Leader preparation: Walking prayers are perfect for this age group because walking focuses their bodies while their minds are still. The labyrinths the learners lay out in this activity should, theoretically, unwind without knotting, but keep a pair of scissors nearby in the event that a quick snip does less to disturb the mood than frustrated untangling.

Supplies:

- Bible
- yarn in various colors, one ball for each participant
- quiet music and speakers
- scissors

Find space for your group to move around (your regular meeting room could work, as could other areas of the church, even the sanctuary). Give each learner a ball of yarn in a distinct color. Invite them to create paths with their strings—laying the strings down behind them as they wander around the space. A path may go around, over, or under obstacles (under tables, around chairs, between pews) and may go over other participants' strings. When all are finished the room should be a colorful tangle of yarn.

Sit together and look out at the tangle. *From here, can you tell where each path goes? Explain that many cultures use forms of walking meditation to connect to the divine. Walking while praying is a way of quieting your mind without having to sit still, and following a path is a reminder of the path God has laid out for each of us.*

Read aloud Psalm 25:4–5. The psalmist is asking for help finding God's path and has the patience and trust to wait to find it.



ploring 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Have learners exchange balls of yarn, and have each child follow a path laid down by someone else. Turn on quiet music, and instruct the participants to remain silent through the exercise. If they run into another string they should concentrate on quietly following their own string, and leaving the others in place. Suggest that they repeat the line “Teach me your paths” as they walk through the labyrinth.



3 Leading and Following

Leader preparation: Blindfold activities work best when participants trust one another. If your learners are new to one another, or are distracted, they will be most comfortable with a leader who is not blindfolded. It is okay to stop at that point. If they take the challenge seriously, they will be able to successfully guide one another even when blindfolded, opening up new conversations about who is capable of guiding disciples.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert Mcgregor <http://tinyurl.com/fp-aprm>
- blindfolds, one for each learner

Take a look at the painting. Who is the leader and who is the follower? What might the young girl know about the path? What might the old man know about the path? Being a disciple means being a follower. We want to follow the paths that lead to Christ, but it is hard to know who to follow, or even to know if we might be the leaders!

Give blindfolds to your group, and ask them all to fasten their blindfolds except for one leader. The group can form a train by putting their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The leader gets to choose the path, moving around the room and, if possible, out into other rooms or outdoors. Remind your group of the trust involved in this exercise. The leader must move slowly and give calm verbal warnings of obstacles. The followers must stay in line and pay attention. If the group gets too silly, then those at the end of the line will feel insecure and the activity will fall apart.

If your group is careful with this activity, it is also possible to blindfold the leader. The blindfolded leader will need to move slowly and rely on his or her senses of touch and sound to find the way. *How does blindfolding the leader change the activity? How do the followers feel about knowing the leader is blindfolded? How does this activity change your assumptions about who is leading and following in the painting?*

With either arrangement, conclude by discussing the activity with the group. *How is leading a blindfolded group like giving witness? At what points in this activity did members of your group act out discipleship by following or by leading? Return to the painting and ask how the young girl is giving witness in the picture. How is the old man sharing his witness?*



Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Making the Case for Jesus (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity will be fun and easy for some of your learners, but some may be intimidated by being asked to give their testimony in front of others. Instead of forcing answers, talk about the discomfort and how it can be difficult to be “on trial” or to come up with words to describe something you believe.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read aloud Mark 8:27–30. Jesus is questioning the disciples about what they’ve heard other people say and about what they say about him. Choose learners to play the roles of judge, the bailiff, and Peter. Call Peter to the stand and have the judge ask him, “Who is Jesus?” As in the Bible, Peter can answer, “Jesus is the Messiah.” The judge can then ask Peter to tell what he has witnessed that makes him believe this.

Next, call forward the learners in your group, one at a time, to give their testimony. Have the judge ask them, “Who is Jesus?” and then ask what they have witnessed that makes them believe this. While some of your learners’ evidence may be from scripture or from things they’ve heard in church, encourage them to also tell stories from their own lives. Affirm all serious answers, even those who say “I don’t know.” Encourage those who are unsure to testify to why they feel that way.

As you wrap up, discuss the activity with your group. *What are some of the similarities with the way we use the words “witness” and “testimony” in a courtroom and in church?*

⑤ Who Do People Say That I Am?

Leader preparation: Read *The Important Book*, noting how Margaret Wise Brown’s free-form poetry is a way of describing the important parts of everyday objects. Notice also that she does not always bring out the most obvious answer about what is “important,” and also notice that her decisions of importance are subjective. Before beginning this activity, think of ways your group would enjoy sharing their poems, either by posting them or by reading them out loud, perhaps in worship.

Supplies:

- Bible
- *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown; sample pages at <http://tinyurl.com/424cyqb>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pencils

How would your group describe Jesus to someone? Maybe they will come up with words such as “teacher,” “miracle worker,” or “friend.” Make a list of the group’s ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Together read Mark 8:27–30, and look at the ways people in Jesus’ own time described him. Other people called him John the Baptist, Elijah, or a prophet. But when Peter is asked directly, he answers, “You are the Messiah.” Peter hit on an



important answer.

Read *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, or look at the sample pages. On each page, the author focuses on one aspect of everyday objects as “important” but lists other aspects as well.

Invite the group to write similar poems about Jesus. First they can pick out one way to finish the sentence “The important thing about Jesus is . . .” They could use Peter’s idea (“The important thing about Jesus is that he is the Messiah”), or they could come up with their own ideas. Then they can add 2–4 other statements about Jesus. The earlier list of words to describe Jesus will come in helpful here. Finally, as in the book, close the poems by repeating the first line.

Share the poems out loud or post them somewhere in your space to share your testimonies. *Like Peter, you have just given witness to who Jesus is for you!*

6 Pipe Cleaner Pathways

Leader preparation: Some of your learners will jump into making pipe-cleaner creations with confidence, but for others you might want to have an idea in mind ahead of time for how to make simple stick figures. The bendable arms and legs are great for illustrating actions and for showing people doing the work of discipleship.

Supplies:

- Bible
- lots of pipe cleaners or chenille sticks
- Styrofoam bricks

In Psalm 25:4 the author asks “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.” *How does one travel along the path of discipleship? If you were looking at God’s path, what would you see on it? How might people on God’s path share God’s love through their work, their interests, their friendships, their chores or their church? How would people of different ages or different abilities give testimony along the path?*

Hand out the pipe cleaners, and invite the group to make people posed in motions of discipleship. Be ready to help bend the pipe cleaners into little stick people if asked, but encourage the participants to pose their people and make props for them on their own.

Arrange the bricks in a line, giving you a path with lots of little people acting as disciples along the way. Use more twisted pipe cleaners to form the letters to part of Psalm 25:4: “Teach me your paths.” Attach these letters along the side of the path.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Sticky-Note Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Being disciples means that giving witness is a part of our daily lives. This activity challenges your group to think of offering prayer, story, and action throughout their daily routines. If you can’t find sticky notes on short notice, use small sheets of regular paper and plastic tape.

**Supplies:**

- sticky note pad or note paper and plastic tape
- pencils

Giving witness as disciples is something we do all the time and can be a part of our everyday routines. Think of the things you do most days, such as brushing your teeth, grabbing a snack from the refrigerator, turning on the TV or a computer, calling a friend, reading a book. How can these everyday things be acts of witness?

Write a few words on sticky notes that will remind you to turn all your little daily practices into times of testimony. Post “Smile! God loves you!” on your bathroom mirror. Post “Pray for world hunger” on your refrigerator. These notes of encouragement can be related to how you will do the upcoming task—such as “Play fair” posted on your baseball glove. Or they can just be clever reminders—such as “Watch for God’s love” posted on the TV remote.

Aim for each learner writing ten sticky notes during your group time. If some learners find writing slow, they might just write one or two words on each note to remind them of their thought. Remind your learners to post their notes when they get home and then to read the little reminders for the next few days.

8 A Trail of Frisbees

Leader preparation: Find an area where you will be able to play. If you have a large outdoor area, full-sized Frisbees work best. If you will be playing inside, small discs that can be bought where party supplies are sold will work well. They don’t fly as far.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a mini disc (or regular Frisbee for outside play) for each participant

Jesus asks, “Follow me,” and the psalmist writes, “Teach me your paths.” Read Psalm 25:1–10 together, focusing on verses 4 and 5. In this game your group will create a path, one turn at a time, and try to follow it with their Frisbees.

To play the game, ask one player to pick a spot you can see—such as a tree trunk or a table leg—to serve as the goal. Each player takes turns throwing a disc at the goal. After everyone has taken a first turn, the player whose disc is furthest from the target gets to try again, until all the discs have hit the target. Then use the first goal as your starting place and have a player pick a new goal. You can play several rounds. Traditionally, Frisbee golfers keep a running score, as in golf, but it’s just as fun to keep informal scores on each hole and not bother with figuring out the overall winners.

As you play, point out some of the emotions of the group. *Is there one goal that is particularly frustrating to hit? Is there a time when some of your group members encourage one another?* When the game is finished, review the activity with these questions:

- What are some goals God asks of disciples? How often do you hit those goals on the first shot?
- In a game, what happens when you feel frustrated that you aren’t hitting the goal? How can other people support you in trying again?
- When you miss God’s goals, how do you feel? Where do you find encouragement to try again?



- How can you witness by hitting God's goals? How can you witness even when you miss? How can you witness to other people who are trying?

9 By the Lakeshore

Leader preparation: Make copies of lyrics of “Tú has venido a la orilla” (“You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore”). This may be easier for your group to follow if you type out the lyrics in the language your group is most comfortable using on a separate sheet of paper.

Supplies:

- song: “Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-orilla>
- copies of the lyrics
- (optional) recording of the song
- paper and pencils

Sing the song or listen to a recording. YouTube is a good source for recordings of the song in both Spanish and English, along with pictures of lakes or fishers. Take a look at the words, this time paying attention to the details of the fisher's life, such as his “fishnets,” his “will for working,” and his “small boat.” *What can we imagine about this fisher's life from the words? How is this fisher a disciple? What testimony do we hear in this song?*

The third verse can be translated as “You need my hands, my exhaustion, working love for the rest of the weary—A love that's willing to go on loving.” Invite the group to think about the things the learners can give to God in their daily lives. Rewrite this verse to celebrate what God needs from your group. If learners have many ideas, write more than one verse! Sing the verses the learners have written, in place of or between the original verses. Song is a powerful way to share testimony, so try to arrange a way to share your verses, either by singing them in worship or by posting the words where the congregation will see them.

Reflect

Looking back at your time together, think of a moment when you saw each young person in your group consider the challenge of discipleship. Offer prayers of hope and courage that these moments will continue to influence each one's practice in the coming weeks. Consider also how your group's reflections have impacted your own practice of testimony through discipleship.

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Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

The Christian tradition contains approachable examples of witnesses and a framework for stating our testimonies in the present. Older children light up when they notice the connections between their own practices and the stories of the past. As they notice the details of our traditions, older children are better able to locate their own witness inside the larger Christian story. In this Exploration older children will experience testimony in the tradition, whether in the past of their own congregation or in the history of the larger church, and use the spaces, symbols, and words of the tradition to speak out their own testimony.

About this Exploration

In addition to the witness of scripture, our faith story continues to be told through the holy and imperfect journey of the Christian church. From the day of Pentecost to the current day people have testified to God's work in our lives and in the world. In this exploration, we will look at how the varied expressions of the Christian tradition over time and around the globe shape our testimony and witness today.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 52:7–10
2 Peter 1:16–21

Leader Preparation

Think back on your discussions about religion with friends when you were in elementary school. Children at this age are building their framework for making sense of the world and are curious about groupings. If you were a part of a Christian church at that time, what stories seemed unique to your church, and what stories seemed familiar to other Christian churches? If you were a part of another religion or no religion, what pieces of your family's tradition did you want to share? Do you remember pieces of Christian friends' traditions that sounded reasonable or strange to you?

Prayer: Loving God, open your strong, gathering arms. As we explore the testimony of our tradition, let our group settle in to the places of welcome and security, and claim them as our own. And then move us to also find in our traditions the places of connection that encourage us to gather more and divide less. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 Beautiful Feet Relays (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In church we often talk about all our hands can do to help God—feeding the homeless, comforting a friend, building houses, and so forth. We don't give as much praise to feet! But Isaiah 52:7 calls out, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace." If you can't find any of the supplies listed below, improvise to have at least one or two relays for this activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) rope or strip of cloth for three legged race
- (optional) ball
- construction paper, markers, and scissors

Read aloud Isaiah 52:7. Then play a few relay games to draw attention to feet, with the purpose of considering how feet can be used to give witness. With a larger group, you may want to split into teams and run these as races. With smaller groups, you may just run as one team, giving everyone an opportunity to try each event. Your relays could include a hop-on-one-leg relay, a funny-walk (walk like a penguin or like a crab), or a no-legged relay (move along on hands and knees). If you have a rope or cloth, you could do a three-legged relay. If you have a few playground balls, you could do a kicking relay (kick the ball around a goal and back) or a hop-while-holding-the-ball-between-your-feet relay.

In biblical times, people got most places by walking, often barefoot or in simple sandals. Jesus walked all over spreading his message. The apostles continued to walk spreading the gospel out into the world. Feet can indeed announce peace, and have done so throughout our tradition.

Talk with your group about how feet testify to peace today. *What do our feet do to testify to God? How do our feet show joy? How do our feet help us in worship? How do feet help us take care of the church building? What projects does this church participate in that need help from feet? How do folks without working feet still participate in all these activities?*

Have the children make footprints on construction paper by tracing around their feet or their shoes. Cut out the footprints. On each footprint write a word that the children used in talking about how our feet testify to God. Post these footprints all around the church.

2 Eyewitness Scattergories

Leader preparation: You can find an alphabet die in board games like "Scattergories," or possibly at a game shop. If a die is unavailable, the learners can take turns choosing the letter.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pencils
- (optional) alphabet die
- timer or watch



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). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

In 2 Peter 1:16–18, the apostles tell how they were “eyewitnesses” to God’s majesty. They didn’t just hear about it, they heard God say to Jesus, “This is my Son.” We, too, are eyewitnesses to God’s majesty every day. Talk with your group about some ways they have seen God at work, just in the past day. They might not have heard God’s voice, but they may have good news to share.

Play a few rounds of “Eyewitness Scattergories.” To play, roll the die (or pick one learner to pick a letter). The group has 2 minutes to quietly write down as many clues to God’s majesty as they can think of that begin with the chosen letter. At the end of the time, read the answers out loud. Play again with a different letter. For instance, if the chosen letter is “R,” the children might list clues such as rain, rainbow, roses, raspberries, rhythm, ripples, rivers, or rocks.

In closing, ask each learner to pick one letter’s worth of answers to read as part of a prayer: *Dear God, we see your works all around us. We are eyewitnesses to your majesty when we see . . . [fill in with your lists]. Thank you for all that we witness, big and small, that shows us your majesty.*

③ “Siyahamba”

Leader preparation: The song in this activity is most fun when it is sung with a beat! If you aren’t sure about your own ability to lead a rousing song, seek out a helper, or find a recording of the song to share.

Supplies

- song: “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb>
- plastic Easter eggs
- dried beans or rice
- colored electrical tape

Part of the tradition of testimony includes giving witness through song. The song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (“We are Marching in the Light of God”) was used as a freedom song in South Africa. Now when this song is heard, it tells two stories: first, the story in the words (we are, indeed, marching in the light of God), and second, the story of freedom from apartheid, the story that everyone is marching in God’s light regardless of skin color.

What statements can you make about God that you can share through this song? Try out several verses using your own words. What message are you sharing through your words? What message are you sharing by singing, rather than just saying the words?

Have learners make egg shakers by filling plastic Easter eggs with dried beans or rice. Use colored electrical tape to hold the egg closed. Rhythm is another way of adding witness. *Noisemakers give voice to the spirit moving as you sing! Choose three or four of your favorite new verses and sing them with your shakers.*

Share your song with another group—perhaps a group that meets at the same time or even the larger congregation in worship. Have learners give some of their egg shakers as gifts to the listeners. *They can shake along as you sing, and can keep the shakers as a reminder of your testimony.* Each member of your group can keep an egg shaker, too, to encourage them to keep singing their song at home.



Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 If These Walls Could Talk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Talk with the pastor or other leaders about a visible place to hang a graffiti wall, and ask if you can keep it displayed for several weeks.

Supplies:

- large piece of rolled newsprint or smaller papers taped together
- pencils or markers that will not bleed through the paper
- tape

Your church's space has contained many memories of the faithful lives of your congregation, in some cases for many years before your learners (or you) were born. Imagine the testimony these walls could give if they could speak!

Find a wall suitable for hanging your paper. It should be in a well-trafficked area (both because it will have more memories and because it will be visible to more viewers). A fellowship hall, an entryway, or a section of the sanctuary would be good spaces. Tape or otherwise fasten the paper to the wall, and write across the top in big letters "If This Wall Could Talk."

Invite your group to write the wall's memories on the paper. Remind the group to write from the wall's perspective ("I remember the first time Brendan was in the Christmas pageant," not "I remember being in my first Christmas pageant.") This means they can also add things that the wall has "seen" that they did not personally witness ("I remember when Elyse's mom sang here as a little girl." or "I remember being underwater in the flood of 1982.") Have scrap paper on hand to write out spellings if asked. You might invite a long-time church member or someone who knows the history of the building to share stories of what the wall has seen.

Spend time looking at the wall with your group. Identify memories that would be common to many churches, memories of your congregation's particular traditions, and memories about unique individuals. *How has God been present in this space? What testimonies have been shared in this space?* Leave the paper in place to share the wall's stories, and invite other church members to add more memories to the wall.

5 Oral Histories

Leader preparation: Invite several adult church members to visit your group. Try to find adults who are ready talkers, because asking questions of adults can be difficult for this age group. You may also recruit someone with some recording experience to set up recording stations to compile and preserve your oral histories for the church.

Supplies:

- audio recorders with microphones (one for every 2 learners)
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Asking questions and listening to the witness of others is a skill. Before the guests arrive, talk with your group about the questions you might like to ask. *What church traditions might these folks have stories about? What values are important to your church today that they might want to tell stories about?* You might focus your



group toward questions about a certain event or theme of current interest in your church. If it is Lent, for example, learners could ask for stories about celebrating Easter. Or if your church is embarking on a big food drive, learners could ask about past service projects. You might write some of their questions on newsprint or a whiteboard for future reference.

Set up several recording stations around your space (and perhaps in other spaces as well, so the groups are not distracted) where two children are paired up to interview each adult. Allow about 10 minutes for the interviews.

When your interviewers return, ask each pair to introduce the adult and tell one thing they learned about the adult's life. Consider a time you could share these recordings with with more members of your congregation.

6 Stoles

Leader preparation: Cut a strip of fabric for each learner. Crayon creates soft colors when drawn directly on white or unbleached muslin. For brighter colors, consider fabric paint pens.

Supplies:

- strips of light colored fabric (about 4 inches × 4 feet)
- crayons or fabric pens
- sample stoles
- pictures of stoles (available from your pastor or church secretary in any church supply catalogue) or visit <http://tinyurl.com/3q83xkw>
- book of church symbols, or find pictures at <http://tinyurl.com/3gka6lg>

In many churches the pastors wear special vestments when leading worship. Their robes and stoles are a symbol of their responsibility to testify through preaching and leading the sacraments. In this activity your learners will create their own stoles with symbols of the stories they can tell.

If the pastors in your tradition wear stoles, invite your pastor to share his or her stoles with your group. Note the colors and symbols. In some churches the colors are prescribed by the church seasons. In others, pastors choose their stoles based on symbols that relate to the season or themes of worship. If your pastors do not have any stoles, you might bring in pictures of stoles or a book of Christian symbols to use as inspiration. The websites listed above can provide a sample if books are not available.

Your group can make their own stoles to remind them that they can tell how they witness to God. They may choose colors of seasons that speak to them or traditional symbols that speak to their faith. They may also include nonreligious symbols that tell about who they are and the gifts they give to the church (such as an artist's palette, a soccer ball, or a peace sign). Talk about the symbolism as they work, pointing out the experiences each child has that gives her or him the authority to tell her or his story.

Encourage your group to wear their stoles during worship, when they pray, or even when they are asking questions about God at home. If possible, find a time for your group to wear their stoles while helping with your congregation's worship service.



Sending & Serving Activities

**7 Bread Stories (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Although this is an easy preparation activity, you will need to find some sort of bread. This could be a donut from the fellowship table, a few stale crackers from the kitchen, or whatever your group can find in the church. Finding it is half the fun, but you'll want to have a few ideas in mind of where to look before you start. If you find no food of any sort to use, quickly bake some pretend bread to use. (You'd be surprised what you can find in a church freezer.)

Supplies:

- some sort of bread or snack you can find in your church
- napkin

Jesus began the tradition of the Lord's Supper by using what he had on hand, bread and wine, to connect the disciples with his story. Bread and wine continue to be common elements to telling this story throughout the Christian tradition.

Your group's first challenge is to find some bread. If you don't find bread, improvise with chips, crackers, or some other food. If you cannot find anything, then find an object you can use as pretend bread. Once found, the bread becomes like a "talking stick"—the learner holding the bread may tell his or her story, and only the one holding the bread may talk. You may want to wrap the bread in a napkin, since it will be passed through many hands.

Practice giving testimony by sharing bread stories. Let each participant take a turn telling a story of a time when God was present as he or she was eating bread (or grain in any form, which should include most any meal). If some are uncertain, ask them to tell a story about a good meal they had, and ask where God might have been present in that scene.

Conclude your activity with an agape meal. This is not communion, but a reminder of the spirit behind the sacrament. Sitting in a circle, invite the learners to each serve the person to the right while saying, "May you never hunger." If you have a very small amount of food, like a cracker, be sure that everyone gets at least a crumb. If you did not find any food, then you can pantomime the activity, or create your own words as a way of practicing making testimony out of what you have available. End with an "Amen."

**8 Tell Me About My Baptism**

Leader preparation: Baptism is a form of testimony steeped in tradition. It is the time when a family brings a child forward or an individual chooses to come forward to publicly witness to Christ's presence in his or her life. Onlookers are witnesses who both observe the actions of the baptized and make their own promises to support them.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Baptism" by Hullis Mavruk <http://tinyurl.com/fp-aphm>
- pencils
- paper



Mavruk's painting shows a community witnessing a baptism. Talk with your group about how the baptism shown in this painting is both similar to and different from baptisms practiced in your church's tradition. *What do they remember from baptisms they have witnessed? Do you remember certain clothes that were worn, spaces or vessels that were used, or prayers that were said?*

Together, make a list of questions to ask the people in the painting about their baptism traditions. These may include questions about the location, about how the woman being baptized made her decision, about the clothing, about the on-lookers, or about other pieces of the tradition not seen in the picture. Focus on the questions rather than knowing all the answers.

Depending on your church's and families' traditions, the children in your group may have been baptized as babies, or their families may want them to make their own decision to be baptized when they are older. As often as families move and change churches, it is likely that you have some of each. Work with the group to come up with questions about their own baptisms. If they were babies, they might ask why their parents chose to have them baptized, who was there, or how the sacrament was similar to the procedure your church uses today. If they have not yet been baptized, they might ask when they will know the time is right, what it would be like to be up in front of the congregation, or who they would like to invite to witness their baptism.

Ask each learner to write three questions on a piece of paper. Encourage them to take their questions home to ask an adult, and to share their answers next time you meet.

9 A Family Tradition

Leader preparation: Consider how much prompting your group might need for this activity. Some children like to write their own words, and some like to copy from trusted sources. Frames are not necessary, but they do add an element of formality. Small frames are often cheap at craft stores, or find mismatched frames at rummage sales.

Supplies:

- Bible
- card stock cut to the size of the frames
- markers
- other flat decorations (stickers, stamps, sequins)
- small frames
- copies of your church's traditional prayers

In our churches and in our homes, Christians have a tradition of praying together. Prayer is communication with God, and it is a way of witnessing that when we are gathered, God is with us! Celebrate these prayers by having learners create prayer cards to set on their family's dinner tables. Set out paper, markers, and other decorating supplies, and work with your group to come up with prayers they would like to use with their families at mealtime.

To help find words for your prayers, there are several traditions you may turn to. Your learners may already have prayers that they say regularly with the family, and they may give testimony to these by writing them down. Your congregation may have certain prayers that it uses, including the Lord's Prayer, which your learners may choose to use. Or, you may turn to the scriptures, specifically Isaiah 52:7–10, for images of prayer.



Have learners write the prayers on the pre-cut cards and then use the art supplies to add decoration. Some learners may write or copy long prayers; others may copy only a short verse and spend more time decorating. Frame the prayer cards, and remind your group to place the prayer cards on their tables at home as an invitation to recognize God's presence at their family's meals.

Reflect

After spending time in this Exploration, how would you describe the story your church is telling your children? Think of how your church's traditions—from worship to missions to evangelism—would look if run by the children in your group. Offer your observations as a prayer of hope for the future.

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Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Older children have a strong sense of justice and want to right the world's wrongs, right now. When it comes to testifying out into the world, this age group tends to conjure up involved plans and then pull back in frustration when their skills don't measure up to their dreams. It is important to give them both room for dreaming and manageable opportunities for success. In this Exploration, learners will build connections by listening to witnesses far and near and will try out their own skills at making a difference by sharing their stories with the congregation and in the larger world.

About this Exploration

We live in circles of context, one of the richest of which is the local church. This Exploration investigates webs of relationships that call us beyond family, workplace, congregation, or community out to a mission of sharing and listening with all people. Testimony can be a tool for building justice when we engage in dialogue beyond our usual circles. The body of Christ is strengthened when our witnessing is intertwined with those whose situations are vastly different from our own.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Matthew 5:13–20**Romans 8:31–39**

Leader Preparation

What were your favorite books in elementary school? Spend a few moments listing some of the fictional “friends” you met in your reading. You were witness to these stories, and your list of “friends” likely includes people of different ages and genders, and people from times and places far from your own. Older children are beginning to grasp the complexity of the world and still have the imaginative capacity to empathize deeply. Expanding their experience of testimonies, both those they hear and those they tell, has an incredible power to add salt and light to their lives.

Prayer: Creator God, let me delve into the pages of your story, open to hear the many witnesses of your grace. Let me share the passion behind the stories I tell with my group to the best of my ability, and let this group flex their testifying skills as they enter into stories from many contexts. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Responsive Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If you can't find a newspaper on short notice, try an online newspaper or look for other hints of the world's worries around your building. Does your church's bulletin list prayer concerns for the congregation? Even if you can't find a tangible example, your group is sure to have concerns, both local and global, on their minds to share.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- today's newspaper

The apostle Paul knew that there were challenges to witnessing God's love. Sometimes things go wrong; sometimes people are cruel. Read what he writes to encourage the church in Rome, in Romans 8:31–39.

Work with your group to write this passage into their context. First, look at verse 35: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” *What are some distresses in our everyday lives that make us feel separate from the love of Christ? Write a list of these distresses on newsprint or a whiteboard.*

Paul also mentions the “big problems,” like famine or sword. Look through today's newspaper and let the group point out where these problems exist in the world today. Talk together about how the people in these situations might feel. *How might they experience or feel separation from Christ's love? Add these worries to your list.*

Paul testifies his answer to these problems in verse 38–39: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” *What do these words mean for our problems today? How can God stay with us and with the people affected by these problems?*

Turn your discussion into a responsive prayer. Ask one learner to read an item on the list. Let the group respond with, “Nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of Christ.” Repeat this pattern until you have mentioned everything on your list.



② In Context

Leader preparation: This activity uses collages from magazines to recreate a scene of Mary and Jesus. Your choice of magazine is essential to this working—one or two new magazines relevant to your context will make more impact than a pile of old magazines with pictures that do not represent your group's everyday life. Catalogs or newspaper sale inserts can also be a good source for pictures of everyday people.



is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child” by John Giuliani <http://tinyurl.com/fp-uccr>
- magazines for cutting
- colored construction paper
- markers
- scissors
- glue sticks

The artist Giuliani studied the Russian Orthodox methods of painting icons and then used these methods to paint traditional Christian figures in Native American contexts. Spend time observing the painting. The figures are looking out as if they are looking directly at the viewer. *If they could speak, what story, what testimony might they share with you as viewers?*

Invite your group to re-create this picture in their context. They can use a combination of collage pictures cut from magazines and pieces they draw themselves. *What would make Mary and Jesus “fit in” in each child’s life? Clothes? Skin colors? Accessories? Familiar toys or games?*

What testimony do you tell by making Mary and Jesus look familiar to you? What testimony do you hear when you look at pictures of Mary and Jesus that look like they are from another time or place?

③ More Salt!

Leader preparation: It is hard to find completely unsalted microwave popcorn. You may need to pop your own in a popper or a large pot with a lid and a bit of oil.

Supplies:

- Bible
- popped, unsalted popcorn
- salt shaker
- bowls
- napkins

Pass out bowls of unsalted popcorn. As the learners start tasting the popcorn, listen to their reaction. Salt is good, and it is missed when it is gone! Each learner also brings his or her own “seasoning” to the group. Pass around a salt shaker, and allow the learners one shake for every gift they bring to their communities. Each time they say a gift out loud, they get to shake the salt once. If this is a group you know well, you might start off by giving one shake of salt to each child as you affirm one of his or her gifts. Be careful not to over salt!

Read aloud Matthew 5:13–16 as the group finishes their popcorn. *What does Jesus mean when he tells them they are the “salt of the earth”? The disciples shared their gifts with their communities by taking care of one another, by healing, and by telling the stories of Jesus. You have already listed the ways you add “seasoning” to the world. What are some ways that your particular gifts give witness to God’s love in your community?*



Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 Gospel Theater (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with some of the mission-actions in which your church participates so that you can better relate your group's ideas to what is going on in your congregation.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read aloud Matthew 5:14–16. Then divide into groups of 2–4 learners. Ask each group to come up with a situation in which they could let their “light shine.” Give groups a couple of minutes to rehearse a pantomime of the situation. Have groups perform the pantomimes, as other groups try to guess what is being acted out. (If you have a small number, then each group might have time to show two or three situations. Or, a single small group might put on pantomimes for you to guess.)

Often, testifying implies talking. In the pantomimes, though, actions are more important than words. What testimony would an onlooker “hear” in these situations?

Conclude by connecting the groups' ideas to activities in which your church, or their other communities, are involved. For example, if a group acted out giving to a food bank, you could connect this to their school's food drive. Or, if a group acted out sandbagging to prevent a flood, you could connect this to your church's offerings for disaster victims.

**5 Morse Code**

Leader preparation: Before meeting, find a dark room where flashlight blinks can be seen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- flashlights (at least one for every two participants)
- “Morse Code Alphabet,” Attachment: Activity 5
- extra batteries

In Matthew 5:14–16 Jesus instructs his followers to be the “light of the world.” Jesus asks us to “Let your light shine.” *What message do you give with your light? Without sharing, think of a one- or two-word message you want to shine out into the world.*

Divide the group in pairs, and designate senders and receivers. Using the “Morse Code Alphabet” as a key, each sender then tries sending words across the room with the flashlights. Once each sender has a chance to send a message, switch senders and receivers.

When everyone has had a chance to send and receive messages, bring the group back together. *Did you find using Morse code to be simple or difficult? When it was difficult, how did you help each other to make sure the message got through? What were some words you sent? Is it sometimes difficult to act out these words in the world? How can we help one another be the “light of the world” to make sure our messages of God's love are heard?*



6 Bring Forth the City of God

Leader preparation: Cut posterboard into large house shapes by cutting each board into four pieces and then cutting off the corners to make a pointed roof. These do not need to be exact—different shapes will give the project a little creativity. You could also include some more urban buildings by not cutting off roofs at all. Set out the blank buildings, paints, and brushes for the group.

Supplies:

- song: “You Are Salt for the Earth, O Lord” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-salt>
- music player
- posterboard
- washable tempera paints
- large brushes (½–1 inch)
- table coverings, such as newspapers or plastic
- paint shirts

Sing or listen to the song. This song describes the “City of God” as a reign of peace, mercy, and justice. Then ask the group, *If you were hired to build God’s city, what buildings would it need? Many might be the same as the buildings we have in our regular cities, but how would these familiar buildings be different in God’s city?*

Have learners construct the buildings with posterboard and paint. As they work, they can either listen to the music or continue discussing what goes on inside of the buildings. When the city is built and painted, find a place to display your “City of God.” If the song will be sung in worship, your group could process in and set their buildings at the front of the worship space, quite literally “bringing forth” the City of God!

7 Post Your Story (Easy Preparation)

Sending & Serving Activities



Leader preparation: Many churches have a mission statement that summarizes their ministry. If you have a copy of yours, use it to help your learners pick out the themes for their posters. Large posterboards and paints will make for bold posters, but printer paper and markers can work as well.

Supplies:

- posterboard or large paper
- colored markers or paints and brushes
- (optional) copies of your church’s mission statement

What story does your church tell? How does the church tell its story—through worship, through mission projects, through friendships? What message does your congregation shine out into the world? If you could only answer with one word, what word would you choose to tell your church’s story? Record the words as the group brainstorms together.

Ask each child to choose one of the one-word answers to turn into a testifying poster. *Think of posters you may see in other places in your life—a dentist or doctor office, at school, in your room at home, at a movie store, in a gas station, on a billboard. Posters generally have few words, and big, simple images. They get their point across quickly,*



so that someone passing by will know what movie to see or what band you like. As the group paints or draws, encourage them to fill up the space with big letters and bold colors that can be seen from a distance.

Display your group's posters. Try to hang them in a public hallway where community members who are not members of the church might walk by them during the week, or, even better, find a place to post them outside of your building!

8 Witness on the World

Leader preparation: There are many worthy organizations that help out in times of disaster, and your church likely supports some of them. At times, however, the most important thing we can do is to witness the situation, allow the people involved to tell their stories, and let their sadness penetrate our hearts. Children of this age group have an enormous capacity for imagination and empathy—sometimes more than they can put into words. Be mindful of the emotions of your group when sharing these pictures. Edit if necessary, and be willing to change course if the pictures are too intense. Use your judgment to find an event, such as an earthquake or hurricane, that is relevant to your context and your learners.

Supplies:

- The Big Picture website: <http://tinyurl.com/45weuf> (or other news photography sites)
- computer and projector for showing pictures

The Big Picture is an online column of the Boston Globe that pulls together remarkable photographs of news stories. Two examples are photographs of the Gulf Coast oil spill (<http://tinyurl.com/yf8xken>) and the earthquake in Haiti (<http://tinyurl.com/2a83eud>).

Find photographs online of a relevant disaster, and print them out or project them for your group. Although we cannot all travel to witness every disaster that occurs in our world, we can still let our hearts be open to hearing the suffering of people worldwide. Give as little commentary as possible, and ask the group to tell what they witness in the photographs. *Who are the people in the pictures? What are they feeling? How would the people in the picture tell their story?*

If your church contributes to One Great Hour of Sharing or another disaster relief organizations, talk about how you reach out to these victims by offering resources for healing.

Adapt this prayer to the pictures you've shown: *Loving Creator, we hear the cries of your children loud and clear through these pictures. We are witnesses, because our hearts are saddened when we see such destruction. Be with the people and places in these pictures as they heal. Thank you for the people who work with disaster relief. Show us ways that we can help others, even when they are far away from us. Amen.*

9 Testify-ish

Leader preparation: One way we can obey Jesus' directive to be a light to the world is to tell the stories of God at work in our lives. Regardless of how comfortable our tradition may be with this practice, it is always an act of courage and skill to open oneself to giving witness. It can be hard to know where to start or what to say. The picture book *Ish* by Peter Reynolds tells of a boy who loves to draw and wants to draw. When his older brother laughs at his attempts, he crumples his drawings and throws them away. But his younger sister teaches



him that she likes his drawings just as they are, even if they don't look exactly as he wanted. You might enjoy a review of the book, found online at <http://tinyurl.com/4238bma>.

Supplies:

- *Ish* by Peter Reynolds
<http://tinyurl.com/44tqv4q>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Before introducing the story, make a list of skills for giving witness. What skills make it easier to share how God is at work? Which of these skills do members of your group have? Which are more difficult for your group, and which seem like things that are usually done by adults?

Read the story together. Then invite the learners to share stories of times when they have wanted to do something but didn't think they were very good at it. Expect this conversation to begin with concrete skills (I wish I could complete level 5 in a video game), and encourage learners to push further to examples that involve discipleship (I wish I could tell a classmate to stop picking on a friend.)

Return to the list of witnessing skills made earlier. What does it look like to "testify-ish"? What witnessing skills would you be willing to try this week, even if you can only do them "ishly"?

Reflect

As your group met, what insight did you gain into what issues or worries spark the hearts of your learners? How did they testify, by telling you new stories or by giving attention to the witnesses presented to their understanding of mission? In your prayers, remember the particular concerns of members of your group and thank God for the work they did in bringing their witness to your attention.

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International Morse Code

1. A dash is equal to three dots.
2. The space between parts of the same letter is equal to one dot.
3. The space between two letters is equal to three dots.
4. The space between two words is equal to seven dots.

A ● ■■■
 B ■■■ ● ● ●
 C ■■■ ● ■■■ ●
 D ■■■ ● ●
 E ●
 F ● ● ■■■ ●
 G ■■■ ■■■ ●
 H ● ● ● ●
 I ● ●
 J ● ■■■ ■■■ ■■■
 K ■■■ ● ■■■
 L ● ■■■ ● ●
 M ■■■ ■■■
 N ■■■ ●
 O ■■■ ■■■ ■■■
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U ● ● ■■■
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1 ● ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ■■■
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 7 ■■■ ■■■ ● ● ●
 8 ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ● ●
 9 ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ●
 0 ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ■■■ ■■■

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Older children are well versed in thinking of the future. They are at a prime age for imagination—aware enough to want a better world and free enough in their imaginations not to be inhibited by standard answers and excuses. As they consider the future, they are strengthening their own hopes and goals for how they can continue to use their skills of witness and testimony. In this Exploration, older children will celebrate their ability to witness what could be, and in sharing their imaginings they will speak a word of testimony to how God will be at work in the future.

About this Exploration

A glimpse of God's realm becomes possible every time we practice testimony and witness. In this Exploration we move daily to express the presence of God through language, symbols, and rituals, as we increase our hope and vision for ourselves and future generations. By sharing our experiences of God's love day to day, we pass on the all-encompassing grace that sets a foundation for the church of tomorrow. Acknowledging that the practice of testimony and witness is an ongoing process, we focus our attention upon God's continuing revelation, as we move toward the future "kin-dom" (the realm of God where all are kin).



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
Philemon 1:1–25

Leader Preparation

Think of a small piece that could be changed in your life, and ask yourself, “What if?” Use your imagination to flesh out what your story could look like with that one change. Follow the story along: How would this change affect your own life, your church, or your community? Could your change affect the world? Imagination is itself a form of testimony. By using our imaginations we acknowledge that a different way could be possible. When we extend that imagination toward the realm of God, we truly create a space “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Prayer: O God, you have blessed your children with creativity to picture a world different from what we can see. Be present in the wonderings of this group, so that the stories of their make-believe will shed light on the future you wish for us all. Let their imagination’s witness of tomorrow be a testimony that we can hear today. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 The Lord Stood By Me and Gave Me Strength (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We often think of giving witness as sharing God’s good works in our lives. Giving witness also means showing authenticity and honesty when we feel alone, and telling about our need for God’s help.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pencils

In 2 Timothy 4:16–18 Paul mentions that no one came to his defense but that “the Lord stood by me and gave me strength.” This line is worth remembering in times when we feel alone or discouraged.

Work with your group to write a litany that uses this line as its refrain. Let each learner complete the statement “I felt alone when . . .” Have the group respond with “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.” When everyone has had a chance to contribute, go around the group again, this time completing the statement “I felt strong when . . .”

The learners could speak their statements and the refrain out loud as they go as an act of prayer. Or, you could extend the witness of this activity by asking the learners to write down their responses and then find a way to share their litany with the congregation in worship.

2 A Word Cloud of Witnesses

Leader preparation: Wordle is an online tool that picks out the most-used words in a passage of text and turns them into “word art.” It is a fun tool for visualizing the words that are most important in a piece of writing. Familiarize yourself with Wordle before meeting your group, and decide how you will print out the finished products. If you will be working at just one computer, it may be helpful to invite a fast typist to your session to type in the group’s words as you lead the discussion.

Supplies:

- Bible
- Wordle, <http://www.wordle.net/>
- at least one computer with Internet access
- printer, or plans to print later

Paul (and some of his followers) wrote letters nearly 2000 years ago, and much of his advice is still useful for churches today. Paul wrote to specific churches about their specific issues, and he also wrote generally about what he believed about God. In 2 Timothy 4:8 and 2 Timothy 4:18, we see two of the writer’s beliefs about the future.

Instead of writing and sending paper letters, explain to the group that you will be creating “word art” from today’s discussion by entering their answers into a computer. If you have access to a computer lab, each learner or small group of learners can type in their own answers. If you are all sharing one computer, you or a volunteer typist can type in the answers as they are spoken.



to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

It is fun to make plans for the future or imagine what the future might hold. For the first piece of “word art,” ask the group to shout out or type in their predictions of what the world will be like in 50 years. *Will we have personal jet-packs for flying around? Will there be an end to hunger?* If more than one participant gives a similar answer, go ahead and write it in twice, this will make the word appear larger in the final product. When everyone has given a few answers, click on “go” and create your Wordle. Which words stand out? Save or print your Wordle.

These predictions may be your hopes, your fears, or your dreams, but they are all guesses. It is harder to give testimony to the things we know through faith. In 2 Timothy 4:18, for example, Paul said, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly Kingdom.” Start another Wordle, this time asking the group to speak or type what they believe through faith about the future. Maybe they believe God will always love them, or that God will always listen to them. Not all answers will be believed by your entire group. Affirm that it takes courage to make statements about the future and that different beliefs are okay. This list is more difficult to articulate, and may be smaller. When you are finished, create a Wordle. What stands out this time? Again, save and print.

It is a powerful form of testimony to share what our hearts know about the future. How can your group share what it knows about the future? Perhaps they can start by displaying the “word art” they have created.

3 Standing Together/Standing Alone

Leader preparation: Go over the list of statements below before you begin the activity. You might add a few of your own that speak to your situation. Adding statements about local issues or about jokes within your group can make this activity more fun and more relevant. Post a simple sign on one side of the room that says “Agree” and a sign on the other side of the room that says “Disagree.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and marker
- tape

Tell the group that you will be reading several statements. Point to the “Agree” sign, and say, *That wall is where you should stand if you agree completely.* Then point to the “Disagree” sign on the other side of the room, and say, *That wall is where you should stand if you disagree completely. If you are somewhere in the middle, stand in the middle, maybe a little more to one side than the other.*

Read the following statements, and let the group respond:

- I think pizza is the perfect food.
- I like waking up on Sunday mornings to go to church.
- I think my teachers at school are often unfair.
- I worry about homeless people.
- I believe God has a reason for everything.

Invite the group to shout out some of their own statements. *Can you think of a statement that places you alone on one side of the room and everyone else on the other side?* This doesn’t have to be a deeply held belief, it can be as simple as “I am a Royals fan” or even “I am wearing red shoes.” *Who can come up with a statement that gets the group closest together on the spectrum?*

As play slows, consider together how the group worked through this exercise.



Did you ever change your position to be closer to the group, or to stand out as being different? What was it like to stand with most of the group? What was it like to stand apart? How was it different standing alone when you were trying to stand alone?

In 2 Timothy, Paul writes that when his case came to court no one stood up for him. He stood alone to defend himself. But he did not let that stop him, because, as he said, “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.”

Sometimes when we give our testimony, we speak up for things that many people agree with. After all, God is at work for all of us; it makes sense that sometimes we will agree. Sometimes, however, we might feel alone when we tell our stories and our beliefs. Invite students to tell a story about a time when they felt comfortable talking about something they felt strongly about, or a time they felt alone because of their belief.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Looking Back (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Learners in this age group can often think faster than they can write. Having some quiet imagining time before the group starts writing will allow younger writers to focus on their imaginations before they get hung up on the mechanics of writing.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pencils

In 2 Timothy, Paul is writing as an old man who has “finished the race.” He looks back on his life and remembers that “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed.” He is pleased that his life gave testimony—through his words and example many, many people learned about Jesus Christ.

Your group is young, but they have probably imagined what things will be like when they grow up. Invite them to join you in a time of imagination, perhaps with eyes closed, to picture themselves as old men and women. Ask them to touch and imagine the wrinkles on their hands and on their faces, and ask them to quietly imagine along with the following prompts:

- What new technology has been invented?
- What dreams have you accomplished?
- What does your family look like? Do you have a partner? Do you have children? How old are they now?
- What did you do for work? Did you do one job, or different jobs through your life?
- What hobbies or interests did you keep enjoying your whole life?
- What were some rough times when the Lord stood by you and gave you strength?
- How did your life tell the story of Christ’s love? Did you show it in your work, in your hobbies, in your family?
- What message would you want to pass along when your life is over?

Ask the group to open their eyes. Give them 5–10 minutes of quiet time to write



or draw an autobiography. Remind them to write as if they were old and looking back on their life. Share the autobiographies in the group. This age group will have an easier time writing concrete “facts” about life, so you will want to help them reflect on God’s presence in their lives through your discussion.



5 Sowing and Growing

Leader preparation: People who work with children are familiar with the idea that the stories they tell sometimes take a while to sprout and grow. This activity encourages your group to think about the ways their testimony continues to grow long after they have finished speaking. Display the artwork where your group can see it. Set a variety of seeds near the painting where your group can touch them. Have the planting supplies (cups, soil, spoon, water) nearby.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh <http://tinyurl.com/fp-uccr2>
- variety of seeds
- paper cups
- potting soil
- spoon or spade
- water

Gather your group around a print of “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh. Pass around the seeds. Make sure to have seeds of different types—perhaps a vegetable, an herb, and a flower seed. Have the children guess what each seed will grow into. *How big will it be? Who will enjoy it or eat it? Will it produce more seeds? How long will it take until you know what it is? Which of these seeds might the sower be scattering in the painting? What would this painting look like in a week, in a month, in three months?*

Sometimes when we share a story of testimony we don’t see an immediate response. *Imagine together how the following examples of testimony might grow when you aren’t watching:*

- Singing a song in the church choir.
- Saying something nice to someone who looks sad.
- Hugging your grandparents the minute they walk in the door.
- Telling a friend a funny story about something that happened at church.
- Saying a prayer with your family at bedtime or mealtime.
- Reading a Bible story to a younger child.
- Telling a friend with a broken arm about the time you broke your leg.

Plant some of the seeds in paper cups and take them home. Ask your group to observe the seeds and try to figure out what they are growing. As the sprouts grow, ask them to remember to think of the ways their stories and testimonies might continue to help people days, weeks, or months later.

6 A New Brother

Leader preparation: Read Philemon 1:1–25. Think of the letter in your time and place. Who would you be surprised to be asked to welcome into your congregation’s life? Questions of how to include newcomers or outcasts are familiar in the dynamic social circles of childhood. Even as adults, the stories we share or the testimonies we hear sometimes encourage us to make changes in the way we treat the people around us.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Paul shared his testimony through letters that he wrote to churches. In Philemon, Paul writes to a community, telling them that Onesimus, the man who was once a slave, has been freed. While Paul was in prison they became friends. Indeed, Paul says he became like a father to Onesimus.

This news might have come as a shock to some in the church. They knew Onesimus before as a slave, and Paul was asking them to treat him like a brother in the future. Consider together the different reactions people might have to Paul's testimony. *Maybe some would obey him right away, happy to include Onesimus in their church. Maybe some would question Paul's decision, or complain about it. Philemon himself was previously Onesimus' "master." How might he feel about being asked to free his slave and treat Onesimus as a brother?*

Have the group act out this letter in a Readers Theater, with members of the group taking on the roles of the different people. After the letter is read (learners can read it right out of the Bible), let the group role play their reactions and the way they treat Onesimus. Let one learner give voice to Onesimus' reaction as well. *How did he feel about his reception? What testimony does Onesimus have to tell about how God was at work in this situation? What hopes does Onesimus have for his future in this church?*

Hearing testimony sometimes means working to change something in the future. Ask your group to think of times when they learned something new that made them change the way they treated another person. Sometimes, like Onesimus, offering a new testimony brings unexpected reactions. Are there times when members of your group were the ones who told a story encouraging others to change the way they treated someone else?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Flying Farther Together (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Can you remember an injustice that bothered you when you were young? Were you able to take action, even in a small way, to change that injustice? Do you know the impact of your actions, or can you imagine what might have happened because of you? Your group might enjoy hearing your personal story as an example of how one person's small act of testimony can bring about change.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens

In his letter to Philemon, Paul changed something about his world. In his time, slavery was common, but Paul asked Philemon to set free his slave Onesimus. Then Paul asked the church to accept Onesimus as an equal. Read Philemon together. The language is tough in places, but with some instruction beforehand your group should be able to understand the main points.

There are a lot of things that we find unfair in our world today. Your group can help you list several. We can feel powerless to change these things, but, like Paul,



we do have the power to give witness against injustices. Paul's action not only freed Onesimus, but it is still remembered in the Bible as a letter against slavery. His one action was remembered for 2000 years!

With the group, think of simple actions you can each do to change something that is unfair. *This could be personal, such as inviting a lonely classmate to sit with you at lunch. This could be global, such as bringing a reusable bag along on the family's shopping trip. It could mean refusing to laugh when a friend makes an ethnic or homophobic joke, or learning more about why a war is happening far away.*

Pass out pieces of paper and invite the group members to write down an action for change. Then, inform them they'll be using these papers in a cooperative paper airplane contest.

Begin by giving the group a few minutes to fold their papers into airplanes. Line up in a hallway or other long space and let each throw an airplane. Measure how far each plane goes, and add the distances together. If you don't have a measuring tape, count the distance in footsteps. What is your group's total distance flown?

Observe what happened in the first round. What made some airplanes go farther and some stop short? Are there different folding or throwing techniques at work? Let the learners with the farthest fliers share their skills with the group. Pass out another sheet of paper to everyone, and again ask them to write an action statement. Then have them remake their airplanes and fly another round. Again, measure your group's total. Did they beat the first score?

If the group is still learning and enjoying, repeat the process a third time. How did your group help one another?

Now take a look at the statements on each plane. *How far into the future will these actions have an impact? How can you help one another make the impact felt even further?* Agree to complete the actions they've written, and to support one another through the ideas for encouragement the group discusses.

8 Fly Your Flag

Leader preparation: Before the session, cut enough small flags (6-inch or 8-inch squares) out of white fabric so that each learner will have about five. Old sheets or basic cotton fabric from a craft store work well. Cutting with pinking shears prevents fraying. Cut a piece of thick ribbon for each learner, and staple the flags to it, creating a garland. (Or, if you're feeling crafty, sew the flags to the ribbon with a sewing machine and a zigzag stitch.) Make sure to protect tables and clothing with newspapers and paint shirts. Thick acrylic paints (permanent on fabric, for outdoor display) or washable tempera paints (for indoor display) used with big brushes will encourage the group to cover large areas with bright colors and not to get too caught up in details.

Supplies:

- white fabric (old sheets work well)
- ribbon
- acrylic or tempera paints
- brushes
- stapler or sewing machine
- newspaper for covering tables
- paint shirts
- information about Tibetan prayer flags, <http://tinyurl.com/3t2x7or>



Tibetan prayer flags are hung by Tibetan Buddhists in the open air. As the wind blows the flags and the weather wears on them, the prayers are figuratively released into the world. As Tibet has faced cultural and political threats from China, these flags have become a witness to the situation—a way for people all over the world to tell the Tibetan story and show their prayers for justice. In your context, flags can also be used as a visible sign of hopeful prayers.

Invite your group to think of their hopes for the future. These can be personal, local, or global. Learners may use the paints to draw symbols or words pertaining to their hopes on each of their flags.

Consider how you will share your flags, and who will see their message. If the flags will be hung around or outside the church building, what testimony do they share with the congregation? What testimony do they share with visitors or passers-by? If the participants will take the flags home, where could they hang them to share their prayers for the future? What testimony could the flags share with their parents, their families, and visitors to their home?

9 Story Cloths

Leader preparation: The Hmong are an ethnic group that was displaced from Laos after the Vietnam war. Many have resettled in the United States, though many are still in refugee camps in Thailand. Their “story cloths” often depict the story of their displacement. If you would like more background information, the book *Dia’s Story Cloth* tells more about the Hmong and shows pictures of the *pa’ndau* embroidery.

Supplies:

- *The Whispering Cloth* by Pegi Deitz Shea <http://tinyurl.com/3ga82c9>
- (optional) *Dia’s Story Cloth* by Dia Cha <http://tinyurl.com/3qr7mfo>

The Whispering Cloth tells the story of Mai, a Hmong girl in a refugee camp in Thailand. Mai embroiders a *pa’ndau*, or story cloth, that tells her own story of how she came to the refugee camp. But her grandmother encourages her that there is still more to the story, and she continues to embroider her dreams of leaving the camp.

Read the entire story together. Then look back at the pictures of Mai’s embroidery. Take a look at the stories she has already lived, and ask your group to point out some of the important points in her life so far. *If you were going to make an embroidery of your life, what are a few main events you might include? Who are some of the people you would make sure to picture? What everyday tasks would you illustrate?*

Take a look at the future stories Mai embroiders. Where might she have heard about things like snow or big yellow beds? What stories does your group imagine for themselves in the future? How are the things they imagine for the future a part of who they are right now?

Mai was able to share her hope for the future with her grandmother through the stories she embroidered. *How is imagining the future a way of giving testimony? Can you give witness to events that haven’t happened yet? What testimony do you share when you tell others about your hopes for the future?*



Reflect

Where do you see the members of your group in the future? Imagine yourself telling your group stories about themselves as children. Pray that through your time with these children as a group, and in their larger experience of your church community, they will remember your church as a place where their stories—from their pasts and for their futures—were valued.

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