

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

The children in your group may have a wide variety of experiences with prayer. Some may come from families who pray together often, others may enjoy a few simple prayers at bedtime or before meals, and some may have little or no experience of prayer yet. Whatever their background, most children understand at some level that prayer is talking with God. This provides a foundation for building a practice of prayer.

Most families practice daily and seasonal rituals as part of their life together, although some may not recognize them as such. Younger children find comfort and security in routine and ritual, while preteens in your group may be reaching the age where they question or rebel against certain family rituals. This does not mean rituals hold no meaning for them. Older children are at the age where friends become increasingly important, and elaborate friendship rituals are common. Things such as secret signals, made-up languages, and passwords are often developed by this age group and are helpful in developing friendship bonds.

Taking the time to create and practice weekly rituals with your group will help younger participants feel secure and help build community for the older ones. It will also deepen the children's understanding of ritual and how to incorporate it into their lives. Let the children guide the development of these rituals, so that they can take ownership of them. Have a conversation about how you might welcome newcomers and visitors into your rituals so they will not feel excluded.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Joshua 4:1-24
Psalms 23

Leader Preparation

Spend time with the texts and consider what they have to teach us about prayer and making ritual. Think about your experiences of this faith practice. How have prayer and ritual helped deepen your relationship with God? Who have been your mentors in this area? What was it about the way they practiced this discipline that you admire and wish to emulate?

As you explore this Faith Practice with your group, be aware that children are far more open to the possibilities of prayer and ritual than many adults. Remind yourself to pay attention to the insights and wisdom children have to share.

Spend time enjoying the beauty of the natural world. You might take a walk outside, or you might examine a natural object such as a flower or shell. Think about the marvels of creation and our God, who holds it all together.

Prayer: Loving God, you created everything that is and hold it all together. You are beyond our comprehension, and yet amazingly you long for a deeper relationship with us. Be with me in this time of preparation so that I may come to a fuller understanding of the gift of prayer and

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Everyday Rituals (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity we will explore daily rituals and routines. Think about your own daily rituals. Where and how does God fit into your daily life? Write eight to ten daily habits or rituals on sheets of construction paper and display them around the learning area. Use the following ideas or some of your own: brush your teeth, make your bed, eat breakfast, pack your school bag, say good-bye to family members, ride to school, wash your hands, exercise, read, play video games, check e-mail, listen to a bedtime story, feed a pet, pray before a meal, and take a bath or shower.

Supplies:

- prepared "daily ritual" signs
- markers

Distribute markers and invite the children to move around the room and read each sign. Tell them to make three dots on a sign if that habit is part of their daily routine, make two dots if they do it at least twice a week, and make one dot if they do it once a week. Encourage older children to partner with younger ones who may not be able to read or count yet. When everyone has finished, collect the signs and gather the children together. Place the signs where all the children can see them easily. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- Which habits or rituals are behaviors that you do regularly? Which have the most dots?
- What other habits or rituals are part of your day that did not have a sign?
- When does prayer fit into your day, or when might you find time for it in your day?
- How might your days be different when you include time for prayer?

2 Sharing Experiences

Leader preparation: Gather the items in the following list that may be used when praying and place them in a box. This activity may help you discover what experiences the children have had with certain practices of prayer. Pay particular attention to what the children share at this time.

Supplies:

- variety of items that might be used when praying, such as a Bible, prayer book, journal, finger labyrinth, prayer beads, candle, contemplative music, prayer mat, singing bowl, incense, kneeler, worship bulletin, and church prayer list
- cardboard box

making ritual. I pray for the children who will accompany me on this journey that they may come to a deeper understanding of this gift and its potential to bring us closer to you. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Sit in a circle and take the items out of the box one at a time. Pass around each item and invite the group to say what it is. If no one knows what an item is, give a brief explanation. When all the items have been shown, place them in the center of the group and explain that they are all things that may help people pray. Ask the children what they know about prayer. Invite them to share their experiences of prayer and any special prayers they say, perhaps before eating or at bedtime. Draw their attention to the items in the center of the group again. Ask them which items they or a family member has used to help them pray, or how they have seen others pray. After talking about this for a while, pick up the box, take a scoop of air out of it, and place it with all the items. Explain that although all these things may be helpful when praying and may help us focus our prayers, we can also pray with just the air and space around us to talk with God. Affirm children’s contributions and observe that there are many different ways of praying.

③ Stone Altar

Leader preparation: Think about the things in your life for which you are thankful. Do you have any rituals in your life for remembering and giving thanks for those things regularly?

Supplies:

- children’s Bible, such as *The Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories* by Mary Batchelor (Colorado Springs: Lion Publishing, 1995), the New International Readers Version (NIV), or *The Message*
- brown paper lunch bags
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard
- newspaper
- tape

Read aloud the story of the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 4:1-24). Explain that Joshua built an altar out of stones as a way of helping the people remember and give thanks for the amazing thing God had done for them. Invite children to brainstorm things for which they are thankful and write their contributions on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Have the children make stones by stuffing brown paper lunch bags with newspaper and sliding a second bag over the open end of the first bag. Secure the bags with tape. Invite the children to write or draw a picture on the stones for the things they are thankful for. Have them stack the stones into a pile saying aloud what they have written or drawn on their stones. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What are some other ways we could say thank you to God?
- What are some other ways of remembering the good things God has done?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Payer Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Bible describes many different ways to pray. In this activity your group may experience a number of those ways. Try them out at home so that you are comfortable demonstrating to the group. Print one compass point (North, South, East, and West) on each of four sheets of paper. Tape these compass points to the appropriate walls in your space.

Supplies:

- prepared North, South, East, and West signs
- tape
- “Prayer Game,” Attachment: Activity 4

Tell your group that God always hears our prayers. Sometimes we can use our bodies to help us pray. Ask them to name different positions to pray. Explain that they are going to play a game that will let them experience some of those ways. Follow the instructions on the attachment to play the game. After the game, ask the following questions.

- How did you feel when you tried these different ways of praying?
- Which ways were new ideas for you?
- Which one did you like the best? The least? Why?

Encourage children to find ways that work best for them when they pray. Tell them that sometimes the way they feel may influence the way they choose to pray.



5 Hunt the Sheep Memory Game

Leader preparation: Make copies of the attachment for the children to take home and one copy to use in the activity. There are two sheets, or twelve sheep, for each child. Cut out the sheep on one set and hide them around the room.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- prepared Psalm 23 sheep
- “Psalm 23 Sheep,” Attachment: Activity 5
- (optional) envelopes, crayons, and scissors

Tell the children that you have hidden twelve sheep around the room. Pair together older and younger children. Send them off to find the sheep, suggesting that the younger children take the lead in finding the hidden sheep. When all the sheep have been found, encourage the group to work together to put the phrases of Psalm 23 in order. Older children can help by looking up the psalm in the Bible. When all the sheep are in order, invite children read Psalm 23 together.

Explain that in the middle of the Bible there is a book of very old prayers and songs called the Psalms. The people of God have prayed and sung these songs for thousands of years. Jesus would have prayed sung them with his family. Mention that this particular prayer, Psalm 23, was written by David, who was a shepherd and later became a king. He knew what it was like to be a shepherd. He realized that there were many ways in which God was like a shepherd. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What does this song tell us about God?
- Why do you think it was included in the book of Psalms?
- Mention that people who are sick or sad often read this psalm. In what ways might it comfort those people?
- When might you want to read this prayer?

Give the children copies of the attachment to take home so they can share the prayer with their families. If there is time, they may cut them out and color them. You may need to assist the younger children with cutting. Provide envelopes to hold each set of sheep.



6 Singing a Prayer

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” Think about times in your life when you have felt you were standing in the need of prayer.

Supplies:

- computer and Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Standing in the Need of Prayer,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxfCVeCt_s
- “Standing in the Need of Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 6, for each child

Explain that there are many ways to pray, and one way is to sing our prayers. Many of the songs sung in church are actually prayers set to music. Show the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer” and encourage the children to join in when they feel comfortable. Provide copies of the attachment, and read the words of the song together. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you think the songwriter is saying to God?
- When might you feel that you are in need of prayer?
- When might children around the world feel that they are in need of prayer?

Sing the song several times. Add some rhythm by inviting the children to clap their hands or stamp their feet. You may wish to have the children create actions or hand movements to go with to the words. They could also add new verses to the song.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Squeeze Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Create a simple one-sentence sending prayer, such as “God bless us as we leave today.”

Supplies: None

Stand in a circle, join hands, and explain that you will finish your time together by praying as a group. Tell the children that you will say a one-sentence prayer and then squeeze the hand of the person to your right. That is the signal for that person to repeat your prayer sentence and then gently squeeze the hand of the person to his or her right, and so on until the prayer and the squeezing has gone all around the circle. Begin your prayer time and, when everyone has had a turn, invite the group to say a loud “Amen” together. Explain that the word “Amen” means “So be it” or “that is my prayer.” Send out the children with the affirmation that God always hears our prayers.



8 Finger and Thumb Prayer

Leader preparation: Think about your prayer life. What prayer aids do you find helpful?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Prayer of Thanks” by Tobey, <http://www.art.com/products/p10281022-sa-i1648861/tobey-prayer-of-thanks.htm>
- white paper
- markers
- “Finger and Thumb Prayer” Attachment: Activity 8

Look at the artwork “Prayer of Thanks” by Tobey and invite the children to tell you what they see. Ask them what they think these people are doing. Have the children mimic the pose of one of the people in the picture. Explain that some people find it helpful to fold their hands in this manner when they pray. Tell them that they can use the fingers and thumbs of their hands to help them as they pray. Distribute markers and paper and invite the children to draw around one of their hands with their fingers wide open. Younger children may need some assistance.

Use the information on the attachment to help children print reminder words on their hand outlines.

- For the thumb, tell the children that we begin our prayer by saying hello to God.
- For the index finger, ask the children what some things are that they are thankful for. When all suggestions have been given say, “I am thankful for [point to each child and say his or her name].”
- For the tallest finger, tell the children that God loves us and is always ready to forgive us when we say sorry.
- For the ring finger, ask the children whom they might like to pray for today. When everyone has had a chance to share, say, “Loving God, hear our prayers.”
- For the pinky finger, tell the children that the people of God have used the word “Amen” down through the ages. It means, “That is my prayer.” When they say “Amen” after someone else’s prayer, they are saying, “That is my prayer, too.” Invite all the children to say “Amen” aloud together.

Have the children take home their hand prints and a copy of the attachment. Encourage them to use the handprint as a prayer aid alone or with their families when they pray.



9 Sheep Puppets

Leader preparation: Follow the instructions on the DLTK website to make a sample lamb puppet (Lamb Puppet Instructions), <http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/melamb.html>. Think about the times you have said Psalm 23. In what ways has it brought comfort to you?

Supplies:

- “Simplified Version of Psalm 23,” Attachment: Activity 9, for each child
- sample lamb puppet
- paper plates
- glue
- scissors
- scraps of construction paper
- cotton balls
- craft sticks

Explain that in the middle of the Bible there is a book of very old prayers and songs called the Psalms. The people of God have prayed and sung these songs for thousands of years. Mention that Psalm 23 was written by David, who was a shepherd and later became a king. He knew what it was like to be a shepherd. He realized that there were many ways in which God was like a shepherd who cared for the sheep.

Show the children the lamb puppet you made, and invite them to make their own puppets. Guide the children in making the puppets, using construction paper scraps to make the facial features. Have them tape a craft stick handle on the back of their plates to make the puppets easier to hold. Distribute the attachment, and read it aloud. Encourage the children to share the psalm with their families.

Reflect

What did you learn about prayer and the children in this session? What surprised you? What gladdened your heart? If possible, find a small stone to represent each child and one for yourself. Place these one at a time into a bowl as you pray for each member of the group, asking that God would call you deeper and deeper into relationship with the Holy.

Attachment: Activity 4

Prayer Game

Assemble the children in the middle of the playing area. The commands and actions are as follows:

- Pretzel prayer—cross your arms over your chest, resting your hands on your shoulders.
- Pray like Miriam—dance in worship.
- Pray like Moses—kneel down and bow your head down to the ground.
- Pray like Jesus—lie flat on the floor with your hands stretched out in front.
- Pray to the East, West, South, North—run in appropriate directions according to the signs posted around the room.
- Fall to your knees—kneel down, fold your hands, and bow your head.

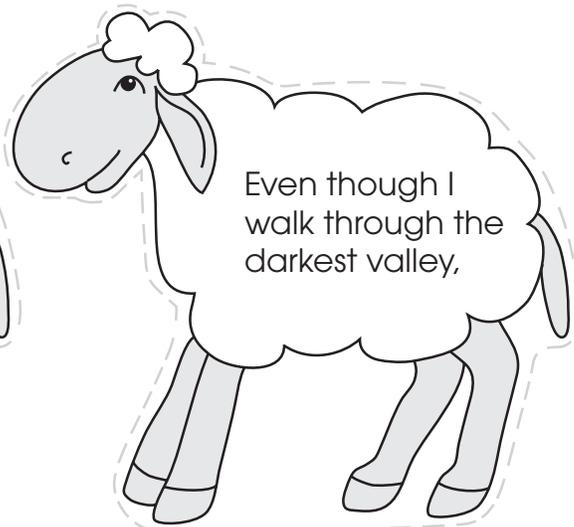
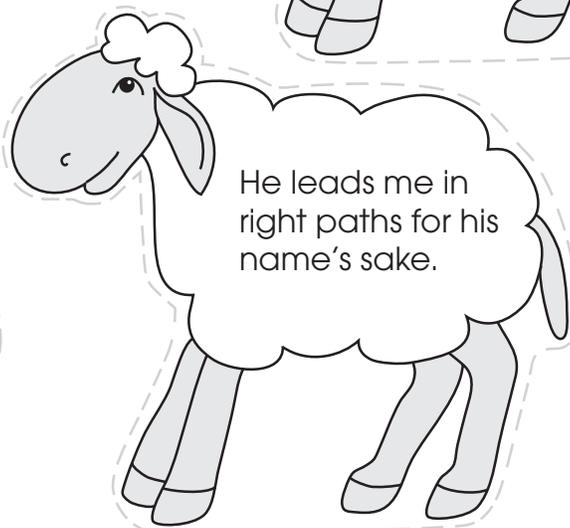
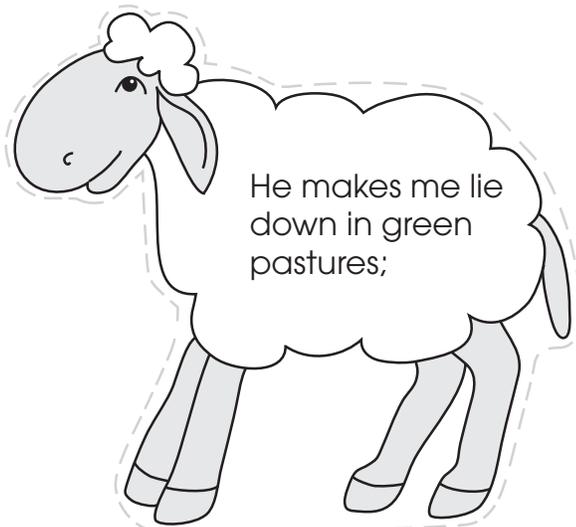
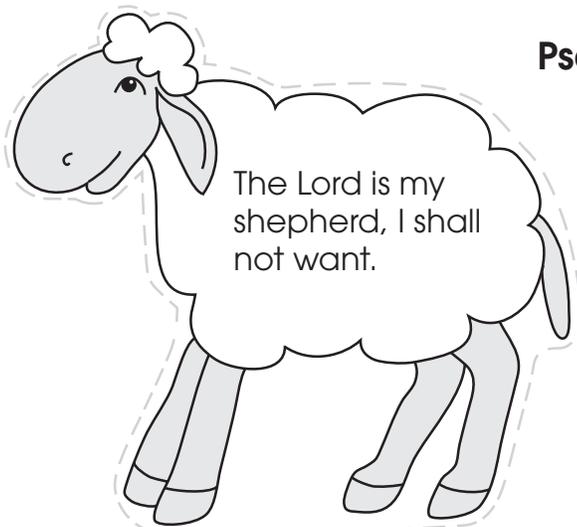
One person does the calling, and the players run around performing the actions. At the start of the game you may want to help the children by giving more detailed instructions, such as, “Pray like Miriam and dance.” Add to the fun by calling out commands one after another very quickly, repeating the same command unexpectedly, or pausing for a few moments to increase suspense. Some children may want to take a turn as a leader.

Before you play the game, demonstrate each action and explain the story behind each one using the following explanations

- Pretzel Prayers: Many years ago, people crossed their arms over their breasts while praying. It is thought that originally pretzels were made by monks to resemble arms crossed in prayer. These little breads were called “little arms” in Latin. The Germans called the bread “brezel,” or pretzel. Today we call them pretzels!
- Pray like Miriam: After the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, Miriam and the other women led the people in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving (Exodus 15:20).
- Pray like Moses: When Moses went to meet with God on Mount Sinai, Moses bowed to the ground and prayed (Exodus 34:8).
- Pray like Jesus: On the night that Jesus was arrested he was worried and upset. He fell to the ground and prayed to God (Matthew 26).
- Pray to the East, West South, North: Many aboriginal cultures have rituals in which they turn to each of the four directions and say special prayers.
- Fall to your knees: Many people kneel and bow their head as a way of showing respect to God.

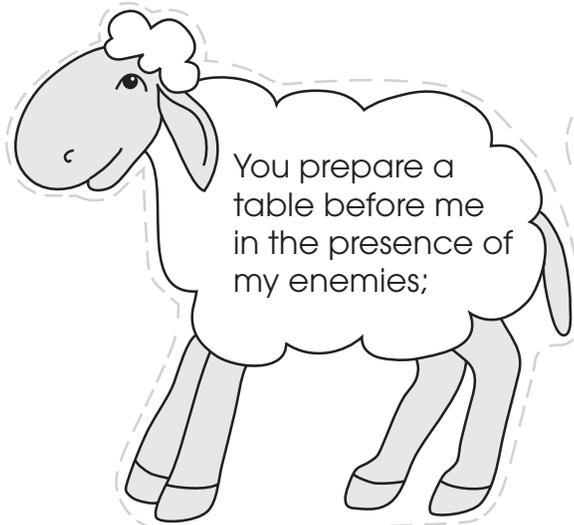
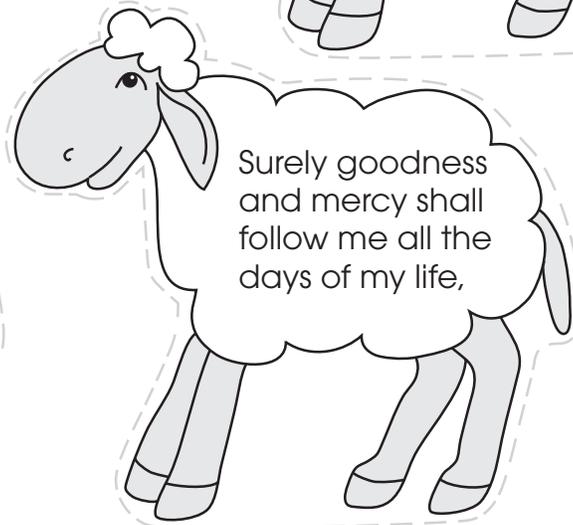
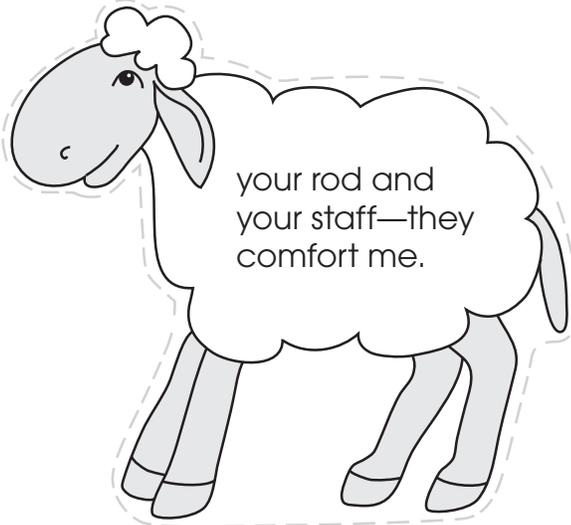
Attachment: Activity 5

Psalm 23 Sheep



Attachment: Activity 5 (continued)

Psalm 23 Sheep



Attachment: Activity 6

Standing in the Need of Prayer

It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord,
Standin' in the need of prayer.
It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord,
Standin' in the need of prayer.

Not my mother (not my father), but it's me O Lord,
Standing in the need of prayer.
Not my sister, not my brother, but it's me, O Lord,
Standing in the need of prayer.

Standing in the Need of Prayer

It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord,
Standin' in the need of prayer.
It's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord,
Standin' in the need of prayer.

Not my mother (not my father), but it's me O Lord,
Standing in the need of prayer.
Not my sister, not my brother, but it's me, O Lord,
Standing in the need of prayer.

Attachment: Activity 8

Finger and Thumb Prayer

Write the words in bold print below on your handprints as prayer reminders.

On your thumb, write: **Hello God!**

Our thumb reminds us to begin our prayer by saying hello to God.

On your index finger, write:
Thank you.

The index finger, which is the one we use to point, reminds us say thank you to God for all the good things in our lives. Name some things you are thankful for.

On your tallest finger, write:
I'm sorry.

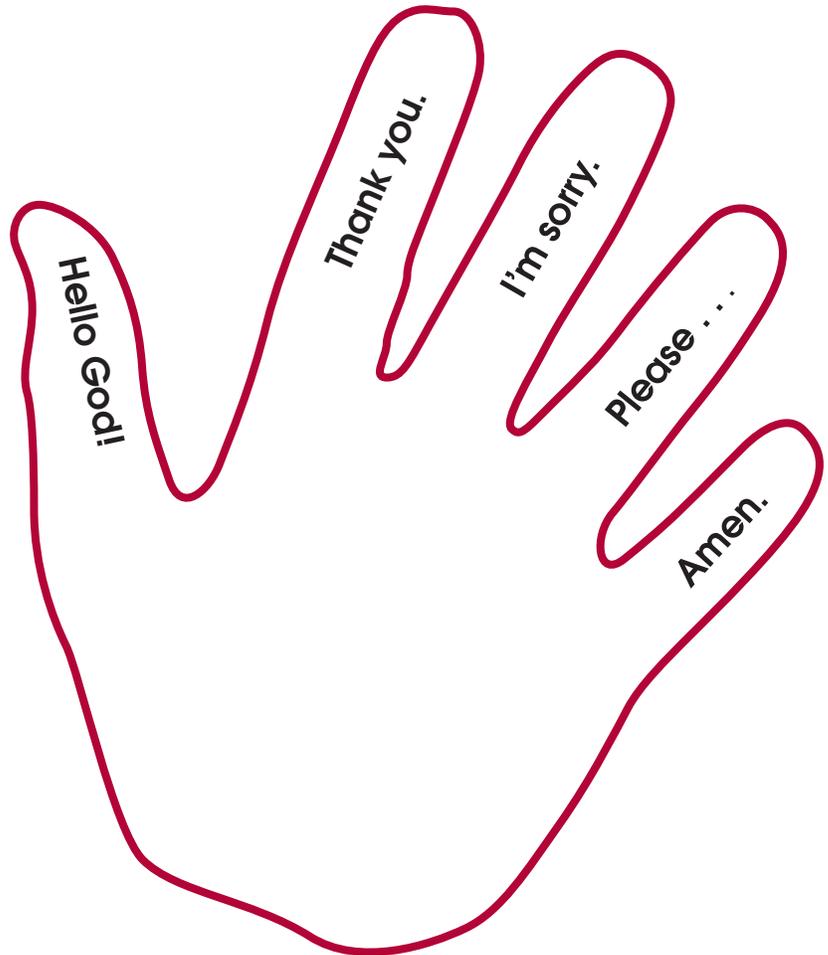
The tallest finger reminds us to talk to God about the mistakes we have made that we feel sorry about. God loves us and is always ready to forgive us when we say sorry.

On your ring finger, write:
Please . . .

The ring finger reminds us to ask for God's help for others and ourselves, such as praying for those we know who are sick, asking God to help us do a project at school, praying for a parent who has to travel away, or praying for a friend who is sad. Who do you want to pray for today?

On your pinky finger, write: **Amen.**

The pinky finger reminds us to finish our prayer with the word "Amen." The people of God have used this word down through the ages. It means, "That is my prayer." When you say "Amen" after someone else's prayer you are saying, "That is my prayer, too."



Simplified Version of Psalm 23

God is like my shepherd,
Who gives me everything I need,
Who lets me rest on tasty grass,
Beside quiet pools of water.

God is like my shepherd,
Who is with me when I am afraid,
Who comforts me when I am sad,
And shows me the right way to go.

God is like my shepherd,
Who loves and cares for me,
Who surrounds me with love,
Forever and ever. Amen.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

In this session we turn to two great prayers in the Bible and explore what wisdom they have to offer. The children in your group may have different understandings of the Prayer of Jesus (the Lord's Prayer). For some it is a prayer filled with archaic words they do not understand. Others may be very familiar with the words and will understand the language quite well. Younger children may simply know the rhythm of the prayer from hearing it prayed at church. Like all of us, children crave a sense of belonging. They may not understand every word of Jesus' prayer, but the experience of saying it with others is readily available to them. Being able to join in with others gives children of all ages a sense of confidence and community. The second prayer, David's prayer, provides an opportunity to think about how we might incorporate praise into our prayer lives and rituals. Younger children will quickly connect with the sense of awe and wonder modeled in this prayer, while older ones will be able to offer the language skills that can help put words to our feelings about the greatness of God.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 11:1–13
1 Chronicles 29:10–18

Leader Preparation

The Prayer of Jesus has been said by Christian communities for more than two thousand years. Although the language may seem old fashioned and strange, it is still something that many of us know and can say by heart. Take time this week to meditate on the words of this prayer. Look at the parable and teachings that accompany the prayer. In what ways do they challenge your practices of prayer and making ritual?

Prayer: Loving God, be with me as I seek to open the scriptures to the children in my group. Give me wisdom as I guide their explorations. Help me to listen and be open to all that they have to teach me. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Freeze! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about a time when you saw a child with a loving parent. Jesus says we can approach God the way a happy child runs to greet his or her parent. Picture this image before you enter into prayer this week.

Supplies:

- “A Story from Luke’s Gospel,” Attachment: Activity 1

Divide children into groups of five or six children with a mixture of ages in each group, if possible. Explain to the children the actions they should do as you give the following commands.

- Begin—Work together in your group to create a scene that illustrates the reading.
- Freeze—Hold your positions.
- Relax—Move around again.

Read the story from the attachment, pausing at the end of each section. At the command “Begin,” the children work in their groups to create a scene depicting the reading. After one minute call, “Freeze.” The children should hold their positions. Let them hold for few seconds and then say, “Relax.” Talk about the passage by using the following questions.

- What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to learn about prayer?
- Jesus said that we can talk to God as if we were talking to a loving parent. What kinds of things should you talk about with your parents?
- What kinds of things might you talk about with God?



2 Jesus’ Prayer Cryptogram (suitable for readers)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–4. Then reread each phrase, pausing to pray for God’s guidance after each verse. Print the attachment “Jesus’ Prayer Strips” and cut apart the strips. Go to the website “Discovery Education Puzzlemaker,” and familiarize yourself with the steps for creating a cryptogram puzzle. Try it out using one of the strips from the attachment.

Supplies:

- (optional) Bibles
- “Jesus’ Prayer Strips,” Attachment: Activity 2
- computers with Internet access
- website: “Discovery Education Puzzlemaker,” <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/cryptogramSetupForm.asp>,
- printer
- pencils

Distribute one of the “Jesus’ Prayer Strips” to each child. There are six strips. If you have more than six children, have children work in pairs; less than six, have some children take more than one strip or take a strip yourself. Direct learners to the website “Discovery Education Puzzlemaker.” Guide them in creating a cryptogram of their verse using the following steps.

choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

1. Title your cryptogram “Jesus’ Prayer.”
2. Type the phrase on your strip.
3. Click “Numbers” for Character Style.
4. Type “A E I O U” with a space between each letter in Give Away Letters.
5. Press the CREATE MY PUZZLE! icon.

Print all the cryptogram puzzles and distribute them to the children to decode, making sure children don’t receive the cryptogram they created. Once all verses have been decoded, work as a group to put the verses in order. Have the children refer to Luke 11:1–4 in Bibles, if necessary. Read the prayer together. Ask them what they think Jesus’ prayer teaches us about praying to God.

③ Wall of Praise

Leader preparation: Print the words of 1 Chronicles 29:11 on a sheet of newsprint or whiteboard. Print the words “Oh God, everything in heaven and earth is yours, and you rule over all.” in the middle of a large piece of mural paper.

Supplies:

- prepared “1 Chronicles 29:11” newsprint
- prepared mural paper
- large markers
- Bible
- thesaurus (If you don’t have a hard copy, one can be found on the Internet Thesaurus, <http://thesaurus.com/>)
- (optional) computer with Internet access

Gather in a circle around the mural paper and explain that you are going to read the prayer of one of the great kings from the Hebrew Scriptures. Tell the children that near the end of his life King David prayed to God in front of all the people. Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What words came to mind when you heard that prayer?
- What kind of prayer do you think this is?
- When have you heard this kind of prayer before?

Have the children use the thesaurus, hard copy or online, to look up the words used in verse 11 to find vocabulary with similar meaning. You may need to show the children how to use a thesaurus. Have the children make a list of all the words from the verse and the ones they find. Ask the children the following questions.

- Which words do you think describe God well?
- What other words can you think of to describe God?

Add the children’s suggestions to the list. Invite learners to write these words on the mural paper to create a wall of praise. Encourage them to use large letters, so the words are easy to read. When all the words have been written, invite the group decorate the mural with stars and planets to symbolize the heavens and the earth.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Celebration Pennants (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–13. Think about some of the prayers and songs of praise you have read or heard through the years. How have they influenced your understanding of God? Cut out a pennant shape from a large sheet of construction paper for each child. Follow the directions below to make a sample pennant.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- sample pennant
- pennant shape for each child made from sturdy construction paper
- crayons or markers
- sturdy straws
- tape
- yarn or thin ribbons
- pens and paper

Explain that you are going to read the prayer of one of the great kings from the Hebrew Scriptures. Tell the children that King David is near the end of his life and is praying to God in front of all the people. Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–13 to the children. Comment that David used a lot of descriptive words to talk about God. Reread verse 11, placing emphasis on each adjective. Ask the children to suggest other words that might describe God, and print their suggestions on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard.

Distribute the pennant shapes. Invite the children print words that describe God on one side of their pennants, referring to the list created earlier, if needed. Encourage older children to help younger ones. Have them use crayons or markers to decorate their pennants as they wish. Instruct the children to tape their pennants to sturdy straws to create handles. Have them add yarn or thin ribbons for additional decoration. Invite the learners to form a parade, wave their pennants, and celebrate our amazing God.

5 Prayer Wheels

Leader preparation: Spend time reflecting on the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor. Think about your experience of community prayers. How have they helped your prayer life? Write the Prayer of Jesus that your congregation prays on a sheet of newsprint or whiteboard. Make a sample prayer wheel following the directions below.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor, <http://www.art.com/products/p12370511-sa-i1740258/henry-savage-landor-tibetan-yellow-monks-using-prayer-wheels.htm?sorig=0>
- prepared Lord’s Prayer newsprint or whiteboard
- sample prayer wheel
- 6-inch length of ¾-inch wooden dowel for each child

- eight ½-inch x 11-inch strips of paper for each child
- colored pens or pencils
- tape
- rubber bands

Look together at the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor and ask the children what they see. Use the following questions to encourage discussion with the children.

- What do you notice about the expressions on the three monks’ faces?
- What do you think they are doing?

Explain that the monks are praying together using prayer wheels. Explain that prayer wheels are a Tibetan prayer tool. They are usually filled with prayers, which are called “mantras.” It is believed that the power of the prayer will spread when the wheel is turned. Point out that the monks are praying together in community. Ask the following questions.

- What are some times when we pray in community?
- What kinds of prayers do we say in community?

Help learners realize that the Prayer of Jesus is one of those community prayers.

Invite the children to make the Prayer of Jesus prayer wheels. Draw the children’s attention to the newsprint or whiteboard with the Prayer of Jesus. Have each learner write the Prayer of Jesus on the ½-inch strips of paper, taping them together as needed to make one long strip. Younger children may need assistance writing the prayer. Have the children tape their dowels to the “Amen” end of their strips. Note that the strip will be on the left hand side of the dowel. Tell the children to wind their strips around their dowels snugly. Explain how to use their prayer wheels by holding the dowel loosely in one hand and slowly pulling the strip of paper with the other hand, saying the Prayer of Jesus as they unwind the strip. To send the prayer wheels home, wind up the prayer and secure with a rubber band. Encourage learners to use their prayer wheels to say the Prayer of Jesus every day.



6 Prayers of Praise

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video “Creation Calls.” What does God have to say to you through this music and video footage? Be prepared to share your thoughts with your learners. On a sheet of newsprint or whiteboard write the following simple outline of a prayer of praise with blanks to fill in: “Oh God you are _____. When I see the _____ you have made, I feel _____. Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you, and you are _____.”

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Creation Calls,”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSx_pGO3QMg
- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- prepared “Prayer of Praise” newsprint or whiteboard
- drawing materials and paper
- tape

Show the children the YouTube video “Creation Calls” and then engage them in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you see in this video that impressed you the most?
- What is the most amazing thing you have ever seen in nature?

Invite the children to look at the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess and talk about what they see.

- In what way does this picture remind you of the video?
- How does it make you feel?

Comment that God created everything: the moon and sun, stars and planets, land and air, animals, plants and people. Wow! Express awe for God’s amazing creative power. Invite the children to suggest words to fill in the blanks on the Prayer of Praise. Write down all their suggestions so you can pray the prayer over and over again. Distribute drawing materials and invite children to draw something in nature that they really like. When they have finished their drawings, tape them around the border of the Prayer of Praise newsprint or whiteboard, forming a frame. Invite the children to pray the prayer they have created several times using different words they suggested.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Imaginary Prayer Box (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use an imaginary prayer box during your prayer time this week. Reflect on the experience. Does it change the way you pray?

Supplies: None

Invite the children to talk about their experiences of prayer or of watching other people pray. Explain that there are many different ways of praying, and invite the children to gather around an imaginary prayer box. Invite them to imagine what it looks like. Have them indicate the size and shape of the box with their hands. Invite children to share some things they might like to talk to God about by using these or similar questions.

- What concerns do you have that you want to pray about?
- What is going on in the world that upsets you?
- What are things you would like to say thank you for?
- For whom do you want to pray?

Have children cup their hands in front of their mouths and whisper a prayer into their hands. Tell them that, on the count of three, they may blow the prayers into the box. Count to three and blow your prayers with the children’s. Finish with a group high five and the word “Amen.” Invite the children to fold up the imaginary prayer box and put it in their pockets. Suggest they take it out whenever they want to pray.

8 Prayer Baskets

Leader preparation: Using the version your congregation prays, print the Prayer of Jesus (the Lord's Prayer) line by line on a sheet of paper so that the children may cut it into strips. Make a copy for each child. You could also use the "Jesus' Prayer Strips" from Attachment: Activity 2. Make a sample folded hands prayer basket using the directions on the website "Pray 'N Praise Basket," <http://books.google.ca/books?id=ywp3YJpcXZIC&pg=PA38&lpg=PA38&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false>. Read the Lord's Prayer aloud using a number of different versions. How do these different translations enhance your understanding of the prayer?

Supplies:

- Lord's Prayer strips for each child
- (optional) "Jesus Prayer strips," Attachment: Activity 2
- sample folded hands prayer basket
- paper lunch bag for each child
- scissors
- glue sticks
- markers

Distribute copies of the Lord's Prayer strips and tell the children that it is a prayer that Jesus taught his followers. Christians all over the world still pray this prayer today. Have the children cut apart the sentence strips and practice putting the sentences in order. Have them set their Lord's Prayer strips aside. Show the children the sample folded hands prayer basket you made. Give the children paper bags and give them instructions on how to make their own folded hands prayer baskets. Younger children may need assistance tracing their hands and cutting. Have the children place their Lord's Prayer strips in order again. Invite the children to pray the Prayer of Jesus together, instructing them to put each sentence in their baskets as they finish the sentence. Encourage children to take home their prayer baskets to share the prayer with their families.

9 Blessing Ritual

Leader preparation: Think about this blessing ritual so that you can bring some ideas to the children. Look in your hymnal and music resources to find simple songs that the children might know. Write the words to several songs on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. If you choose to use the Prayer of Jesus (Lord's Prayer), print the version you use in your congregation onto a sheet of newsprint or whiteboard.

Supplies:

- prepared newsprint with song suggestions
- (optional) prepared Prayer of Jesus newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) small bowl containing water or oil
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the children to create a simple blessing ritual that can be used at the end of every session before the group departs. Explain that the blessing might include a song, a prayer, or both, and motions or a way to do the blessing. Show the children the song suggestions you prepared, and invite them to choose a song or suggest another song that would be appropriate for a blessing. Have the children

suggest words for a prayer or a blessing, and write those on a sheet of newsprint. Or use the Prayer of Jesus so the children become familiar with the words. Have the children decide how they want to do the song and the blessing/prayer. Suggestions might be singing the song and saying the blessing/prayer as a whole group, passing around the blessing from child to child, or creating motions to go with the words of the song or the blessing/prayer. Another option would be to use water or oil in the parting ritual, particularly if this something your congregation uses. Each person can dip a finger into a bowl of water (or olive oil) and as the words of blessing are said make the mark of the cross on the hand of the person next to her or him. Encourage creativity and imagination, but keep the ritual as simple as possible.

Reflect

What new understandings of prayer and making ritual did you and the children have today? Keep your group in prayer as they continue to deepen their relationship with God.

Attachment: Activity 1

A Story from Luke's Gospel
from *The Message*

Luke 11:5-13

1. Imagine what would happen if you went to a friend in the middle of the night and said, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. An old friend traveling through just showed up, and I don't have a thing on hand."
2. The friend answers from his bed, "Don't bother me. The door's locked; my children are all down for the night; I can't get up to give you anything."
3. But let me tell you, even if he won't get up because he's a friend, if you stand your ground, knocking and waking all the neighbors, he'll finally get up and get you whatever you need.
4. Here's what I'm saying: Ask and you'll get; Seek and you'll find; Knock and the door will open.
5. Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This is not a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your little boy asks for a serving of fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate?
6. If your little girl asks for an egg, do you trick her with a spider?
7. As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing—you're at least decent to your own children. And don't you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask him?

Attachment: Activity 2

Jesus' Prayer Strips

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

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

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

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

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Like us, the children live in a consumer culture that does not encourage gratitude for what we have, but rather persuades dissatisfaction with what we don't have. Even the youngest child can tell you what they want and what they want next. Taking time to count our blessings and focus on God's goodness is a powerful antidote to a society that constantly demands more. Many children live a frenetic pace of life, and they might wonder how it is possible to find time to pray for a few minutes. So the invitation to pray without stopping may seem like an impossible task. The activities in this Exploration examine how we can incorporate prayer into the natural rhythms of our everyday lives.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Deuteronomy 26:1–11
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

Leader Preparation

Think about how you incorporate prayer into your everyday life. Is it as natural as breathing? Pause to acknowledge God's presence in the beauty of nature or the laughter of a child. Express appreciation for the taste of a good cup of coffee or tea. Quietly utter a fervent plea for help when facing a difficult situation. Try to remember to acknowledge God's presence as you go about your daily life.

Prayer: Loving God, help me as I seek to make prayer a constant part of my life. Give me wisdom as I lead this Exploration, that the children will experience your deep love for them. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Breath Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Breathe in and out deeply. Be conscious of your breathing. Open your mind and your heart to prayers of thanksgiving or concern that your breathing pattern brings to your consciousness. Allow your breathing to become your prayer.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Lead learners in a discussion about breathing using these questions.

- Why do we breathe?
- What would happen if we stopped?
- Show me what it's like to go outside on a beautiful day, turn your face up to the sun, and breathe in deeply.
- In what ways might this be a prayer?
- Show me how you might you sigh in relief. When might you do that?
- How might this be a prayer?
- Show me how you might catch your breath in fear. When might you do that?
- How might this be a prayer?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 together. Explain to the group that a breath prayer is a short prayer that can be said in the space of one breath in and out. Tell them that they can use this kind of prayer anytime through the day to remember that God is near. In this way, praying can become a part of our lives, just like breathing. Ask the group to sit quietly and slowly breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. As they breathe encourage them to think of something they want to pray about. For example: "Thank you for this beautiful day," or "Be with my friend who is sad." Encourage them to say their breath prayer quietly or silently as they continue to breathe slowly. Finish with a breath prayer of blessing. Invite them to inhale deeply and say, "O God," and then exhale and say, "Give us peace." Invite the children to breathe this prayer as many times as they wish.



2 Ritual Survey

Leader preparation: A few weeks before this activity, fill in the blanks on Attachment: Activity 2 describing who is requesting this survey and where and when to turn it in. Make copies and distribute the survey to church attendees. Invite them to complete the survey and drop off in your designated spot. Check out the Kid's Zone website "Create a Graph," <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/graphing/classic/>, and familiarize yourself with the procedures for making bar graphs and pie charts. To make the pie charts you will need to be able to calculate percentages. You can find a calculator on this math website: "Calculator," <http://math.about.com/library/weekly/aa061502a.htm>. Before the session, bookmark the Kid's Zone website "Create a Graph" on each computer the children use.

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

Supplies:

- completed Ritual Surveys
- “Ritual Survey,” Attachment: Activity 2 for each child
- three computers with Internet access
- printer
- paper
- pencils
- (optional) calculators
- (optional) poster board
- (optional) markers

Distribute copies of the Ritual Survey, invite learners to complete them, and add those surveys to the ones you collected. Divide the children into three groups. Tell them that one group will make a bar graph with the “Yes/No” results from the questions on the survey, one group will make a bar graph with the results from the special days observed, and one group will make a pie chart from the results of time in prayer.

Note: Only the results that can be measured as a percentage may be made into a pie chart. For example, the results for time in prayer may be a pie chart because the sections of the pie are percentages of the total of participants responding, which will add up to 100 percent. The bar graphs show the distribution of participants’ responses. Pie charts may be made, however, from one of the questions with the percentages of participants responding “Yes” or “No.” If you have time, you may want the groups to make pie charts from the results of particular questions.

Have each group gather around a computer. Direct them to go to the Kid’s Zone website “Create a Graph” on the computers. Instruct the children to make the graphs and chart they have been assigned. Assist the groups with the website as they need help. The children making a pie chart will need to figure out percentages and may need math assistance and calculators. As you will have noticed, the bar graph and pie chart have various options. After the children have made choices and filled in all their data, they may go back and change options to see their graphs and chart in different configurations, such as 2D or 3D, orientation, font, color, and so forth. They may preview their graphs and chart as well. When the children have finished their graphs and charts, have them print out their finished work. Display the charts and graphs and gather the children around them. Invite them to analyze their data. Ask them what the charts show about the ritual and prayer habits of your faith community. Ask them what they have learned from these graphs and charts. Consider sharing the results of your survey with your congregation by having the children make posters of their graphs and charts.

3 Remembering

Leader preparation: Gather photographs and other memorabilia from a special event you enjoyed. As you do this give thanks to God for the memories it invokes. What rituals of thanksgiving and remembrance were part of your childhood? Which of these have you continued as an adult? How do they enrich your life?

Supplies:

- photographs and memorabilia from a special event or holiday.
- Bibles

Show the photographs and memorabilia and share a few stories about the memories attached to them. Invite children to talk about special celebrations or events

that they have attended. Ask them if they have any special photographs or souvenirs they keep, or stories they tell about these special times. Invite volunteers to read Deuteronomy 26:1–11 to the group. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What did the people of God want to remember?
- How do you think their celebration helped them to remember?
- What does your family do to remember special events such as birthdays?
- How do these things help your family remember?
- What other holidays do you celebrate?
- What are you remembering on those days?

Invite the group to plan a celebration of thanksgiving. They may wish to follow the model set out in the Deuteronomy passage, which includes liturgy, giving to God, welcoming others, and a grand party!

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Prayer Plaque (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a sample plaque and hang it as a reminder to incorporate prayer into your daily life. Make a list of some ways you incorporate prayer into your daily life. Be prepared to share your experiences with your learners.

Supplies:

- Bible
- sample plaque
- 7" cardboard circle for each child (recycle the side of grocery boxes)
- thick yarn or string
- scissors
- white glue
- pencils with erasers
- 9" aluminum foil circle for each child
- tape

Read Philippians 1:3–4 to the children. Share with learners the ways you pray throughout the day. Ask them the following questions.

- What are some other ways we could include prayer in our lives?
- How could this strengthen your prayer life?

Use the following directions to instruct the children in making a PRAY plaque.

- Print the word PRAY in the middle of the 7-inch cardboard circle.
- Sketch a simple pattern around the edges. Be sure and keep the design simple, as fine details will not be clearly seen later.
- Glue pieces of yarn or string over the letters and patterns.
- Place a 9-inch circle of aluminum foil over the cardboard circles.
- Press down the foil carefully over the yarn or string so that the words and patterns show through. Smooth out the plain areas. The eraser end of a pencil or their fingertips, not fingernails, works well for this.
- Fold the excess foil over the edges of the plaque and secure with tape.
- Tape another piece of yarn to the back of the circle to act as a hanging loop.
- Hang your plaques where you will see them every day.

5 Sand Garden Meditation

Leader preparation: Create your own meditation sand garden. An example can be found at “Mini Desktop Zen Garden,” <http://www.coachingyourcreativity.com/articles/26ways/desktop-zen-garden-instructions.shtml>. Use it a couple of times during the week to quiet your thoughts and focus on God’s blessings in your life.

Supplies:

- sample meditation sand garden
- sandwich-size plastic storage container for each child
- clean, chemical-free sand (found at hobby stores or garden centers)
- small stones, twigs, seed pods, or other natural items
- plastic fork for each child
- quiet reflective music
- music player

Engage the children in conversation about taking time to be quiet using the following questions.

- What helps you calm down?
- What might we do to quiet our thoughts and focus on God?
- How might this strengthen our prayer life?

Show the children the meditation sand garden you made. Explain how you made it and how you use it. Give the children supplies, and invite them to create their own meditation sand gardens. Have the children fill their containers three-quarters full with sand. Provide natural items for them to add to their containers, encouraging them to try different arrangements until they find one that pleases their eyes. Distribute plastic forks and demonstrate how to rake in long strokes to create patterns. Play quiet, reflective music and invite the children to use their sand gardens. As they rake a pattern of straight lines or swirls in their sand, suggest that they reflect on all the good things God has given them. Encourage the children to take their sand gardens home and use them.

6 Drumming Our Thanks

Leader preparation: Gather supplies for each learner to make a simple drum such as the one found on the Squidoo website “Make Your Own Drum.” If it is not possible to make drums, consider how the children may use their bodies or objects in the room to make drumming sounds. Watch the YouTube video “Thanks a Lot.”

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Thanks a Lot,” <http://www.coachingyourcreativity.com/articles/26ways/desktop-zen-garden-instructions.shtml>
- (optional) supplies to make drums—see the Squidoo website “Make Your Own Drum,” <http://www.squidoo.com/kids-musical-instruments>

Tell the children that there are many ways of praying. Some people like to sing their prayers, and others find it helpful to play instruments as they pray. Following the instructions and using the supplies you’ve chosen, invite learners to create their own drum. Let the children experiment with the different sounds they can produce. Ask the children how they might use the drums to pray. If you have time, try some of the group’s suggestions. If you are not able to make drums, ask the children how they can make drumming sounds by using their bodies or

objects in the room. For example, children could pat thighs and cheeks (mouths open), drum on a table top or chair seat.

Show the YouTube video “Thanks a Lot.” Encourage the children to listen to the words and notice the beat and rhythm of the song. Ask the following questions.

- What is the songwriter giving thanks for?
- What do you want to give thanks for?

Play the video again, inviting the children to use their drums or to make drumming sounds as the music plays. They can also sing along if they wish. Older children may like to make up a few extra verses to add to the song.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Sheet Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Try adding movement to your prayer this week. In what ways does it add an extra dimension to your communication with God?

Supplies:

- large bed sheet or cloth table covering

Spread the bed sheet or table covering on the floor and invite the children to stand around it. Have everyone pick up the edge of the sheet and hold it at waist level. Invite each child in turn to crawl under the sheet and call out something they want to say thank you for, or name something or someone they wish to pray about. If a child can't think of anything, invite the group to make suggestions. After each child makes a prayer request, say, “Dear God, we pray for/we give thanks for [child's suggestion].” Invite the group to respond by saying “Amen” as they lift up the sheet to make it billow upward and settle back down on the child. Repeat until everyone has had a turn.

8 Grace Cube

Leader preparation: Print Grace Cube. Make a copy of the Grace Cube on card stock for each child. Make a sample Grace Cube. Think about the graces you have learned and used through the years. Which are your favorites? Why?

Supplies:

- copy of Grace Cube on card stock for each child, <http://www.anglicanrock.org.au/baptism/pdf/printout4.pdf>
- sample Grace Cube
- scissors
- glue or tape
- crayons or colored pencils
- a snack to share

Invite the children to describe their experiences of saying grace, or not, before a meal. Some may want to recite some of the graces they have learned. Ask the children why they think some people pray before they eat. Distribute copies of the Grace Cube and have the children follow the instructions to make their Grace Cubes. Have them decorate their Grace Cubes, if they wish. Older children can help younger ones with cutting and assembly. Read the prayers on each side of

the cube and demonstrate how to use it. Share a snack together, using the Grace Cube before you eat. Encourage children to take their cubes home to use at family mealtimes.

9 Celebration of Giving

Leader preparation: The week before this session make phone calls asking everyone to bring prepared fruit or vegetables to share. Be sensitive to any food allergies within the group. Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Purchase some fruits and vegetables that are grown locally and prepare them for snacking.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- basket with locally available fruits and vegetables
- world map or globe
- festive music
- music player

Place the fruits and vegetables in the middle of the group. Look at each one and ask the children where they think they were grown. If you know where some of the food is grown, help the children locate the country on the map. Express appreciation for good harvests and for all the people who worked to grow the food. Ask for volunteers to read Deuteronomy 26:1–11 to the group. Discuss what is grown locally that could be used as first fruits of the harvest to give to God. Ask the children what else they might give to God. Say a short prayer of thanks and enjoy the snack together. During the celebration play music and encourage the group to move around and shout out, “Thank you God!”

Reflect

What did you and the children learn about incorporating prayer into your daily lives? In what ways are you becoming aware of opportunities for prayer that you haven’t recognized before?

Attachment: Activity 2

Ritual Survey

Please fill out this survey for _____ and return it
(group requesting the survey)

to _____ by _____
(designated drop-off place) (date)

QUESTIONS	YES	NO
Have you been baptized?		
Were you baptized as a child?		
Were you baptized as an adult?		
Have you or would you have your children baptized?		
Do you go to church on Sunday?		
On a regular basis, do you receive communion at least once a month?		
If you receive communion, was your first communion a special event?		
Do you usually say grace before a meal?		
Did you learn any special prayers as a child?		
Do you say family prayers?		
Did your parents or caregivers read or tell you stories from the Bible?		
Do you have a bedtime ritual?		
Do you have a morning ritual?		
Do you have a different daily ritual for weekends?		
Do you have a ritual for saying goodbye?		
Has your household ever created your own special rituals?		

Place a check mark beside each special day you observe as a family.

Christmas	
Easter	
Epiphany	
Valentine's Day	
Memorial Day	
Pentecost	
All Saints' Day	

What other special days do you observe?

Place a check mark beside how many hours you spend in prayer each week.

Less than 1 hour	
1-2 hours	
3-5 hours	
5-8 hours	
More than 8 hours	

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

All families and communities develop their own set of traditions and rituals. Some have been passed down through the ages from one generation to another; others are newly developed. Participating in these rituals is important at every age. It provides a link to the past, gives a strong sense of belonging, and helps shape identity. The children in your group will have enjoyed all kinds of rituals, and their understanding of these traditions can vary. Some will have a good understanding of the stories behind the rituals, while others simply know that it is something they always do. Younger children do not usually want or need explanations and are content to simply participate with everyone else. Older children are reaching the age where they want to know the whys and wherefores of everything and may question the validity of some rituals, particularly those that seem antiquated and meaningless. This Exploration gives the children a chance to share their experiences and provides the opportunity for them to deepen their understanding about some of the rituals we practice as a church community.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Matthew 6:7-15
1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Leader Preparation

Christian rituals and traditions are intended to draw us closer to God. They invite us to intentionally set aside time (even just a few moments) to be aware of God's presence. What rituals have been important in your faith journey? How did they influence your faith formation and shape your identity as a beloved child of God? In what ways are you open to new expressions of our faith?

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for rituals that deepen our relationship with you. Grant your wisdom as I guide the children through this Exploration. May we all draw closer to you. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Relay Race (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the instructions for the relay races on Attachment: Activity 1, "Relay Races," and prepare your space accordingly. This activity involves a lot of movement. If there are children in your group who are unable to run or hop, think about ways they can participate, perhaps by using a variation in the relay that allows their participation, or by having them give the starting signals. Think about the traditions you enjoy and the way they were passed onto you. How have they enriched your life?

Supplies:

- "Relay Races," Attachment: Activity 1
- masking tape
- something to serve as a baton, such as a shoe, hat, or wooden spoon

Invite the children to play some relay races. Follow the instructions on the attachment to lead the races. When the group has had a chance to expend plenty of energy, gather the children in a circle. Comment that during the game the baton was passed from one person to another. Make the observation that in families we learn special traditions and customs from older family members. Like the baton, special traditions and customs may be passed on to them, and they may pass them on to their younger brothers and sisters, their friends, and their own families someday. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What does your family do to celebrate birthdays?
- How do you celebrate Christmas or Easter?
- What special food is made for these occasions?
- Who passed these traditions to you?
- What traditions have you passed onto others?
- If you have children someday, what traditions do you want to pass onto them?

2 Puzzle Prayer

Leader preparation: Go to the DLTk website and play with the "Lord's Prayer Jigsaw Puzzle." Bookmark this site on the computers the children will use. Try it at different difficulty levels and with different puzzle shapes. Before you leave the site pray the Lord's Prayer.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computers with Internet access
- website: "Lord's Prayer Jigsaw Puzzle," http://www.dltk-bible.com/jesus/lords_prayer-puzzle.htm

Ask the children what they know about the Prayer of Jesus, or the Lord's Prayer, explaining if necessary that it is a prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. Tell them that Christians all over the world still pray this prayer today. Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 6:7–15 to the group. Help children access the DLTk puzzle site "Lord's Prayer Jigsaw Puzzle" and invite them to solve the jigsaw puzzle. Encourage older learners to help younger ones, changing the level if needed so they can experience a successful solution to the puzzle. Note that there is always the option for Auto Solve. If there is time, children can try a number of different puzzle options. Finish by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

3 The Last Supper

Leader preparation: Spend time studying the artwork “The Last Supper Detail” by Crespi. How does it make you feel? Based on the position or action of each hand, what do you think that person is feeling or doing? In your imagination place yourself at the table with the other disciples. What would Jesus say to you?

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Last Supper” Detail by Crespi, <http://www.art.com/products/p12061746-sa-i1508087/daniele-crespi-the-last-supper-detail-of-the-food.htm>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- drawing materials and paper.

Without telling the children the name of the artwork by Crespi, invite them to spend a few minutes looking at it. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you notice first?
- Who do you think the people are?
- What do you think they are doing?

Tell the title of the artwork and ask the children what they remember about the Last Supper, explaining if necessary that it was the meal Jesus ate with his disciples before he was arrested. Retell or read the story of the last supper in Mark 14:12–26. Comment that we use the ritual of the communion table as a way of remembering this special occasion, but also to celebrate and remember the things Jesus did and said. Have the group make a list of all the things they can remember about Jesus. Record their list on newsprint or a whiteboard. Invite the children to draw a picture of themselves sitting at the table with Jesus. Post their pictures around the artwork.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Prayer Pong (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Place a piece of masking tape down the center of a long table. If you have a large group, you may need to use two tables.

Supplies:

- Bible
- long table(s)
- masking tape
- soft ball or inflated balloon for each pair of children

Read Matthew 6:7–15 to the children. Discuss this prayer with learners using the following questions.

- Who knows this prayer by heart?
- When did you learn it?
- How often do you say it?
- Where are you when you say it?

Practice saying the Prayer of Jesus (the Lord’s Prayer) together so that everyone is comfortable with the words. Tell learners that they are going to play Prayer Pong.

Have them get into pairs with one child on one side of the long table and the partner on the other side of the table. Explain that they are to gently throw the ball or balloon back and forth to each other across the table. Have them practice a few times. Once they are comfortable with the tossing, instruct them to say the Prayer of Jesus one word at a time. Each pair will follow this example: Child 1—"Our"; Child 2—"Father"; Child 1—"in"; Child 2—"heaven." Have them continue in this manner to the end of the prayer. To make the activity more challenging, time how long it takes each pair to say the prayer and then challenge them to do it faster the next time. If the children do not know each word of the prayer, or for younger children who do not know it all, have the pairs repeat one phrase over and over until they have learned it, and then move onto the next phrase. It doesn't matter if they don't finish the prayer.

5 Going Down in the River to Pray

Leader preparation: Place a little pea gravel or a few small pebbles in the bottom of the cups. Fill the cups about half full with water to create small finger rivers.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: "Down in the River to Pray,"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZjBYzeKi0A&feature=related>
- Bible
- paper cup for each child
- pea gravel or small pebbles
- water
- blue streamer, scarf, or flowing fabric for each child

Distribute finger-river cups to the children and encourage them to touch the water and stir up the gravel. Invite them to describe their experiences of rivers or creeks by asking the following questions.

- What activities can you do in or around a river?
- What does it feel like to touch the water?
- What are some ways we use river water?

Show the YouTube video "Down in the River to Pray." Ask if anyone knows what the people in the photographs are doing. Explain that the tradition of baptism started even before the Christian faith. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River before he started his ministry. Depending on your faith background, and even the part of the country you live in, baptism can be associated with sprinkling water on infants or full immersion of older children and adults. Some churches still use rivers. Talk briefly about the baptism traditions of your church community. Invite children to tell stories of their own baptism or those they have witnessed. Distribute blue scarves, streamers, or flowing fabric and invite the group to experiment with different ways of moving them. Play the video again and invite the children to move around the learning area moving the scarves, streamers, or flowing fabric to represent the flowing water of a river. When the video has finished, suggest the children continue to move as they hum the tune and pray quietly to God. Invite the children to finish by making a wide arc with their streamers, scarves, or flowing fabric and saying "Amen."

6 Wash O God

Leader preparation: Spend some time looking at “Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West. What Christian symbols can you see in the picture? Then watch the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters.” Identify symbols in the picture that are mentioned in the song.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHEvIRiqBYo>
- artwork: “Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1004323110?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401

Play the video “Wash, O God Our Sons and Daughters,” and invite the children to listen carefully to the words. Engage the children in conversation about what they heard using the following questions.

- What do you think the songwriter is trying to say?
- When and where would you expect this song to be played?
- What words or ideas in the song do you find difficult to understand?

Explain that this song was written over thirty years ago and uses language that can be a little difficult to understand. Have the learners note references in the song’s lyrics to the different rituals your church community practices. Also have them listen to the lyrics for mention of various symbols used by your church. These might include water, garments, dove, cup of blessing, and bread. Finally, have them listen for lyrics that remind them of God’s love. Tell the children that songs such as this one can remind us of the things we do together as God’s children and the things that join us together. Ask them when they think it might be a good time to sing this song.

Then show the children “Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West. Ask: How does this picture remind you of the song? What symbols do you see in the picture that are mentioned in the song? Invite the children to see if they can spot a boat and a rainbow in this picture, and explain that these are also symbols used in many churches. Play the video once again and invite the children to listen to the music and look at the picture as they think about God’s love.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Etched reminders (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a sample card. Place the card where it will act as a reminder to take a little time each day to pray.

Supplies:

- sample card
- 8½ × 11" white paper or card stock cut into quarters
- crayons
- black crayon for each child
- paperclip for each child
- envelope for each child
- (optional) postage stamps

All of us need reminders now and then to talk to God. Invite children to color a quarter sheet of paper or card stock with a variety of bright crayons. Tell them that they can make stripes, blotches, or any pattern they like. Tell them to press hard to make a thick layer of crayon all over the paper. When they have finished their color designs, give everyone a black crayon and have them all color over the whole sheet with a thick layer of black crayon. Demonstrate how to scratch a design into the black surface with a straightened paperclip so that the bright crayon colors will show through the black. Invite the children to etch messages that they would want to remember about God, such as "Remember God loves you," "Remember God hears your prayers," "Remember God cares," or something of their own choosing. They might also wish to etch a simple design around the edges. Have older children act as scribes for the younger children. Have the children place their cards in envelopes, seal them, and write their mailing addresses on the envelopes. Make arrangements to mail the cards to the children early in the week. If mailing costs are prohibitive, encourage children to take home their sealed envelopes and open them during the week.

8 Communion Meal

Leader preparation: Reflect on some of the different communion meals you have shared. What memories do they evoke? Which were the most meaningful, spontaneous, healing? In what ways does the communion meal enrich your faith journey?

Supplies:

- children's Bible with the story of the Last Supper
- large blanket
- snack
- communion vessels used by your church community

Spread out the blanket and invite the children to sit on it. Say grace and share the snack together. As you eat, invite the children to tell you what they know about the Last Supper Jesus shared with his friends. Explain, if necessary, that it is the last meal that Jesus had with his disciples. Read the story of the Last Supper from a children's Bible. Comment that down through the ages people have been remembering the Last Supper by sharing communion together. Show the children the communion vessels used by your church community. Ask the children if they know what those items are, what they are used for, and when they are used. Work together to clear up the snack and fold the blanket. Send the children out with the words, "As you go, remember how much God loves you."

9 Prayer Bracelet

Leader preparation: Using the version your congregation prays, print the Prayer of Jesus (Lord's Prayer) line by line on a sheet of paper so that you have ten short phrases. Make a copy for each child. Make a sample bracelet and try using it during your prayer time this week. In what ways does it enhance your prayer life?

Supplies:

- 10" length of cording for each child
- beads that fit on the cording, in a variety of colors so that children may each choose ten different colored beads
- prepared copy of the Lord's Prayer lined out for each child

Explain to the children that there are many ways to pray. One way is to use beads to remind you of different parts of a prayer or different things to pray for. Sliding beads along a string as one prays is one method that people of many faith backgrounds have used for thousands of years. Hand out the copies of the Lord's Prayer lined out to the children. Give them each a piece of cording. Use the following directions to guide the children in making a prayer bracelet.

- Choose ten different color beads, one for each phrase in the prayer.
- Tie a knot about 2 inches from the end of the cording.
- Together say the first phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Choose a bead and thread it on the cording. Tie a knot after the bead.
- Repeat this pattern with each line of the prayer.
- Finish the bracelet with a final knot.

Have the children tie completed bracelets onto one another's wrists. Cut off excess cording, if needed. Invite the children to pray the Lord's Prayer together, suggesting that the children touch each bead in turn as they say the words. Encourage children to take their copy of the prayer with them, so they can use the bracelet at home.

Reflect

What have you and your group learned about the traditions, rituals, and prayers of your church? What, if anything, might hinder the children from fully participating in these rituals, such as church rules? How might these obstacles be addressed?

Relay Races

Basic Instructions

Use masking tape to mark a starting and a finish line.

If you have a small group you only need one team. Larger groups should divide into teams of equal numbers. Have each team line up behind the start line. When the start signal is given, the first player (holding the baton) runs to the finish line and back again, then passes the baton to the second player, who does the same. Repeat until all team members have had a turn, at which point the team sits down.

To make the game noncompetitive, challenge the group to see how fast every member can get through the race. Run the races several times to see if the players can get any faster.

Variations

- *Crab Relay:* Team members crawl backward on all fours to the finish line and back.
- *Frog Relay:* Team members frog hop to the finish line and back.
- *Kangaroo:* Team members jump with both feet together to the finish line and back.
- *One Foot:* Team members hop on one foot to the finish line, switch feet, and hop on the other coming back. (This may be hard for younger participants.)
- *Shuffle:* Team members slide on their behinds to the finish line and back.
- *Between the Knees:* Team members hold the baton between their knees and make their way to the finish line and back.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Most children enjoy serving and doing things for others. They generally want to help and make things better for others. They also want to be a part of something, and being a part of a community that reaches out in love will be attractive to them. The focus of younger children is their immediate family and praying for family members will appeal to them. Older children have a greater sense of the wider world, and they are aware of the suffering and hardships endured by many. These learners often have a burning desire to help in meaningful ways. Some of the children in your group may wonder if praying for others really makes a difference. They might prefer to take action and do something concrete. We can encourage these young disciples to partner prayer and action. We can also share stories of times we were surrounded by the prayers of others and explain how those prayers made a difference in our lives.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Philippians 1:3-4

Leader Preparation

Take time this week to read some current newspapers. What stories disturb your spirit? Now imagine God moving in those situations to bring healing. What would that look like? Pray about these things and imagine your prayers settling over the situation to bring transformation and change. As you pray, listen for the prompting of the Spirit. Are you being called to take action? How?

Prayer: God of love, sometimes the magnitude of the injustice and suffering in the world overwhelms us and all we can do is call out in prayer. Help us to realize that our prayers can accomplish far more than we can even begin to imagine. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Pray It Forward (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look up the following verses and place bookmarks in your Bible so you can find them easily: Genesis 27:28 and Romans 15:13. Cut 8½ x 11” paper into quarters. Make two pieces for each child. Think about times when you needed the prayers of others. Who prayed for you? How did those prayers support and uphold you?

Supplies:

- Bible
- two quarter sheets of paper for each child
- two envelopes for each child
- pens, pencils, crayons, and markers
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- calculators

Talk with the children about their experiences of prayer. Ask: When are times that you pray? What special prayers do you use? Explain that they can pray to God any time, anywhere. They can pray for themselves or for other people and situations. Read the prayers of blessing from Genesis 27:28 and Romans 15:13. Invite learners to think of two friends or family members they would like to pray for this week. Distribute the quarter sheets of paper and have the children print these or similar words in the middle: “I am praying for you this week. Please pass on this prayer by praying for two other people, and ask them to do the same.” Encourage older children to act as scribes for the younger ones. Use crayons or markers to decorate the edges of the paper. Place papers into the envelopes, and help children address them. Use calculators to help figure out how many people might be prayed for in one week if everyone in your group prayed for two people, and the next day those people prayed for two others, and the following day those people also prayed for two others, and so on. Write the numbers or draw stick figures on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard so the children may see the math happening! Encourage children to deliver the envelopes to the people for whom they are praying.



2 The Reading

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “The Reading” by S. Wilson. What feelings and memories does it evoke? What story would you create around this picture? Display the artwork where everyone will be able to see it.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Reading” by S. Wilson, <http://www.art.com/products/p10278691-sa-i852604/s-wilson-the-reading.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+reading+wilson>
- paper and pencils
- illustrated children’s Bibles
- (optional) stuffed animals

Draw the children’s attention to “The Reading” by S. Wilson. Ask everyone to find a comfortable spot where they can see picture. Invite them to spend time looking at the picture. Say, “Imagine yourself in the painting. Tell us a story about the picture with you in it.” Use the following questions to help encourage discussion.

Praying and Making Ritual

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

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

- Who do you think these people might be?
- Where do you think they might be?
- What time of day do you think it is?
- How do you think they are they feeling?
- What do you think they are they reading?

When the children have finished their stories, explain that people have often used the stories from the Bible as a way to share God’s love with others. Invite them to name some of their favorite Bible stories, as they feel comfortable. Ask the children how they might share their stories with their friends and family. Older children might like to write down one of their stories. Younger children could tell their story to an adult to transcribe, or they may enjoy using the illustrated children’s Bibles to tell stories to each other, or to stuffed animals.

③ Praying for the World

Leader preparation: Read recent newspapers or news magazines to identify some places in the world that could use prayer. Use the Internet to gather more information about those places. Use a map or globe and place your hands on those countries bringing them before God in prayer. Be prepared to share with the children the information you have gathered about those places that need prayer.

Supplies:

- Bible
- globe or world map
- information about countries you researched

Gather around the globe or world map. Explain that the world map or globe shows the whole world. Invite the children to point to where they live, places they have visited, and places where people they know live. You may need to assist younger children. Ask for a volunteer to read 1 Timothy 2:1–2 to the group. Ask the children what they think the passage encourages them to do. Share some of the information you have gathered about places in need of prayer. Help the group locate those places on the globe. Brainstorm how you might pray for the people who live there. Have the children place their hands on the map or globe and pray for those places. If you have time, let the children take turns spinning the globe and stopping it with their finger. If you are using a world map, have each child in turn cover his or her eyes, turn around, and then point at the map. Have the group say a brief prayer for the people of the country landed on. If they point to water, they could pray for fishermen, sailors, and others who spend a lot of time on the ocean.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Prayer Musical Chairs (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: On index cards print something that followers of Jesus today might pray for regularly. This might include a good harvest, family, those who are sick, leaders, ministers, those who help others, firefighters, teachers, those who are hungry, those who have no homes, those who are scared, those living where there is war, and so forth. Make enough cards for the number of children in your group. Set the chairs in a circle with the seats facing out. On the back of each chair tape the index cards you have prepared. See “How to Play Musical Chairs,” http://www.ehow.com/how_2044549_play-musical-chairs.html, if necessary.

Supplies:

- chair for each child
- prepared index cards with things to pray about
- tape
- (optional) lively music
- (optional) music player

Play a version of musical chairs, but have the same number of chairs as players and do not remove chairs after each round. Instead, when the music stops, have each child kneel in front of the nearest chair and offer a brief one-sentence prayer for the topic taped to that chair. Be prepared to read the cards for nonreaders. Repeat the action, having the children find a different chair each time the music stops. If you do not have music, choose one player to be the caller. Have the caller close his or her eyes while the other players march around the chairs clapping a steady beat. The caller shouts, “Stop!” to end a round. Have a different caller for each round.

5 Serving and Praying

Leader preparation: Review information about Church World Service Hygiene Kits (http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=kits_hygiene). Talk with your church leadership or congregation’s mission committee so that this project can be coordinated with the church’s outreach program. They may have suggestions for other projects that would be more appropriate for your community. The main focus of this option is to combine outreach and prayer. The Hygiene Kits project is just a suggestion. Make arrangements for someone to prepare the kits for shipping.

Supplies:

- “Letter to Friends and Family,” Attachment: Activity 5, several copies for each child
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Together We Can Change the World,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFy54NmYPyc&feature=related>
- cardboard boxes
- paper
- markers and crayons
- scissors
- glue sticks
- (optional) poster board

Show the YouTube video “Together We Can Change the World.” Invite the children to talk about some things they might do together that could change the world. Ask them how praying together might help change the world. Share the information you have gathered about the Church World Service Hygiene Kits. Invite children to decorate cardboard boxes to act as collection points. Learners could draw pictures of the items in the kits and glue them on the box. They could also decorate the boxes with captions, such as “Together we can change the world” or “You can make a difference!” They might want to create posters to promote the service project. Pray together, both for this project and for those who will be receiving the kits. If possible, arrange for the group to collect the kits that are deposited in the boxes and deliver them to the person who will make the shipment.

6 Community Prayer Walk

Leader preparation: Take pictures of the institutions that serve your community, or gather brochures from these institutions with pictures. These might include places such as a hospital or urgent care center, school, fire station, daycare center, food bank, and so forth. Post these around your learning area or along the hallways to create a “virtual” prayer walk. You may want to actually take the children on a prayer walk around the community. Plan the route ahead of time, recruit extra adults to go with the group, and secure permission slips from each family.

Supplies:

- photographs of institutions that serve your community

Invite the children to pray for their community. Walk around the learning area or along the hallways, pausing at each picture. Invite children to talk about the ways the institution helps the community. Invite the group to pray for the people who work and go there and the service provided at this place.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Oreo Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Twist apart an Oreo. As you eat each chocolate cookie, think of someone close to you to pray for. Lift them in prayer.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) Oreo cookies
- (optional) milk

Have a volunteer read Philippians 1:3–4. Explain to the group that Paul gives us the example of praying for others and shows that we can pray for one another as well. Brainstorm ideas of what to pray about and write them on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the children to describe an Oreo cookie, explaining if necessary that they are made up of two chocolate cookies and a cream center. Divide learners into groups of three. Explain that you are going to say Oreo prayers. The person in the middle is the cream center, and the two people on either side are the chocolate cookies. If there is an extra person, make a couple of groups of four (Double Oreos). That person will say a short (one sentence) prayer for the person to the right and then for the person on the left. Allow time for learners to pray for their partners. Have learners switch places so that everyone has the

opportunity to be the cream center and pray for the other two people in their group. When everyone has had a turn, have a snack of Oreo cookies and milk, if you choose.

8 Prayer Rocks

Leader preparation: Wash and dry rocks or river stones, if necessary. Use pink-ing shears to cut fabric into squares large enough to wrap the rocks. Make a sam-ple prayer rock. Think about a time when the prayers of others encouraged and strengthened you. Be prepared to share your story with the children.

Supplies:

- sample prayer rock
- two small rocks or river stones for each child
- paint pens
- pinking shears
- two fabric squares for each child
- fine tipped markers
- thin ribbon
- small gift tag for each child
- single-hole punch
- rubber bands
- pens

Invite the children to make prayer rocks, one for themselves and one to give away. Have the children choose two rocks and use paint pens to write an encouraging word such as “peace,” “joy,” “hope,” “faith,” “strength,” or “comfort” on their rocks. Have older children write the words for younger children, if necessary. Have the children set aside their rocks to dry. Give them a gift tag and have them print an encouraging message, such as “God hears your prayers” or “I am pray-ing for you” on the tags. Again, older children can help the younger children, as needed. Then follow these instructions:

- Punch a hole in the corner of the tag and thread the tag onto a ribbon.
- Choose two fabric squares.
- Spread out a fabric square and place a rock in the middle.
- Gather the material around the rock and secure it with a rubber band.
- Tie a gift tag on one of the fabric-wrapped rocks.

Explain how our prayers can encourage others and remind them of God’s love and care. Talk about times others prayed for you and how it helped. Encourage children to give their rock to someone who would appreciate a reminder of God’s love and care. Suggest that they might like to pray for that person in the coming week.



9 Pretzel Prayer Reminders

Leader preparation: You will need access to a kitchen for this activity. Make dough or defrost frozen dough so it is ready for the children to use. Read the Pretzel Recipe, <http://gourmetfood.about.com/od/appetizersandsoups1/r/bakedpretzels.htm>, to ensure you know how to shape and bake pretzels. Bake one as a sample. Make copies of the attachment and cut apart the cards.

Note: The pretzels have to bake for 15 minutes and cool for 10 minutes. You might want to select another activity from this Exploration to enjoy during this time.

Supplies:

- sample pretzel
- prepared pretzel dough, enough for each child to make two pretzels
- baking pans
- pastry brushes
- parchment paper
- oven
- cooling racks
- zip-closure plastic bags
- “Pretzel Prayer Cards,” Attachment: Activity 9
- markers or crayons

Show the sample pretzel to the children. Explain that many years ago people crossed their arms over their chests and placed their hands on their shoulders while praying. Ask if they can see that in the shape of the pretzel. Tell them that pretzels were originally made as a reminder to pray and as a treat for children who remembered their prayers. Give each child two sections of pretzel dough. Follow the directions on the online Pretzel Recipe to shape and bake pretzels. While pretzels are baking, distribute the Pretzel Prayer cards for the children to decorate. Remove the pretzels from oven and place on cooling racks. Invite the children to cross their arms over their chest and pray the Pretzel Prayer with you. Enjoy eating the warm snack. Package the remaining pretzels in zip closure plastic bags along with a copy of the Pretzel Prayer. Encourage learners to give a pretzel to a friend and then to pray for that friend every day during the upcoming week.

Reflect

What new experiences of praying and making ritual did you and the children have today? What new understandings about prayer have the children gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group of young disciples, thank God for the gifts each child brought to today’s gathering.

Letter to Friends and Family

Date:

Dear Friend:

Our group at church is supporting the work of Church World Service by collecting Hygiene Kits. In times of natural disasters, or places of violence, or situations of poverty, Hygiene Kits can mean the difference between sickness and health for struggling families. These kits are used both in this country and in places around the world.

Please help us change the world by gathering the following items to make a Hygiene Kit:

- 1 hand towel measuring approximately 16 x 28 inches (no fingertip or bath towels)
- 1 washcloth
- 1 wide-tooth comb
- 1 nail clipper
- 1 bar of soap (bath size in wrapper)
- 1 toothbrush (in original packaging)
- 6 standard-size Band-Aids®

Note : Please do not add toothpaste to the Hygiene Kit. Cartons of toothpaste that have an extended expiration date will be added to Hygiene Kit shipments just prior to shipment.

Place all items in a one-gallon plastic bag with a zipper closure; remove excess air from the bag, and seal.

Please bring the bag to the church by _____.
(date)

We appreciate your prayers, both for this project and for the people who will receive the kits.

With gratitude,

Pretzel Prayer Cards

Loving God, bless us as we eat this pretzel, which reminds us of the first followers of Jesus, who sometimes crossed their arms to pray. Thank you that you always hear our prayers. Help us to remember to talk to you often. Amen.

Loving God, bless us as we eat this pretzel, which reminds us of the first followers of Jesus, who sometimes crossed their arms to pray. Thank you that you always hear our prayers. Help us to remember to talk to you often. Amen.

Loving God, bless us as we eat this pretzel, which reminds us of the first followers of Jesus, who sometimes crossed their arms to pray. Thank you that you always hear our prayers. Help us to remember to talk to you often. Amen.

Loving God, bless us as we eat this pretzel, which reminds us of the first followers of Jesus, who sometimes crossed their arms to pray. Thank you that you always hear our prayers. Help us to remember to talk to you often. Amen.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

The learners in your group will come with very different understandings of the future. Younger learners are just beginning to comprehend the concept of time and don't really have a good understanding of the future. After all, they have only been alive for a short time! Older children have a clear understanding of past, present, and future and may be starting to imagine what the future might hold for them. No matter how hazy their understanding of the future, most children recognize fairness when they see it. Even a five-year-old can articulate what the world might look like if everyone played fairly. We can help these young disciples articulate their dreams for the world and explore what role prayer and ritual might play in bridging the gap between dreams and reality.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

This Exploration invites us to be prophets—to see what is not yet there, based on God’s leading and direction and our hope in God’s presence and activity. In what ways do you discern God’s movement in and through your life, your church, and in people and events around the world? As you prepare to lead this Exploration, remind yourself to listen for God speaking through what the children have to share.

Prayer: God of history, thank you that you have always been with us, are with us today, and promise to be with us forever. Help us to face the future with strength and hope. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Concentration Prayer Game (Easy Prep)

Leader preparation: Make two copies of the Prayer Game, Attachment: Activity 1, on card stock, and cut apart the cards. Shuffle the cards together and secure them with a rubber band. Make one set of cards for each pair of children.

Supplies:

- “Prayer Game Cards,” Attachment: Activity 1—one set for each pair of children

Show the children a set of Prayer Game cards and talk about the pictures with them. Invite the children to share their stories and experiences of each kind of prayer shown on the cards. Invite the children to play a game with the cards that is like the card game “Concentration.” Have the children get into pairs and give each pair a set of Prayer Game cards. Have them lay their cards face down on the table. Explain that the players take turns turning over two cards trying to find a matching pair. If the cards do match, the player keeps them and takes another turn. Cards that do not match are placed face down again, and the other player takes a turn. Have the children play several times, changing partners each time they play. Encourage children to talk about how they might include some of these kinds of prayer into their days.

2 Dancing Our Prayers

Leader preparation: Read Paul’s letter to Philemon, in which Paul appeals for the freedom of Philemon’s slave Onesimus. Onesimus has run away, and Paul asks Philemon to welcome him home as a beloved brother. We do not know the outcome of Paul’s request, but we can be sure that he prayed about it a great deal. Think about someone you know who is in a difficult situation or about a vulnerable group of people in your area, such as homeless families, immigrants, or poor children. What obstacles keep them from living their lives to the fullest? Watch the YouTube video “Just Wanna Praise You.” How might you use this song as a prayer for their freedom?

Supplies:

- Bible—*The Lectionary Story Bible, Year C*, by Ralph Milton (Woodlake Publishing, 2009) is a helpful resource for sharing the letter to Philemon
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Just Wanna Praise You”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIHed68ZDWM&feature=related>

Read Philemon 1:1–9 to the children, or read Philemon’s story from *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year C*. Summarize Paul’s letter to Philemon, if necessary. Ask the children what they know about slavery, making sure they understand that God did not intend for people to live in that kind of relationship with one another. Show the YouTube video Just Wanna Praise You. Encourage children to sing along and feel the rhythm and movement of the music. Explain that shackles are chains attached to a prisoner’s feet or hands, so that they can’t move very well. Engage the children in conversation about the video using the following questions.

- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.
- What are your thoughts, feelings, or impressions of this song?
- What was the songwriter asking God to do?
- How might this song be Onesimus's prayer?
- What kinds of things might imprison people today and stop them from living their lives?
- How might this song help them to pray about those things?

Invite children to work as group to choreograph a liturgical dance to accompany the song. When they are ready to present their dance, ask them to think of a person they know who is going through a hard time, then sing and dance as way of asking God to bring freedom into the situation. If possible make arrangements for the group to share their prayer dance with the congregation.

③ Weaving Prayer into Your Life

Leader preparation: Consider some simple ways to weave prayer and ritual into your everyday life. Be prepared to share them with the children. Review the instructions for creating a woven decoration on the Wilderness Wigwam website "Nature Weaving," <http://www.wilderness-wigwam.com/nature-crafts-for-kids-weaving.html>. Make a sample weaving. Prepare the cardboard rectangles for the children by making the cuts on each end of the cardboard as shown on the website.

Supplies:

- sample weaving
- prepared 5" x 10" strong cardboard rectangle for each child (recycle old grocery boxes or printer paper cartons)
- scissors
- twine
- material to weave through the loom, such as yarn, ribbon, twigs, leaves, feathers, and so forth
- ribbon
- pens

Show the children the nature weaving you made. Give them the prepared cardboard rectangles and explain how to make their weavings by stringing the twine around the cardboard to create a loom and weaving items through the twine to make their weaving. As the children work, invite them to talk about some ways they might weave prayer and ritual into their lives. Ask: *What might you or your families could do each day or week to remember to spend time with God?* When the children have finished weaving, have them print the words "I will weave prayer into my life by . . ." onto some ribbon and complete the sentence. Have them add the ribbon to the weaving.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 Praying the News (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Prayerfully look through newspapers, news magazines, or the Internet to find a news story to include in your prayers this week. Why were you drawn to this story? How does it pull on your spirit? Share with the learners how this experience affected your prayer life.

Supplies:

- variety of current newspapers or news magazines
- paper
- writing and art materials
- (optional) computer with Internet access

Pair readers and nonreaders and distribute newspapers. Share your experiences of praying the news this week and encourage learners to find and read a news story for which they would like to pray. Provide writing and art materials for participants to write or draw a prayer about the issue in the story, or for the people impacted by the news event. Encourage older children to act as scribes for learners still developing their writing skills. Gather in a circle and invite the children to share their prayers.

 **5 Guatemala Processions**

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke. What do you see? What stands out for you in the image? Familiarize yourself with the background information about the painting.

La Duke’s intent is presenting the Guatemalan tradition of a procession of the faithful on All Saints’ Day, celebrated on November 1. This procession includes saints from the cemeteries as they remember those who have gone on before.

There are Christian images and symbols represented in this artwork that connect to the broader Christian faith beyond the celebration of All Saints’ Day.

- Candles are a symbol that can remind us of Christ as the light of the world. They bring to mind the various celebrations that incorporate light and candles, such as Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.
- The figure of Jesus on a donkey in the center of the picture reminds us of the Palm Sunday procession. It is also significant in the Guatemalan procession for All Saints’ because a Christ figure on a donkey leads this procession.
- Birds remind us of God’s creation, but also are a symbol often used for the Holy Spirit.
- The kings near the top of the picture represent the Magi, or wise men, who sought out the Christ-child, celebrated on Epiphany. Epiphany is a tradition that is widely observed in Hispanic cultures.
- The various colored faces may represent the saints who have gone before, but also may be all God’s people in the world.

Imagining the faces as a representation of humanity could well tie in this picture with Joel 2:1. In Joel 2:1 and Joel 2:15 the passage speaks of gathering the people together in an assembly to hear God’s word being spoken to them. The words spoken are ones of warning to the people, urging them to turn back to God, seek forgiveness, and choose life rather than death.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- drawing paper cut into different sizes
- art supplies, such as crayons, markers, colored pencils, pastels, and so forth
- bulletin board or poster board
- glue or stapler

Look together at “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke. Invite children to talk about the painting, allowing them time to discuss whatever features catch their eye. Engage them in conversation about the artwork using the following questions.

- What scenes do you see?
- Why do you think these scenes are all joined together in one picture?
- Where do you see prayer in this piece of art?
- What holidays or celebrations of the church do you see in this picture?

Explain that this picture tells the story of an event that takes place in Central America. Share the background information from the leader preparation. Invite children to share some of the rituals that are part of their family life. Ask how these rituals might be depicted in art. Suggestions might include everything from bedtime rituals, to family prayer rituals, to special family celebrations. Invite children to choose a piece of drawing paper and use the art supplies to create a scene depicting a ritual their family enjoys. Piece the scenes together to create one picture. You might staple them onto a bulletin board or glue them onto a piece of poster board. Admire how all the scenes combine to make one piece of art. Invite the children to talk about new rituals they might like to introduce to their families.



6 Mandala

Leader preparation: Read the background information on the attachment to find out more about the mandala and the mandala rituals in a variety of cultures. Follow the instructions to create your own mandala with the supplies you have collected.

Supplies:

- items that can be used to create patterns within the mandala, such as buttons, marbles, checkers, bottle caps, building blocks, nuts and bolts, washers, scrabble tiles, mosaic tiles, pebbles, glass pebbles, small stones, seed pods
- “Mandala,” Attachment: Activity 6
- paper circle, about the size of a dinner plate, for each child
- (optional) camera
- (optional) hula hoop

Briefly share information about the mandala and how it can be used. Explain that instead of sand, the children may use all the supplies you have gathered. Invite the children to find a place to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Follow the instructions on the attachment to prepare participants for this activity. Distribute paper circles and have children use the items supplied to create their cir-

cles. When everyone has finished, some children may choose to share something about their mandalas and the prayer it represents. If you have a camera, take pictures so the children have a record of their work. When you have finished, quietly dismantle the mandalas.

Option: Instead of making individual mandalas, have the group create a larger community mandala using a hula-hoop to provide a large circle.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prayer Reminder (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Cut poster board into 6" x 10" rectangles. Make one rectangle for each child. On a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard, print the words from *The Message* paraphrase: "Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know" (1 Timothy 2:1a). Think about this verse. How many different ways of praying can you name? Why do you think Paul was so insistent about the need for prayer?

Supplies:

- prepared 1 Timothy 2:1a newsprint or whiteboard
- heavy paper or card stock for each child
- scissors
- crayons and markers
- 6" x 10" poster board for each child
- glue

Draw the children's attention to the newsprint or whiteboard with the 1 Timothy 2:1a verse. Invite a child to read the verse to the group. Tell the children that the Bible is full of stories that remind us that we can talk to God anywhere, and at anytime. Give the children a piece of heavy paper or card stock and invite them to trace around each hand and wrist with their fingers closed. Encourage older children to help the younger children. Have them cut out hands tracings and fold them at the wrists. Younger children may need assistance with cutting. Invite the children to decorate their hand cutouts with crayons and markers. Distribute poster board bases. Have children copy the 1 Timothy 2:1a Bible verse around the edge of their bases. Have them glue hand cutouts together at the fingertips and attach wrists to the bases, so the hands stand up and look as if they are folded in prayer. As they work, talk about all the different ways they might pray. Encourage the children to put their praying hands in a special place at home to remind family members to pray every way they know how, for everyone they know.

8 Bubble Prayers

Leader preparation: Go to the Bubble Town website "Bubble Formula" and make bubble solution for the children to use. Find a place where you can blow bubbles. Note that bubble mixture can make the floor slippery, so you may want to do this activity outside. Go to the Bubble Town website "Bubble Tube," <http://www.zurqui.com/crinfocus/bubble/tube.html>, and make a bubble tube to blow the bubbles. How might you incorporate breath prayers into your daily routine?

Supplies:

- bubble mixture from “Bubble Formula,” <http://www.zurqui.com/crinfo-cus/bubble/form.html>
- paper
- masking tape
- scissors

Show the children how to make a bubble tube. Use the tubes to blow bubbles galore! Draw attention to the way the bubbles float through the air and then burst. After the children have played for a while, observe that it takes one breath to blow a bubble. Explain that there is a form of praying called breath prayers. These are prayers that can be said in one breath, such as “Bring peace to the world, Oh God,” or “Holy Spirit, come.” As the children continue to blow bubbles, encourage them to say a breath prayer before blowing. After a few minutes invite children to imagine what the world would be like if everyone followed in God’s loving ways. Encourage them to take a deep breath, say one thing that would happen in this new world, such as no more war, no more sickness, a world filled with giggles, or everyone playing, and then blow out a stream of bubbles. Ask them to imagine the bubbles floating across the world carrying their hopes and dreams, then bursting and showering the people below with God’s love.



Ⓢ If I Could Fly . . .

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold. Reflect on the statements: “If I could fly, I would . . .” and “A world lived in fairness would have . . .”

Supplies:

- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://www.art.com/products/p10310201-sa-i797333/faith-ringgold-tar-beach-ii.htm>

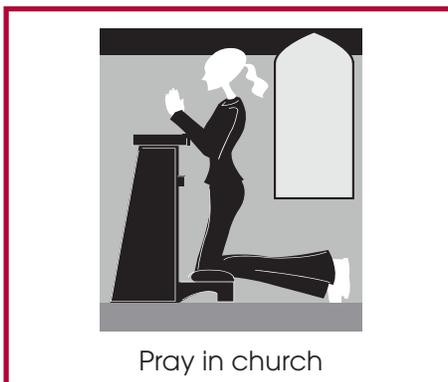
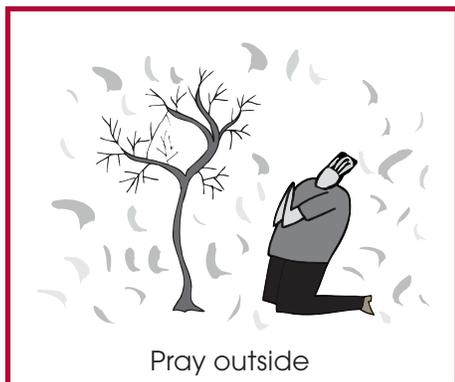
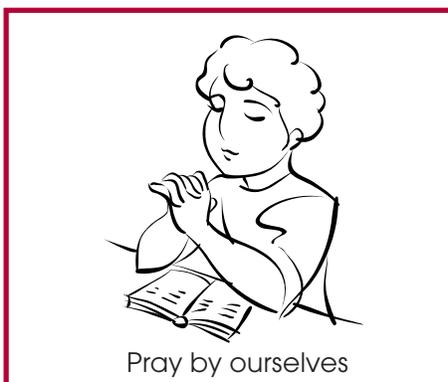
Gather around the “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold and invite children to describe what they see. Point to the figures on the roof, the flying figures, and the bridge. Ask children to look at the buildings and talk about how they are similar and different from buildings in your area. Mention that this is a picture of a dream. Explain that in her dream a young girl, Cassie, flies above the city escaping unfairness. Comment that dreams are a gift from God, given to us as way of imagining different ways of living. One at a time, invite participants to finish the following statements: “If I could fly, I would . . .” and “A world lived in fairness would have . . .” Finish your time together with a short prayer: *Loving God, may the whole world begin to live in fairness. Amen.* Challenge the children to be on the lookout for signs of fairness in the coming week.

Reflect

In what ways did you hear God speaking through the prophetic voices of the children today? What ideas did they have for practicing prayer and ritual as they face the future? What new ways of praying did you discover today?

Attachment: Activity 1

Prayer Games Cards



Mandala

The word “mandala” means a “special circle.” In many different countries people create mandalas as a way of praying or showing something about their beliefs. Some doctors have their patients make a mandala to help them express feelings they have trouble talking about. In Tibet, mandalas for peace are created in sand. The Navajo create similar sand paintings to heal sickness. When they are finished, they take the picture apart and sweep up the sand. Sometimes they sweep it into some water as a special blessing. They do this to remind themselves that everything in the world is always changing and the sand won’t stay the same forever. It starts out just as sand, then becomes a beautiful work of art, and then goes right back to being sand. But when they’re finished, the sand is special because it came from their art and it knows their prayers.

A meditation before making a mandala: Have children find a place to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Invite God to join you by praying aloud in a way that is comfortable for you. Read the following, pausing between each direction.

- Take three, slow deep breaths and imagine God’s Spirit filling you with love from head to toe.
- Think about something sad that is happening in the world, something that you want to see change. Imagine God’s Spirit moving in the world to answer that prayer.
- Imagine God’s Spirit bringing love into that situation.
- Now imagine God’s Spirit forming a big circle, a circle of love in that place.
- You are standing in the middle of the circle. Think about what it looks like and what it feels like.
- When you are ready, open your eyes. Use the items in the containers to make a picture of your circle. You can do whatever you wish with your circle. Don’t worry about making mistakes. Trust that God is with you and whatever you do with your circle is right.