

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Patterns and routines help children to follow along and know what to expect as well as what is expected from them. Children also need to have safe opportunities to explore or experience different ways of doing things. Reviewing and learning the ways in which prayer and ritual are used in your setting will give them a strong basis for discovering their own personal prayer rituals.

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 ritual may go beyond words. From a fearful cry in the dark to the joyful laughter of celebration, prayer is an expression of our heart and innermost being. From the reflex of folded or outstretched hands in prayer to the many layers liturgy may have, ritual is a pattern etched into our lives.

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

Leader Preparation

Spend time thinking about when and how you pray. What are the rituals your family and your congregation observe? How do prayer and ritual mark the rhythm of your day, week, or life? In the passage from Joshua twelve stones are set up as a reminder of what God had done for the Israelites, not only on that day, but also in their past and as a teaching tool for the future. Does your family have any mementos that trigger conversation about your family history? Pray for yourself and the children you will be leading as you begin to explore this faith practice.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for this opportunity to come closer to you. Open my heart and my ears that I may follow your path. Help me to guide these children as we start this new phase of our faith journey together. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 What Are Prayer and Ritual? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about your own definitions of prayer and ritual. Gather your supplies and tape the newsprint to the wall in your meeting space. Choose several verses on prayer from the Bible concordance for the children to look up during the activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- dictionary
- tape
- two sheets of newsprint
- markers
- Bible concordance

Ask the children to describe what prayer is. Affirm and write all answers on the newsprint. Have a volunteer look up the definition of “prayer” in the dictionary and read it aloud. Ask the children if this definition gives them any additional ideas to add to their list. Show the children the Bible concordance and explain that it is a reference tool that alphabetically lists key words used in the Bible and their verse citations. Ask a volunteer to look up “prayer” in the Bible concordance and share with the group its variations listed in the concordance, such as “pray,” “prayed,” and so forth. Pass the Bible concordance to the person to the right and ask that person to count how many times the word “prayer” is used in the Bible.

Write down the verses you chose for the children to find. Ask for volunteers to find each of these verses in their Bibles and read them to the group.

Repeat the procedure with the word “ritual.” Ask the children to describe ritual and write their answers on the second sheet of newsprint. Have a volunteer read the definition of “ritual” from the dictionary. Then, instead of using the Bible concordance, since the references to “ritual” in the Bible are all about ritual offerings and cleansing primarily from Leviticus, invite the children to make a list of some of the rituals you use in your group, your congregation, and your families. Remember that your church’s order of worship is a ritual.

2 Remembering Twelve Stones

Leader preparation: Read Joshua 4:1-7, 19-24. Joshua used the twelve stones to create a monument that would serve as a reminder to the people of what God had done for them. It was to be the conversation starter for teaching the children about their history and about the greatness of God. It also helped to establish God’s support of Joshua’s leadership.

If necessary, make paper bag stones by stuffing crumbled newspaper into paper lunch bags or grocery sacks (depending how big you want your stones). Seal the bags with tape. Cover a box with gold or yellow paper. This could be a shoebox or something larger. Review the attachment “Twelve Stones Script” and think about how you will assign parts. Depending on the number of children you have, some parts may be shared. If your schedule permits, maybe your group would like to share this skit with another group.

- 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.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Twelve Stones Script,” Attachment: Activity 2
- box covered in gold or yellow paper
- 12 blocks, paper-bag “stones,” or rocks the children can carry
- blue fabric or plastic tablecloth
- (optional) simple biblical costumes

Invite the children to act out a story from the Bible. Assign parts and distribute costumes, if you are using them. Hand out scripts to the children with parts, keeping one for yourself to direct the action. Invite several children without parts to help you set the stage by laying out the blue fabric or tablecloth and placing the stones in the riverbed. Encourage the children to read the parts with their best dramatic voices. If you will present this drama to another group, you may want to run through it several times, or you may want to give others a turn with the different parts. Afterward, ask your group why they think God wanted the people to be sure to share this story with their children.

3 Standing in the Need of Prayer

Leader preparation: Check your hymnal to see if it contains the song “Standing in the Need of Prayer” (tune: Need of Prayer). If not, find a copy of the lyrics. Print the lyrics on a sheet of newsprint and display them in the meeting space. Watch the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer” and familiarize yourself with the video.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- hymnals or prepared newsprint with “Standing in the Need of Prayer” lyrics, http://www.scriptureandmusic.com/Music/Text_Files/Standing_In_The_Need_Of_Prayer.html
- video: “Standing in the Need of Prayer,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P2YEC-ochc&feature=related>
- rhythm instruments

Invite the children to read the words of the song “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” Ask them to think about something for which they need to pray. Explain that they do not need to share, but they can just have something in mind. Invite the children to watch the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” Have the group sing the song through once. Tell the children that when they sing it a second time, you will point to each child when you sing the words “It’s me!” and they should shout out the words on their turn. Hand out the rhythm instruments and sing the song a third time, inviting the children to play the instruments as you sing together. If you have time, have the group discuss how singing can be like praying. Close with a prayer asking God to be with each child, mentioning each by name. You might also include those who are not with you during this session.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 Wants and Needs Game (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 23. Look at it in several different versions if you have them available. Think about the things you want and the things you need. How different are those two lists? What do you trust God to supply you with the things you need? How easy will it be for your group to differentiate between their wants and needs? Write “Wants” and “Needs” on separate pieces of paper and post on opposite walls in your space.

Supplies:

- Bibles, several different versions if possible
- prepared “Wants” and “Needs” signs
- “Wants and Needs Game,” Attachment: Activity 4

Invite the group to look at one of the most famous psalms in the Bible. Hand out Bibles and have the children turn to Psalm 23. Ask for volunteers to read Psalm 23. Listen to it in several different versions if you have them. After hearing the whole psalm, invite the children to go back and look at the psalm one verse at a time. Ask them what they think the need is that God is filling in each verse. Invite the group to play the “Wants and Needs” game. Tell them that you will call out different things and they should decide if it is a “want” or a “need” for them and move to the side of the room where you have posted the signs “Wants” or “Needs.” Use the attachment as a guide to play the game. Close with a prayer, giving each child a chance to say something for which he or she wants to thank God.

**5 When Do We Pray or Make Ritual?**

Leader preparation: Think about when you pray. Are there ritual times when you pray, such as before meals or at bedtime? What daily rituals do you have? Separate the pages from a calendar. Display the calendar pages, the page from a day planner, and the attachment “Seasons of the Church Year” on a wall or bulletin board in your space.

Supplies:

- page from a day planner with a list of hours in the day
- calendar that can be taken apart
- “Seasons of the Church Year,” Attachment: Activity 5
- tape
- pencils or markers

Ask the children about the times of day they are most likely to pray and have them mark the times on the day planner page. Remind them that they can pray any time, but that many people do have set times. Using the calendar pages, ask the children what some of the special times of the year are that they observe personally or in their families. Draw their attention to the attachment “Seasons of the Church Year.” Ask the children if they see any patterns or similarities between the seasons of the church year and the times celebrated throughout the calendar year. Ask if anyone has any joys or concerns that she or he would like to share with the group. Close with a prayer, being sure to mention each joy or concern mentioned.

6 The Reading

Leader preparation: Spend time looking at the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson and think about how it makes you feel. What story would you create around this picture? Display the artwork where everyone will be able to see it.

Supplies:

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

Draw the children’s attention to the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson. Play the background music and ask everyone to find a comfortable spot where all can see picture. Invite them to spend some time looking at the picture and to imagine themselves in the painting. Hand out the paper and pencils and invite the children to write a short story about the picture, either about the scene they see or imagining themselves in the picture. Use the following questions to help them think about their stories.

- Who are the people?
- Where are they?
- What time of day is it?
- How are they feeling?
- What are they reading?

When the children have finished their stories, tell them that people have always used stories as a way to share their faith and history. Invite them to share them with the group, as they feel comfortable. Ask the children how they might share their stories with the others in your congregation.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Create a Prayer Space (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: What do you have a special place that you like to use for prayer? What makes it special for you? Gather a variety of items that the children can use to create a prayer space, or know where the items can be found in your setting so the children can set up a prayer space.

Supplies:

- Bible
- items for a prayer space, such as tablecloth or fabric, cross, candle, bowl for placing prayer requests in, paper and pencil, nature items, inspirational pictures or sayings, cushions or mats to sit on

Talk with your group about places to pray. Tell them that although they can pray anytime anywhere, it is nice to have a place where they can be focused on God, a place where they feel safe enough to share what is in their hearts, and a space where it may be quiet enough to hear God speak to them. Ask the children what kinds of things they would like to have in a prayer space. Using the items you

have gathered, invite the children to create a special area in your space that will be used for prayer. Your group may want to add to this space as you continue to explore this faith practice.



8 Ways to Pray

Leader preparation: The Bible describes many different ways to pray. In this activity your group will experience four of those ways. Try them at home so that you are comfortable with helping your group try them. If your church has moveable prayer kneelers, you may want to bring them to your room or have small pillows or mats for each child to kneel on. Mark each of the passages suggested on the attachment “Ways to Pray” that will be read today. There will be other “Ways to Pray” prayer postures in Context and Mission Activity 1 of this Faith Practice.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Ways to Pray,” Attachment: Activity 8
- (optional) prayer kneeler, pillows, or mats for each child

Tell your group that God always hears our prayers. Sometimes we can use our bodies to help us pray. Ask them about some ways they can think of to pray. The Bible mentions a number of different ways that people prayed. Explain that they are going to try out four of those ways. Use the attachment to guide the children through this experience. Afterward, ask the children how they felt about these different ways of praying. Were some of the postures new ideas for them? Encourage the children to find ways that work best for them when they pray. Tell them that sometimes the way they feel may influence their postures of prayer.



9 Prayer Rocks

Leader preparation: The rocks for this activity should not be polished rocks, because the paint will not adhere. Cover the table(s) with newspaper or a plastic tablecloth. Make copies of the attachment on card stock. Cut apart cards. Make a card for each child.

Supplies:

- one rock for each child, about 2–3 inches long
- permanent markers, paint pens, or acrylic paints and brushes
- old shirts, plastic aprons, or paint smocks
- newspaper or plastic tablecloth(s)
- “Morning and Evening Reminder Cards,” Attachment: Activity 9

Give everyone a rock and have each child put on an old shirt to protect his or her clothing if you are using paints. Invite them to make prayer rocks. Instruct them that if they place the rock on their pillows every day when they make their beds, when they go to bed at night their rocks will serve as a reminder to pray and say goodnight to God before going to sleep. Every night when the children take their rocks off their pillows and place them on the floor where they will step in the morning, they will be reminded to say good morning to God. Invite the children to decorate their rocks with the supplies you have provided. Give each child a “Morning and Evening Reminder Card” to take home.

Reflect

As you worked through this Exploration, did you discover some things about prayer that you hadn't thought of before? Did you find new ways to pray? Are the children in your group feeling comfortable with the experiences? Pray for each of them, asking God to help all of you stretch and grow.

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Attachment: Activity 2

Twelve Stones Script
Based on Joshua 4

Characters (five or more):

- Narrator
- Joshua
- Priests (one or more)
- Representative for each of the twelve tribes (parts may be doubled as needed)
- Children (one or more)

Props:

- box wrapped in gold or yellow paper for the Ark of the Covenant
- twelve blocks or paper-bag stones
- blue fabric or plastic tablecloth to be the river

Costumes (optional)

- robes or large shirts
- pillow cases, dish towels, or pieces of fabric to use as head coverings
- lengths of rope, fabric, or ties to use as belts and to secure head coverings

Setting: The Jordan River

(Place the twelve rocks on the floor and cover with the blue fabric or tablecloth.)

The Story:

The people are gathered on one side of the river. Joshua is in the crowd. The priests are carrying the Ark of the Covenant.

Narrator: For forty years Moses had led the Israelites from Egypt, through the wilderness toward the land that God had promised them. Moses died before reaching the promised land, but before he did he blessed Joshua and made him the new leader for the Israelites. *(Joshua steps to the front of the people.)*

Joshua led the people to the Jordan River, and then God spoke to him. God told Joshua that when the priests carrying the ark stepped into the Jordan River, the waters would pile up behind them.

(Priests carrying the ark step toward the river as two people pull the fabric back, making a clearing to walk through the waters. The priests stand between the pile of water and the stones.)

Joshua: People of Israel, see, God made the waters pile up so that we may cross on dry land. It is the same thing God did for us so that we could cross the Red Sea. As long as the priests stand in the riverbed, it will be safe for everyone. As you cross the dry river, one person from each tribe is to pick up a stone and carry it across. These stones will remind us of what God has done for us. When our children ask what these stones mean, we will tell them the story of how God piled up the waters of the Jordan so that we could cross in safety.

(People cross in front of the priests, picking up the stones one at a time to carry across.)

Narrator: After the people had crossed and carried the twelve stones to the other side, the priests stepped out of the riverbed, and the water flowed again.

(The priests step out while two people spread the fabric back in place.)

Narrator: Joshua stacked the stones to make a memorial for the people.

(Joshua arranges the stones in a small circle.)

Child or Children: *(point to the stones)* What are these twelve stones for?

All: These twelve stones remind us that God brought us safely out of the wilderness and across the Jordan River to the land that God had promised to us.

Attachment: Activity 4

Wants and Needs Game

Post the word “Wants” on one side of the room and the word “Needs” on the other side.

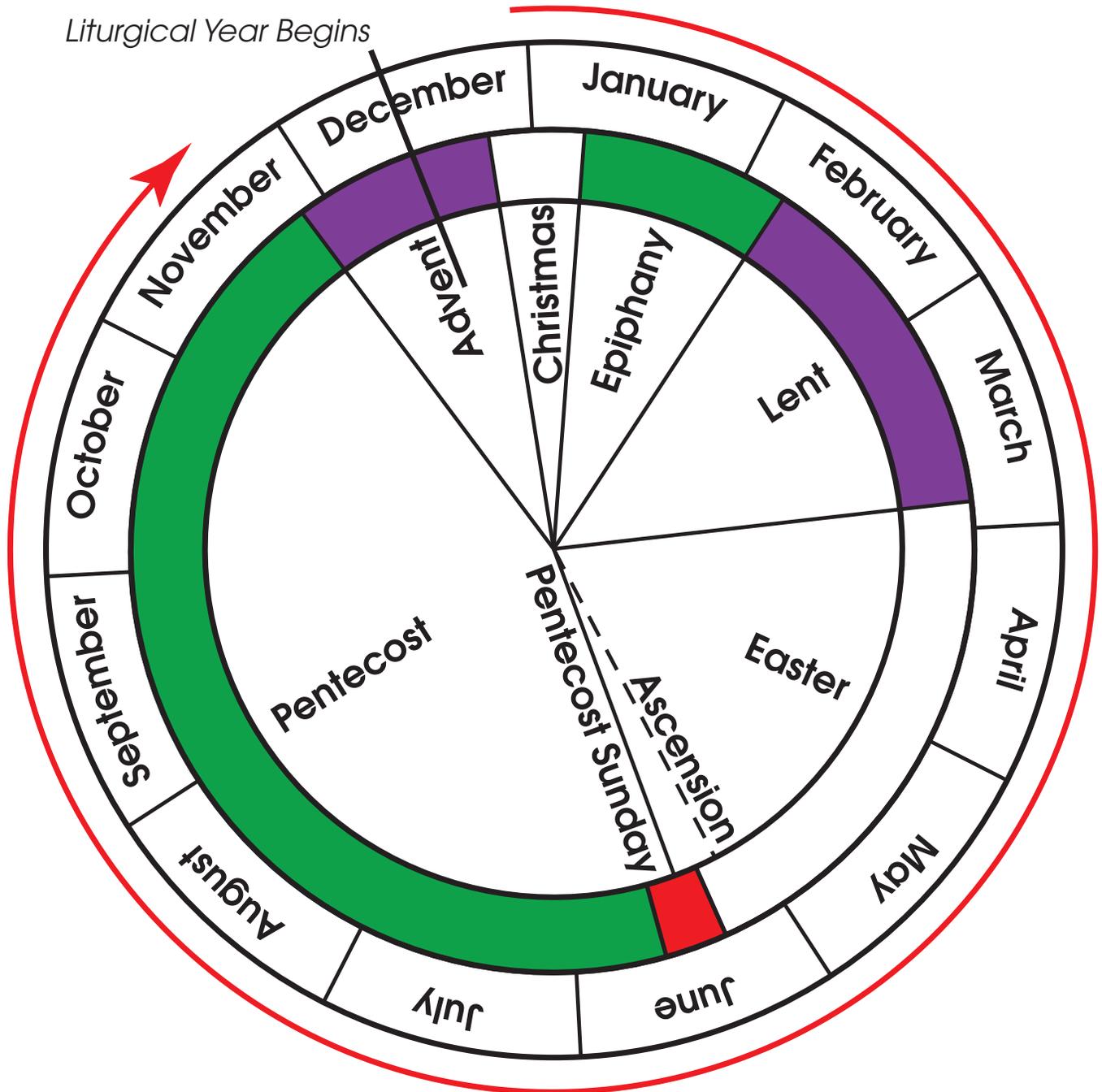
Have the children stand in the middle of the room. As you read through the list of words, they should decide if it is a “want” or a “need” and move to that side of the room. If they don’t think it is either, they can stay in the middle. As you go through the list, you might want to discuss why they think something is a want or need, especially if the group is split. However, be careful not to be judgmental about a child’s choice or let others ridicule them.

Add to the list whatever movies, music, toys, or fashion items are the current craze.

clothes
car
food
trees
house
Wii or another electronic game
soft drinks (cola, soda, pop)
pets
bed
popcorn
TVs
cell phones
fruits
iPod or another electronic device
medicine
friends
family
sunshine
air conditioning

Attachment: Activity 5

Seasons of the Church Year





Ways to Pray

1. **Bowing in Prayer**—Exodus 34:6–9. Have someone serve as narrator, someone read the words of God, and someone read the words of Moses. All should bow their heads when directed. Bowing our heads is a way of showing respect and paying homage to someone.
2. **Kneeling in Prayer**—Daniel 6:10 and Luke 22:41. Have someone read each of these verses. Let the group know that the first verse is about Daniel before he was put in the lions' den and that the second verse is about Jesus before he was betrayed. Kneeling is a way of humbling ourselves before God. We think of getting on our knees as something we do to ask or plead for something. Ask your group to think about something they would like for God to help them with or someone that they would like God to help. Encourage them to get down on their knees and offer a short silent prayer.
3. **Standing in Prayer**—Mark 11:25. These are the words of Jesus. Have the group stand as they listen to someone read the verse. Ask them to think about someone they need to forgive or need to ask forgiveness of. Standing to pray can be a sign of respect. It is also a reminder that we can pray anytime and anywhere.
4. **Praying Alone**—Matthew 6:6 and 14:23. In the first passage Jesus is telling us not to make a big deal out of praying in front of others. Instead we should pray privately. In the second passage Jesus models what he has said. Ask everyone to find a spot in the room where they can be comfortable and by themselves. Have them listen as someone reads the passages. Spend a few minutes in silent prayer. Close by saying, "In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

Attachment: Activity 9

Morning and Evening Reminder Cards



Morning: When you make your bed in the morning place this rock on your pillow. At night it will remind you to thank God for the good things that happened and share what is in your heart.



Evening: When you get in bed at night place the rock on the floor so that you will feel it when you get up in the morning. It will remind you to praise God for a new day and ask for guidance in all you do.



Morning: When you make your bed in the morning place this rock on your pillow. At night it will remind you to thank God for the good things that happened and share what is in your heart.



Evening: When you get in bed at night place the rock on the floor so that you will feel it when you get up in the morning. It will remind you to praise God for a new day and ask for guidance in all you do.



Morning: When you make your bed in the morning place this rock on your pillow. At night it will remind you to thank God for the good things that happened and share what is in your heart.



Evening: When you get in bed at night place the rock on the floor so that you will feel it when you get up in the morning. It will remind you to praise God for a new day and ask for guidance in all you do.



Morning: When you make your bed in the morning place this rock on your pillow. At night it will remind you to thank God for the good things that happened and share what is in your heart.



Evening: When you get in bed at night place the rock on the floor so that you will feel it when you get up in the morning. It will remind you to praise God for a new day and ask for guidance in all you do.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The natural exuberance of children lends itself well to prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Younger children in this group will feel contrite when they have done something wrong and may seek forgiveness, while older children may have learned to hide behind a wall of defensiveness. All of them will have some trouble discerning between wants and needs and understanding that God sees a bigger picture than they can imagine.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Read the scripture passages several times. Are they similar in any way? Ask someone to pray for you and the children as you prepare to lead them in this Exploration.

Prayer: *Gracious God, you have given me so much. Thank you. Please let your Holy Spirit be with me as I work with these children. Let all that we do and say be acceptable 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.



1 Hand Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–13 several times. What part of this passage speaks to you the most? Lift up each member of your group to God in prayer.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- construction paper in a variety of colors
- scissors
- pencils and pens
- tape

Have the children trace their hands on the colored paper of their choice. On the left hand outline starting with the little finger have them write “Self”; ring finger, “Others”; middle finger, “Thanks”; index finger, “Forgiveness”; and thumb, “Praise.” Have them cut out both hands, match them up, and tape down the side of the little fingers so that they will open as if both palms are up. Across the palms have them write “Ask. Search. Knock. In Jesus name we pray.” On the right hand fingers have them write a word or phrase that will remind them of something they want to pray about that corresponds to the words on the front of the left hand. Read Luke 11:1–13 together.



2 Baptism

Leader preparation: Spend time looking at the artwork “The Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West. Invite your pastor to come talk with your group about what baptism means and how you celebrate it within your congregation. If that is not possible, discuss with the pastor what information he or she would want you to share with the children. If possible, arrange to visit the sanctuary and look at the baptismal font or pool. Gather other posters or photographs showing baptisms. You might want to check with your church historian or search the Internet if there are not any pictures available in your supply files. Be aware that not all of the children in your group may be baptized or have witnessed a baptism. It is also possible that some in your group come from backgrounds that observe different rituals than does your church.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/261288992?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15627&store_id=1401
- pictures and/or photographs of baptisms
- items that your church uses during baptisms, such as special candles, pitcher, towel, robes, and so forth

If the pastor is able to participate, introduce her or him and invite the pastor to talk with the group about baptism. If the pastor is not available, share the information you were given. If you are able, visit the sanctuary to see where baptisms are performed or look at the special items that are used. Ask the group to share what experiences they have had with baptism. Remind them that not all churches

use the same rituals and methods. Invite the group to study “The Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West, as well as any other pictures or photographs you were able to locate. Show them to the children and ask them how they are alike and how are they different. Ask them what symbols they see in the different pictures.

3 Our Daily Bread

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–13 and Exodus 16:4, 11–16. Think about what you had to eat yesterday. Did you really need all that you ate? Did you have leftovers? Is there anyone in your group who might not be getting enough food or who has just enough to get by? Be sensitive to their feelings during the discussion.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- variety of breads and crackers, including pita and matzo, if possible
- napkins or paper plates
- paper and pencils

Have the group read Luke 11:1–4 and Exodus 16:4, 11–16. Tell the group that as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness with Moses, God provided enough food for each day. Distribute the paper and pencils and have everyone make a list of all of the food they ate yesterday. Ask the children the following questions about the food they ate yesterday. Be sure to include snacks as well as meals.

- Did you have more food than you really needed?
- Were there any leftovers?
- What happened to the leftovers?
- What food did you really need yesterday?
- What food could you have done without eating?

Explain that we frequently have more food than we really need, along with foods that are fun to eat, but not really necessary. In his prayer Jesus tells us to ask God for our daily bread—not what we need for the next week, but just what we need for the day. Ask if anyone has a special prayer that his or her family uses before meals at home that he or she would share with the group before your snack. Enjoy some “daily bread” together.

Extension activity: You could also talk about how “daily bread” can mean anything. That we can ask for God’s help one day at a time as we try to do better with our homework or getting along with a brother or sister, and so forth.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Yes. No. Wait. (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Print the attachment “Situation Cards” and cut the cards apart. Familiarize yourself with the situations and think about your answers. Would your answer change if you knew more about the situation? How does seeing the bigger picture help?

Supplies:

- “Situation Cards,” Attachment: Activity 4

Have the group members take turns drawing the cards and asking the questions to the group. Have the rest of the group decide each answer, choosing from “Yes,” “No,” or “Wait.” Discuss why they made each choice. When might their choice be different? What circumstances might change the answer? For instance, does the choice of video game make a difference in their answer? Tell the children that when we ask God for something, we usually hope for a “Yes” answer, but sometimes God says “No” or “Wait,” just as the people in our lives do. Explain that God knows the big picture while we see only a small part of it. Say a prayer asking God to help you understand when the answer is “no” or “wait.”

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Leader preparation: For what are you thankful?

Supplies:

- construction or plain paper cut in half across the width, at least two pieces for each child
- markers, crayons, pencils
- yarn cut in 14-inch lengths, one per child
- (optional) magazines, scissors, glue

Spend time talking as a group about all the people and things for which they are thankful. You might want to give the group a two-minute time limit and see how many different things they can identify. Give each child at least two pieces of paper, and ask participants to fold them together like a book. On the outside each one should write “Prayers of Thanksgiving” and her or his name. Instruct them that, on the inside, they should draw pictures of what they are thankful for and write short prayers and poems of thanks. Have them tie the yarn around the pages at the fold. Close the activity by saying a prayer thanking God for your time together and for all that you have been given.



Forgiving Dough

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–13. How easy is it to ask for forgiveness? How do you feel when you acknowledge that you have been wrong? How easy is it to forgive others? How do you and the person asking feel when you grant forgiveness? Obtain play dough or make play dough using the recipes on the attachment.

Supplies:

- Bible
- play dough or homemade play dough
- “Play Dough Recipes,” Attachment: Activity 6
- paper plates
- quiet meditative music
- music player

Start the music and hand out the paper plates with play dough on them. Encourage the children to squeeze the dough and play with it as you talk, telling them that they are not making anything special with it. Read Luke 11:1–4 to the group. Ask them what Jesus wants them to do when they do something wrong (ask for forgiveness) and what they should do when someone does something to hurt them in some way (forgive the person who hurt them). Invite the children to think about a time when they did something wrong. How did they feel about it? Have them use the play dough to create something that expresses that feeling. If

they are willing to share, they can talk about those feelings as they work, but do not directly ask anyone. Then have them think about how it feels when they are forgiven for what they did wrong and express that feeling with the play dough. Point out to them that God wants us to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others. Ask them how they think God feels about these things. It is not easy to admit when we are wrong. Say a short prayer asking God to help the children say they are sorry when they need to and to help them forgive others, to ask for forgiveness, and to forgive others.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Praise God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. If your congregation does not use a Doxology following the offering, select one from your church hymnal. You may also use any song of praise with which you and the children might be familiar. Print the words on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. The focus is more on the words and the experience of praising God than on performing. You might use this inclusive language Doxology:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God, all creatures here below.
Praise God for all God's love has done
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) hymnals
- (optional) newsprint or whiteboard with praise song

Have the group read aloud 1 Chronicles 29:10–13. Have the children look at the words to the song you selected. How are the song and the scripture passage similar? We can praise God just as David offered praises to God. Have the group make up some simple movements to the song. Encourage them to use some big sweeping movements. Practice the song and movements several times. If possible, share this with another group or the rest of the congregation.

8 Prayer Boxes

Leader preparation: If you have a younger group, you may want to cover the boxes before your session, or have the paper pre-cut for them. Or, if funds are available, you may want to purchase plastic shoeboxes from a discount or dollar store. You will need one extra box to create a group prayer box as well. Be sensitive to those who might not feel comfortable expressing something.

Supplies:

- shoebox or plastic box for each child and one for the group
- craft paper
- scissors
- tape
- markers, crayons, stickers
- paper cut into quarters or eighths—each child will need one piece of paper for every other member of your group

Explain to the group that they are going to make boxes to keep prayer helps and reminders. Invite the children to cover and decorate the boxes. Have the children write each person's name on a separate piece of paper. Go around the group and give each child a chance to name a joy or concern for which she or he would like others to pray. As the children mention their prayer requests, instruct the other children to write the joy or concern on the paper with that person's name on it. Say a one-sentence prayer about the prayer request and have the children put that paper in their boxes. Remember to create and fill a prayer box for your group as well. Have the children take home the box at the end of this session, or have them keep the boxes in your space to add more prayer requests to as you continue work with this Faith Practice, taking it home at the end.

9 Giving Back

Leader preparation: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–18. Come up with some simple service projects that your group could do. This could be almost anything, from washing windows at the church to picking up litter at a local park. If possible, let the group make the final decision. Depending on the project, make sure you follow safety precautions, have permission forms, have adequate help, and take care that the children are dressed appropriately.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- tape

Have the group read 1 Chronicles 29:14–16. On the newsprint or whiteboard write this at the top: “For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you (1 Chronicles 29:14b).” Lead the group in a short prayer, thanking God for all that they have been given. Ask them to name some ways we can give back to God by doing something for the church or the community. Make a list of ideas, and have the children select a project. Help the children plan the service project.

Reflect

Where have you seen God at work this week? Take a few minutes to lift up a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Attachment: Activity 4

Situation Cards

You are the parent.
Dinner will be in half an hour.
Your child asks to have some cookies.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are the parent.
Your twelve-year-old asks for money to buy a computer game.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are at school.
A classmate asks to borrow a pencil.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are walking down the street.
Someone comes up and asks for money for food.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are the parent.
Your four-year-old asks to cross the street alone.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

A neighbor knocks on your door.
She asks for help getting her cat out of a tree.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are the parent.
Your child asks for a hug.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

A friend calls.
He asks for help studying for a test.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

You are the parent.
Your ten-year-old asks to meet a friend at the park close to your home.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait.

Your younger brother or sister asks you to read a story.
What do you answer? Yes. No. Wait

Play Dough Recipes

Cooked Play Dough

1 cup flour
½ cup salt
1 tablespoon cream of tartar
1 cup water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
food coloring

Combine all ingredients except the food coloring. Stir continuously over low heat for three to five minutes until mixture begins to thicken. Continue stirring until the mixture forms a ball. Remove from heat. If you want different colors, divide into portions before adding the food coloring. Turn onto a floured surface and knead until smooth and even in color. Store in a plastic bag or covered container.

You may need to add more flour or more water to achieve a smooth, pliable consistency. Add only small amounts at a time.

Scented option: Add one envelope of unsweetened powdered drink mix to the ingredients before cooking.

Uncooked Play Dough

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
1 cup water

Mix flour and salt in a large bowl. Slowly add water while mixing until the dry ingredients are uniformly moistened. Remove the mixture from bowl and knead for several minutes.

If you want to have reusable dough, add a tablespoon or so of cooking oil along with the water. This will help to keep it from drying out.

Color option: Add food coloring with water.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are frequently in motion. It is helpful for them to be doing something while praying. Drawing, writing, or movement may help them experience prayer more fully. Understanding how they can incorporate prayer into activity may help them grow as disciples. Participating in the rituals of the church, rather than just witnessing them, makes the rituals more meaningful.

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 to interpret and use to create new rituals in contemporary contexts.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 26:1–11
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24



1 Acrostic Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a sample acrostic using your name.

Leader Preparation

Think about how you incorporate prayer into your everyday life. Is it as natural as breathing? How do you give back to God each day? Think of all the little things that you do for others—even in these little ways you are giving back. Try to remember to praise God as you fix a meal, tie a shoe, or mow the grass.

Prayer: Dear God, I want to be more connected to you. Help me to make prayer a constant part of my life. Be with these children and let them know your love. 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

Supplies:

- sample acrostic with your name
- paper
- pencils
- (optional) newsprint

Explain to the group that an acrostic is a type of poem in which the first letter of each line spells a word, such as your name or the name of a city or a holiday. Hand out the paper and have them write their name in capital letters down the side of the paper. Invite them to use each letter of their name to identify something or someone for which they want to pray, or to write a prayer. For example:

P lease hear me, God.
 A nd help me to be still so that I can hear you.
 U se me to help others
 L et me love others as you love me.

Invite the children to share their acrostics. Share the acrostic you made of your name as well. As an additional or alternative activity, work as a group to come up with acrostics for different types of prayer:

- Petition: What do you want to ask for?
- Intercession: Whom do you want to pray for?
- Forgiveness: What do you need to say “I’m sorry” for?
- Thanksgiving: What do you want to thank God for?

Post the prayers around your space.



2 A Whole Hour of Prayer?

Leader preparation: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16–24. This activity is not meant to last for a whole hour! Each group of children is different, and you will need to decide how long your group can stick with this activity. However, don’t be afraid to challenge them with this. Children will rise to what is expected of them when they are clear about what those expectations are. Set up five stations using the supplies in the following list. Use a larger space, if possible, so that everyone has room to move or sit quietly without being disturbed. Set up your space so that the different stations are not crowded together, allowing space for walking around. You may want to have additional adult helpers for this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pencils and paper
- bell
- small rugs or pillows for sitting on, one or two at each station
- quiet, meditative music
- music player
- (optional) adult helpers

Labyrinth Station

- “Finger Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 2

Praying with Art Station

- paper, markers, crayons

Storybook Station

- assorted children’s books of prayers or Bible stories

Around the World Station

- globe or map, and pictures of children from other countries

Nature Station

- small fountain or bowl of water
- rocks, shells, feathers, and other nature items

Invite someone to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. Tell the children that today you will spend part of your time together praying without ceasing just as Paul told the Thessalonians that they should do. Let them know that this does not mean that they will spend the whole prayer time sitting with their hands folded and their heads bowed! Explain that they will be talking to and listening to God, not to each other. Show them the different stations you set up, and briefly explain what they can do at each station using the following descriptions.

- **Labyrinth Station.** Trace the path of the labyrinth with your finger. Move slowly into the center of the labyrinth, praying about something that concerns you. Pause in the center and give thanks to God for hearing your prayer. Move slowly out from the center, releasing your concern to God.
- **Praying with Art Station.** Use the art supplies to offer a prayer to God.
- **Storybook Station.** Read some prayers or Bible stories.
- **Around the World Station.** Choose a location on the map and say a prayer related to that location. It may be about a concern there or for the children that live in that place.
- **Nature Station.** Look at the water. Hold different items from nature. Look at them closely and consider God’s creation. Say a prayer of thanks for the wonder of creation.

Tell the children that they may sit quietly at a station as long as they want, or they may try out different stations. Explain that the one rule of this time is that they talk with and listen to God, not to each other. Tell them that they may also read their Bibles, write down prayers, or simply walk around quietly as they talk with God. Tell them that you will ring the bell to start the time in prayer, ring it again five minutes before the end of your time together so that they can finish up, and then again when it is time to say “Amen.” As the children move through the stations, you and other helpers may quietly move through the group to help anyone who needs to refocus.



3 Tibetan Monks

Leader preparation: Spend time sitting with the artwork “Tibetan ‘Yellow Monks’” by Landor. Review information on prayer wheels online at: “[Prayer Wheels](#),” or the Wikipedia article “[Prayer Wheel](#)” Watch the YouTube videos “Prayer Wheel” and “Chanting.” Decide how much of the information you will share with your group and if you will use the videos. The chanting video is quite long and is just chanting. You may want to show a small clip of this or use it as background music. Think about your group. Are they exposed to a variety of faiths and cultures in your community or will discussion about how others pray be new to them?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Tibetan Yellow Monks” by Landor, <http://www.art.com/products/p12370511-sa-i1740258/henry-savage-landor-tibetan-yellow-monks-using-prayer-wheels.htm?sorig=0>
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- website: “Prayer Wheels,” <http://www.dharma-haven.org/tibetan/prayer-wheel.htm>
- video: “Prayer Wheel,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1Y1nwbNMLU&feature=related>
- video: “Chanting,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG_I_NuNUVd4&feature=related
- Wikipedia article: “Prayer Wheel,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_wheel

Place the artwork “Tibetan ‘Yellow Monks” by Landor where all can view it comfortably. Spend several minutes looking at it with the chanting playing in the background, if you choose. Do not give any background information. Ask the group to share how the picture makes them feel. Ask who they think the people are and what they are doing. Explain that these are Tibetan monks offering up prayers, and give as much of the background information as you feel will interest the children. Show the YouTube video “Prayer Wheel.” Discuss how different faiths can have similar ways of doing things. Catholic monks use chanting as a means of prayer and worship just as the Tibetan monks do. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul tells Christians to pray without ceasing. Tibetan prayer wheels and Islamic prayer five times a day are examples of how other faith traditions keep prayer as a part of their lives. Talk about what other faiths can teach us about our own Christian faith.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 How Do You Give? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about how you give back to God. This is more than the money you place in the offering plate. It includes all you do for others that demonstrates God’s love for us. Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. If possible, make arrangements for your group to help collect the offering and lead the Prayer of Dedication during a worship service.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- worship bulletin
- offering plate
- slips of paper
- pencils

Invite volunteers to read Deuteronomy 26:1–11 to the group. Ask them which part of the worship service this passage describes and discuss how it differs from the way your congregation collects the offering. You may want to refer to a copy of your worship bulletin. Tell the group that there are many ways to give back to God besides putting money in the offering plate. Pass out the slips of paper and pencils. Place the offering plate in the middle of table. Brainstorm different ways that you give to God, such as bringing in food, volunteering at church or school,

caring for others, helping neighbors, and so forth. Invite the children to write these ideas on the slips of paper and place them in the offering plate. Marvel at all the ways we can give back to God. Have the group write a Prayer of Dedication for their offerings. Let a volunteer read the prayer as another child lifts up the basket filled with offerings or places it in your worship area. If your group will be to help with the offering during worship, spend some time practicing what they need to do. Perhaps the prayer they wrote can be used during the service as well.



5 Breath Prayer

Leader preparation: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. Read some background information on Breath Prayer, <http://www.thefellowship.info/Pray/Prayer-Practices/Breath-Prayer>. Practice saying the suggested breath prayers. Create your own breath prayer and begin to use it.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Breath Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 5
- blank index cards
- pencils

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 together. Tell the group that a breath prayer is a short prayer that can usually be said in the space of one breath in and out. Explain that they can use it all through the day to remember that God is near. It is a way to “pray without ceasing.” Invite the children to try some breath prayers. Go through the list on the attachment, demonstrating how these statements can be said in one breath. Let the group try several together; then let them choose one to try on their own. Ask the group to sit quietly and slowly breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. Tell them to say their breath prayer quietly or silently as they continue to breathe slowly. Gently bring them back together and let them write their prayer on the index cards to take home. If you have an older group, you may want to let them try writing their own breath prayers. If you made the prayer boxes in Scripture Exploration Activity 8, let them know that they may keep their breath prayers there for future use. Keep one copy for the group prayer box if you created one.

6 Spinning Prayers

Leader preparation: Read the background on Tibetan prayer wheels at “Prayer Wheels,” <http://www.dharma-haven.org/tibetan/prayer-wheel.htm> or the Wikipedia article “Prayer Wheels,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_wheel. Make a sample spinner.

Supplies:

- old CD or DVD disc for each child
- (optional) adhesive CD label
- permanent markers
- marble for each child
- bottle cap from pop or water bottles for each child
- glue gun and glue sticks
- (optional) adult helper

Explain to the group that Tibetan monks use prayer wheels as a way of praying. Tell them that they will be making their own version of a prayer wheel. Have the group choose some short prayers, such as “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” or “God be with me today.” Have the children write one of the prayers on

the CD or DVD labels in a spiral fashion. Tell them to attach their labels to the discs. If you don't have labels, the children can write directly on the shiny side of the discs. Have an adult use a hot glue gun to glue a marble to the hole from the bottom side of the disc and a bottle cap over the marble on the top side of the disc. Have the children place their spinners on a flat surface and let them spin! If you made the prayer boxes in Scripture Exploration Activity 8, let them know that they can keep their spinners there for future use. Keep one copy for the group prayer box if you created one.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Freeze Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Arrange your space so that there is as much open area as possible or arrange to use a different space for this activity.

Supplies:

- lively music
- music player

Invite the children to spend a few minutes trying out different prayer postures, such as kneeling, hands folded, hands outstretched, and face lifted to heaven. See how many different postures the group can come up with. Invite everyone to spread out in your space. Explain that when the music starts they can dance and move around, but when the music stops and you call out "Pray!" they are to freeze in an attitude of prayer until the music starts again. Explain that while they are "frozen," you will randomly point to a child and have him or her suggest something that someone might be praying for in that position. You may want to let each person in the group take a turn at starting and stopping the music. When you are done, say a prayer thanking God for friends and fun.

8 Prayer Books

Leader preparation: How do you decide who or what issues you will pray for? Is it a conscious decision or spur of the moment? Do you have a specific time each day when you pray? Do you have something to remind you about whom or what to pray for? Think about your group. Is a daily prayer list of ten people and issues too much? Would five be a better goal? You might want to pre-cut the paper to fit the notebook covers.

Supplies:

- 3" x 5" pocket notebook for each child
- cardstock or construction paper cut to fit the cover
- double-sided tape
- markers and crayons
- pencils or pens
- (optional) stickers
- (optional) rubber stamps and ink pads

Invite the children to make prayer books that can be used to keep a daily list of people and things they want to pray about. Hand out the paper for the cover and have the children decorate it. Discuss with the group the different people as well as national and global issues that they may want to pray for. Suggest that no one can pray about everything every day, but a short list can provide more focus to

their prayers. Fasten the decorated cover to the notebook with the double-sided tape. Have the children turn to the first page, write today's date at the top of the page, and make a list of the people and things they will pray for today. Encourage them to think of people to pray for, personal joys and concerns, joys and concerns of friends and family, and national or global issues. If there is time, they could work on lists for the rest of the week. Encourage them to take the book home and use it on a daily basis.

9 Celebration of Giving

Leader preparation: Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. The week before this session you will want to send out invitations or make phone calls asking everyone to bring a healthy snack to share. Be aware of any food allergies within the group. Purchase some fruits and vegetables that are grown locally. You might want to have some of the fruit and vegetables already cut up along with the whole ones to save time during your session.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- basket with locally available fruits and vegetables
- plates
- napkins
- hand wipes or sanitizer
- knife and cutting board
- festive music
- music player

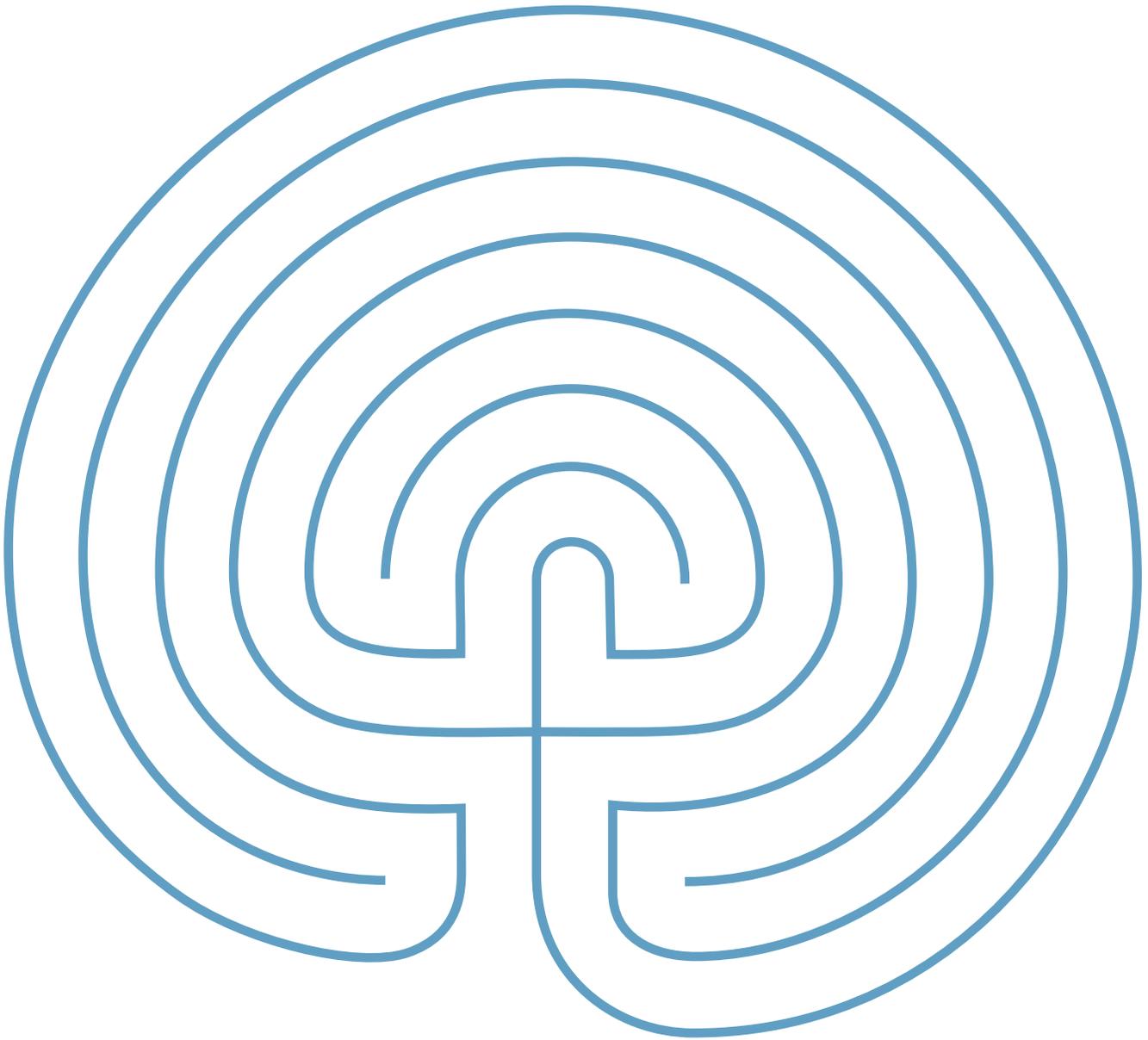
Place the basket of fruits and vegetables in the middle of the group. Invite a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 26:1–11 to the group. Discuss what is grown locally that could be used as first fruits of the harvest to give to God. Invite the children to act out the scripture passage, including the celebration, sharing the “first fruits” as well as the other snacks that have been brought. During the celebration play music and encourage the group to create a simple dance. Have them decide on a movement or movements for the phrase “Thank you God!” that will be a part of the dance. Enjoy the first fruits and vegetables!

Reflect

Are you more aware of ways and times to pray? Are the children becoming more aware of ways that they can pray? Are all of you finding prayer to be something you can enjoy rather than something you have to do?



Finger Labyrinth





Breath Prayers

Be still and know that I am God.

Praise the Lord, for God's love lasts forever.

Creator God, be with me.

God is always with me.

God, grant me peace.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

God, let me listen to you.

Lord, increase my faith.

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Create your own prayer by imagining that you are talking to God. What is the one thing that you would say or ask for? Now think of your favorite name for God. Put the two things together to create your own prayer.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are just beginning to figure out who they are in relation to others. They want to do the same things that youth and adults do. Being able to contribute to the life of the church will make them feel valued. It will also help them to learn the value of doing things for others. They also like the security of knowing that things will be the same each year. They look forward to the rituals around holy days and special times. Older children in this group can help explain these rituals to the younger ones.

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

What are the traditions, rituals, and prayers that you remember from childhood? They may be centered in your experiences of church, school, or family. What traditions, rituals, and prayers does your congregation use? How familiar will the children in your group be with them? Are they able to participate in them, only able to observe, or are they not even around to experience them?

Prayer: God of us all, be with me and the children as we learn more about our faith. Help us to 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 The Prayer of Jesus (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 6:7–15 in several different versions, including *The Message* (see the Attachment: Activity 1). Compare these versions to the version of the Prayer of Jesus, or the Lord’s Prayer, that you use in worship. Print the words to the prayer that you use in your congregation on a sheet of newsprint or poster board. Leave space between each phrase for writing.

Supplies:

- Bibles in various versions
- prepared newsprint or poster board with the Prayer of Jesus
- “The Lord’s Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 1
- crayons or markers

Have volunteers read Matthew 6:7–15 from several different versions of the Bible. Look for ways the versions are the same and different. How do the different versions help you understand what the prayer is saying? Now compare them to the version that you use in your worship services. Talk about how people find comfort in the familiar ways of doing things, but sometimes they forget to think about it really means when they are too comfortable. Working together, have the group consider each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer and write a version of it in words that they understand. Use the attachment if they need help getting started. Invite the children to add decoration and illustration on the newsprint or poster board, creating a poster for your space. You could share this version with the congregation through your newsletter or in worship.

2 Holiday Rituals

Leader preparation: What are the different rituals that your church observes around Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, and other holidays? What items would serve as reminders of each of these rituals? If you are doing this activity at the time of year of a particular holiday, you may want to focus more on those particular rituals. Gather supplies and place them in a box or bag to keep them out of sight.

Supplies:

- items that will remind the group of special holiday rituals, such as a Nativity set or Advent candle wreath, an Easter lily or Easter egg, a christmon, and so forth
- box or bag to place items in
- paper and pencils

Ask your group to think about the different rituals that take place in your church around certain holidays. Focusing on one holiday at a time, bring out the related items one by one. Have someone keep track of the rituals for each holiday. How do these rituals help us to share the stories of our faith? In what ways do they help us to understand our faith better? How can they help us explain our faith to others? Decorate your space with something from each holiday.

 **3 The Last Supper**

Leader preparation: Study 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? Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Does it change the way you feel about the artwork? Think about each member of your group and list something that you remember about each one.

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?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+last+supper+detail+of+food+by+crespi%09>
- paper and pencils

Without telling them the name of artwork, invite the group to spend a few minutes looking at it before asking them what they think it is about. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 aloud while they look at the artwork. Then tell them the name of the artwork. We use the ritual of the communion table as a way to remember not just what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross but also to remember the things he taught us. Have the group make a list of all the things they can think of about Jesus. Ask them to think about how they want others to remember them. Share your list to help them get started.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 The Ritual of Worship (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Think about the order of worship used in your church. Gather copies of worship bulletins from your congregation. If possible, gather copies of worship services with different events happening, such as celebrating Holy Communion or a baptism, welcoming new members, and so forth.

Supplies:

- copies of worship bulletins from your congregation
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Hand out copies of the worship bulletins from your congregation. Invite the children to look through them and on newsprint or a whiteboard list the things that happen in worship in order. As they mention each item, invite the children to share what happens at that time. As children have different bulletins, they may have different orders of worship or items that may not be in a typical Sunday service. Add those items using a different color marker. Ask the children why they think there is an “order” to the worship service and why it changes from time to time. If they attend all or part of your worship services, ask them about their favorite parts and why those are their favorite times. Invite the children to pay attention the next time they are in worship to the different parts of the worship service.



5 Labyrinth Prayer

Leader preparation: Spend time experiencing the finger labyrinth for yourself. If possible, visit a labyrinth. Look at the following websites to learn more about labyrinths: “Labyrinth Society,” <http://labyrinthofsociety.org/>, and the Wikipedia article “Labyrinth,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labyrinth>. Gather pictures of labyrinths and people walking a labyrinth using an internet image search. Decide if you want to make the finger labyrinths more tactile by adding yarn. If so, glue the attachment to heavy paper or poster board. This will take some time to dry and set.

Supplies:

- “Finger Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 5
- pictures of labyrinths and people walking labyrinths
- quiet, meditative music
- music player

If you want to make the finger labyrinth more tactile, add these items to the supply list:

- heavy paper or poster board
- white glue
- yarn

Tell the children that a labyrinth is an ancient tool used for prayer and meditation. Explain that as people go through a labyrinth, they will stop to lift up a prayer or listen for God. They might listen to music as they walk. Show the pictures you found illustrating a variety of designs. Invite the group to find comfortable spots to sit, and give them copies of the finger labyrinth. Turn on the music, and ask them to place a finger at the beginning. Suggest that before they start to move their finger along the path they silently greet God, and that they might want to pause along the way in, when they reach the middle, and on the way out to lift up a prayer or listen for God. Let them know that you will spend five minutes doing this activity. They may want or need to move through the labyrinth more than once. For a more tactile experience, have the children place a line of white glue along the path of the finger labyrinth and then place yarn on the glue. Allow the glue to dry and set.

6 Down in the River to Pray

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video “Down in the River to Pray.” Read Matthew 3:1–17. Think about how your church celebrates a baptism.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- vide: “Down in the River to Pray,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSif77IVOdY&feature=related>
- hymnals with the song “Down to the River to Prayer” (tune: Traditional) or copy of “Down in the River to Pray,” http://www.gospelsonglyrics.org/songs/down_to_the_river_to_pray.html, lyrics for each child

Review the lyrics to the song “Down in the River to Pray” with the children. Show the YouTube video “Down in the River to Pray.” 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 in which you live, baptism can be

associated with sprinkling water on infants or full immersion of older children and adults. Ask the children what is similar and what is different between what they saw in the video and how your congregation celebrates a baptism. Invite the children to act out the song as your group sings or listens to the video again.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Remember Cards (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Decide how many cards your group can make: enough to give one to everyone in the congregation on a Sunday, or enough to scatter through the sanctuary. Notify the appropriate people ahead of time so that the cards won't be collected and thrown away. Ask if the group can give a short explanation about the cards during the service. Write the following phrases on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard.

- God is listening.
- Remember God is available 24/7.
- Don't forget to take your worries to God.
- Talk to God.

Supplies:

- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with phrases
- blank index cards
- markers

Tell the children that all of us need reminders now and then to talk to God. Tell them that they are going to make cards to put in your sanctuary to remind people to pray. Draw their attention to the newsprint or whiteboard on which you wrote some suggested phrases. Ask the children to add their suggestions to the list. Keep the phrases short. Instruct the children to make as many cards as you have determined you need. Encourage them to print neatly and decorate the cards. Have your group distribute the cards in your worship area before the next service. The cards can be sticking out of hymnals or Bibles or scattered on seats. If something is going to be said during the worship service about the cards, decide what will be said and who will say it.

8 Holiday Collection

Leader preparation: We frequently collect items for food baskets or food pantries during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons, but the need can be just as great during other times of the year. These collections can take on the feeling of a ritual, especially if the food is blessed before being delivered. This activity can be done in conjunction with your regular holiday collections or as a new “off season” collection. Coordinate this project with your Mission Committee. Perhaps the entire congregation can participate. Decide on an organization that will receive the collected items and how long your group will be collecting them. Find out if there are any special items needed by the organization you select. Get background information about the organization to share with the children. Arrange for delivery of the donations and have the children help, if possible. You may want to combine this with Context and Mission Exploration Activity 9.

Supplies:

- information about the selected organization
- large boxes or grocery bags
- butcher paper to cover boxes
- tape
- markers, crayons, stickers for decorating
- poster board

Tell the children that they are going to organize a food drive. Tell them about the organization for which they will be collecting items. Explain what the agency does, whom they help, and the kinds of things that they need. Invite the children to create posters, decorate collection boxes or bags, and write a news item for your church newsletter and an announcement to be used during worship. Make sure they include the pertinent information, such as the purpose of the collection, the organization they are collecting for, when items are needed, and what kind of items are needed. Have the group place the bags or boxes and posters in prominent areas where all will see them.

After the food collection is over, have the children gather up the boxes and bags of donations. Lift up a prayer of thanks to God for those who gave and ask that those who receive the items will be blessed. If the rest of the congregation participated in this activity, this blessing could take place during the worship service. Deliver the donations and include the children, if possible.



9 Prayer Beads

Leader preparation: For centuries, Christians have used beads as a tool for prayer. In this activity, participants will weave beads with ribbons to create a chain of prayer beads. Make a sample strand of prayer beads to familiarize yourself with the process.

Supplies:

- “Prayer Bead Directions,” Attachment: Activity 9 for each child
- 20” length of 1/2-inch-wide ribbon in a variety of colors, one ribbon for each child
- “pony” beads in a variety of colors, ten beads for each child
- one jewelry split or spacer ring for each child
- variety of charms, such as crosses, fish, or other Christian symbols, one charm for each child
- needle-nose pliers
- scissors
- ruler
- clipboards

Ask the group to describe what they do with their hands while praying. Explain that in some Christian traditions, people have used beads to help them pray. Show the prayer beads you made. Give each child a copy of the attachment and allow each to choose the color beads, ribbon, and charm he or she would like. Invite them to make a set of prayer beads. Provide assistance as needed. Using the hints on the attachment, invite the children to try different ways of using their prayer beads. Invite them to think of some other ways they might want to include on this list.

Reflect

What have you and your group learned about the traditions, rituals, and prayers of your church? Were you able to find ways for the children to be active in the worship life of the congregation? How do the children and the congregation feel about that?

Attachment: Activity 1

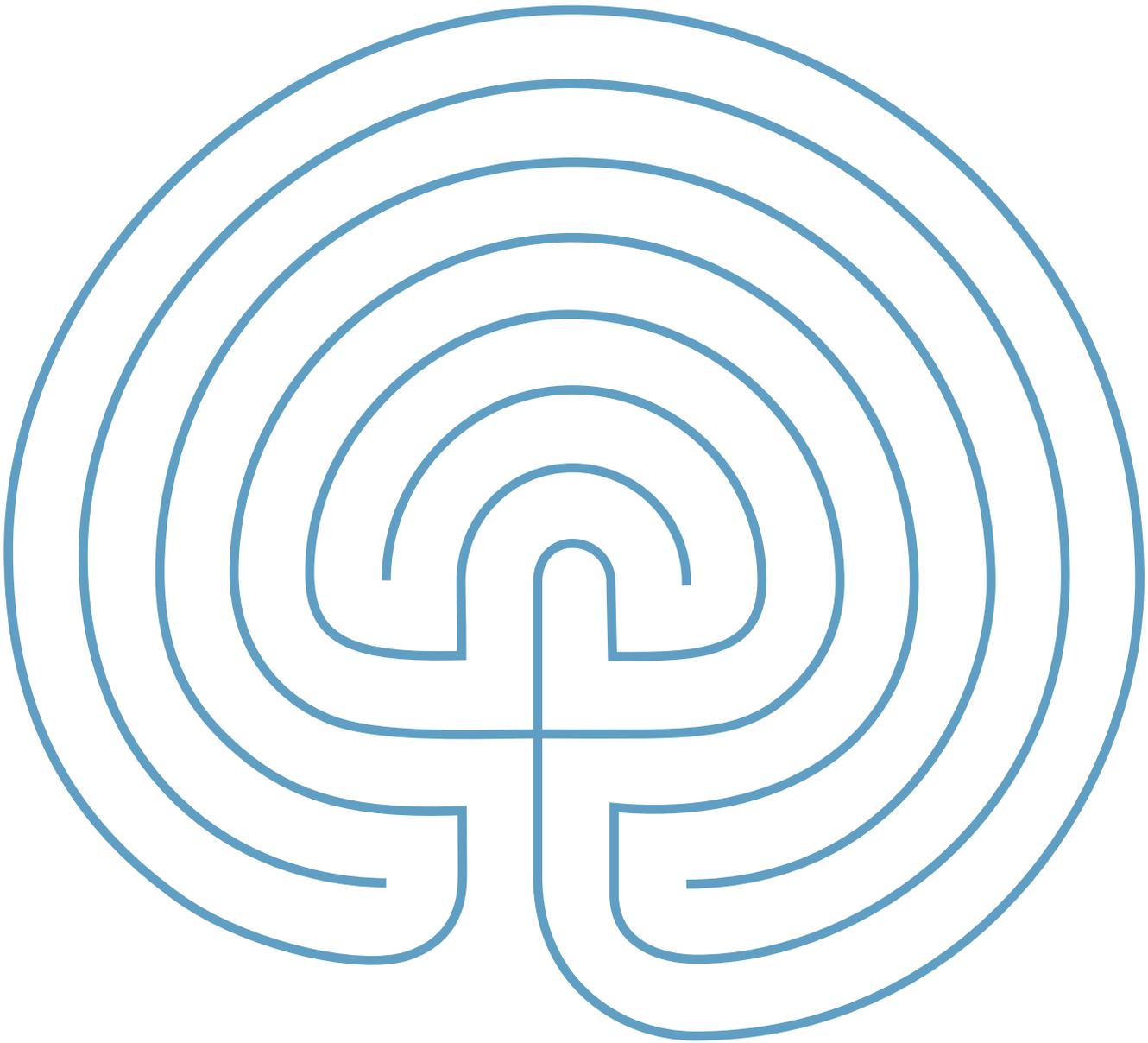
The Lord's Prayer

The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best—
as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes.

Attachment: Activity 5

Finger Labyrinth



Attachment: Activity

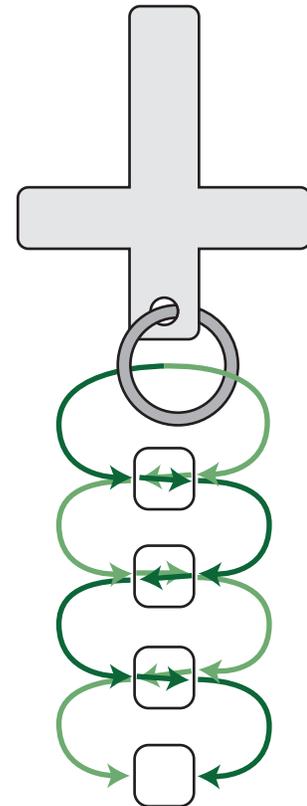
Prayer Bead Directions

Supplies:

- 20-inch length of ribbon, 1/8-inch wide
- 10 pony beads (also called “crow” beads)—size 6 x 9 mm with a 3 mm hole
- one small cross/pendant (approximately 1 inch long)
- one “split” or “spacer” ring
- needle-nose pliers for attaching “spacer rings” to the cross/pendant
- scissors
- ruler
- clipboard for holding your work in place.

Directions:

1. Using needle-nose pliers, insert a “split” or “spacer” ring in the hole in the cross, for the ribbon to go through. (The holes in small crosses and pendants will likely be too small to receive the ribbon.)
2. Clip the cross to a clipboard, with the spacer ring at the bottom. Anchoring your work this way makes it much easier to handle.
3. Cut a 20-inch length of 1/8-inch-wide ribbon and slip it through the spacer ring.
4. Match up the ends of the ribbon so that the center point of the ribbon falls at the spacer ring.
5. Thread each end of the ribbon through the first bead, one end coming from the left, and the other end from the right. The ribbons will cross inside the bead.
6. Pull the ends of the ribbon to tighten the bead up against the spacer ring.
7. After stringing this first bead, you will need to adjust it so that the ribbon ends are once again even at the bottom.
8. Repeat steps 5–7 with each bead, pulling the ribbon snug after each bead.
9. After the last bead is on, line up the ribbons and tie together with a *secure* over-hand knot or square knot. Leave space for the beads to slide. See picture.



After the ribbon is tied, the beads can be pulled, one at a time, toward the knot, as each part of the prayer is offered. Slide them back again for more prayers.

Attachment: Activity 9 (continued)

Prayer Beads

- You might want to list ten things for which you are grateful and thank God for each of them as you slide each bead along.
- You might want to repeat a verse of scripture or a line from a song as you slide each bead.
- You might want to pray for ten friends or family members.
- You might pray for ten countries in the world, or ten arenas of concern.
- You might want to simply slide the beads through your fingers and let your heart, mind, and soul rest and relax!

Helpful Hints

Pony beads (also called “crow beads”) are available on line from Amazon.com and at craft stores. Most are plastic, but better-grade glass pony beads are also available at about four to five times the price of plastic.

Inexpensive pony beads are available in craft stores in variegated packages; but often you can see and feel the rough ridges left from the manufacturing molds. The plastic beads from amazon.com are better quality, smoother to the touch, and one hundred of the same color are about \$1.50. Amazon provides many more color choices.

Small crosses and attractive pendants are available in craft stores—but a bit pricey. Less expensive ones are available on eBay. Be alert for lead content in imported “silver” from China and elsewhere, especially if these will be accessible to young children who might put them in their mouths.

Often the hole at the end of a pendant will not accommodate the 1/8-inch-wide ribbon. You’ll need to get some small spacer rings, or split rings or “double rings” from a craft store. (They come in small packages, miniature versions of the split rings found on key chains.)

The use of ten beads in this set is optional. Here it mirrors the several sections of Roman Catholic rosary beads that are arranged in “decades” of ten.

Submitted by JoAnne Bogart, joanne@bogarhome.net

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Many children need active and physical ways to experience things. They need adults to set the example for them to follow. When they are invited to actively participate in the mission and life of the church, seeds are planted. As the children grow, so will their spiritual 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 local 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

Think about the ways that you are involved in the life and mission of the church. Make it a point to pray for your church every day for a week.

Prayer: *Creator God, you have given me so much. Help me to share my faith with others. 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 Ways to Pray (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Bible describes many different ways to pray. In this activity your group will experience four of those ways. Try them out at home so that you are comfortable with helping your group to try them. You may want to mark each of the passages that will be read today. You will find other prayer postures in Activity 8 of the Discovery Exploration of this Faith Practice.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Ways to Pray,” Attachment: Activity 1
- sheet or tablecloth

Tell your group that God always hears our prayers, but that sometimes we use our bodies to help us pray. Ask them about some of the ways they can think of to pray. Explain that how we feel may guide us in the prayer posture that we use. The Bible mentions a number of different ways that people prayed. Use the attachment to guide you through this experience. Invite volunteers to read the scripture passage(s) and explanation for each posture, and then invite the group to try praying in that way. Some children may feel awkward or embarrassed about some of these postures. Encourage everyone to try them, but do not force them. Your willingness to participate will encourage them. Afterward, ask the children how they felt about the different ways. Were some of the postures new ideas for them? Let them know that each of them needs to find ways to pray that work best for them and that they may use different ways to pray at different times.



2 Palm Sunday or All Saints’ Day?

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “Guatemala Procession” by Betty La Duke. What is your response to it? For more information on the history of All Saints’ Day check your denomination’s website or go to the Wikipedia article “All Saints’ Day.”

Supplies:

- artwork: “Guatemala Procession” by Betty La Duke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- Wikipedia article: “All Saints’Day,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Saints.
- three sheets of newsprint
- tape
- markers

Display the artwork “Guatemala Procession” by Betty La Duke so that everyone in the group can sit comfortably while looking at it. Invite the children to spend three to five minutes just looking. Ask them what feelings they had while looking at the artwork. Cover the artwork with newsprint. Have the group make a list all of the things they can remember on a second piece of newsprint. Uncover the artwork to see how accurate they were. Ask them if any of those things they listed reminds them of any holy days or times celebrated in the church. Make a list of those suggestions on a third sheet of newsprint. Explain that Betty LaDuke was painting the celebration of All Saints’ Day in the village of Chichicastenango,

Guatemala. This celebration is a way for the villagers to remember the saints and their ancestors. They light candles and follow a statue of Jesus entering Jerusalem as it is paraded from the church into the village. This ritual combines two holy days that are months apart: All Saints' Day in November and Palm Sunday in the spring, the week before Easter. Ask the group why they think this might be so. Discuss the rituals your congregation observes on All Saints' Day and Palm Sunday. Say a short prayer, thanking God for those people who have been a part of your congregation, but who have died.

List of possible symbols and holy days in the artwork: Birds—Holy Spirit at Jesus baptism or Pentecost; people across the top—saints for All Saints Day or magi for Epiphany; candles—Advent or All Saints Day; Jesus on donkey—Palm Sunday; angel—various parts of Christmas story.

3 Fly a Kite

Leader preparation: Kites are often used in celebrations to express the winds of the Spirit or prayers sent heavenward. Kites are used in Guatemala for the Day of the Dead celebration, which is an observance of All Saints Day; in Greece at the beginning of Lent; and in Bermuda on Good Friday. Watch the YouTube video "Bermuda—Good Friday Celebration." Read about the tradition of Clean Monday at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clean_Monday and Bermuda Kites, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bermuda_kite. Decide if you will show either of the videos to the children or what information you will share. Make a sample kite using one of these sites: "Wikihow—Kite" or "Big Wind Kites."

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- (optional) video: "Bermuda—Good Friday Celebration," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvtl1nWGZ-8>
- supplies and directions for making a kite from "Wikihow—Kite," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bermuda_kite, or "Big Wind Kites," <http://www.bigwindkites.com/20kids/>
- sample kite

Tell the children that kites are used in many countries. Flying a kite can be part of the celebration rituals for Pentecost, Clean Monday (first Monday in Lent) in Greece, Good Friday/Easter in Bermuda, and Day of the Dead (All Saints'/All Souls' Day) in Guatemala. Show one or both videos, if you choose, and share information you have learned about the kite traditions in the different countries. Suggest that when they feel the wind tugging on a kite, it is easy to imagine the breath of God blowing on it. A high soaring kite can help them visualize prayers going out to God or the spirits of those who have died going to heaven. Show the children the kite you made. Invite the children to make their own kites following your directions. After the kites are made, try flying them outside, if possible, and invite the children to say a prayer while flying their kites.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 Repent and Forgive Game (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Joel 1:1–2, 12–17. You will need a space large enough for your group to stand in a circle with arms outstretched. In the middle of the circle, set up a small worship space on a small table. This can be as simple as a Bible, or you can add a cloth, candle, and cross as well. Print the attachment and cut apart the strips. Make enough strips for every child to have one, even if a few strips repeat. Fold the strips and put them in a basket. Add the basket to the worship space.

Supplies:

- Bible
- prepared worship space
- “Repentance and Forgiveness,” Attachment: Activity 4
- basket

Invite everyone to sit in a circle on the floor around the worship area. Ask a volunteer to read Joel 1:12–13 to the group. Explain that when we do something hurtful or wrong, we are turning our backs on God. When we ask for forgiveness from others or from God, we are repenting, or turning ourselves around to face God. When we practice our faith by praying, Bible study, and doing things for others, we are changing our lives and moving closer to God. Tell the children to stand and take a step back into a larger circle, facing the center. Tell them that God is represented by the worship area in the center. Invite them to pick a “Repentance and Forgiveness” strip from the basket one at a time and read it aloud. They must decide if the action will bring them one step closer to God, or if they will turn their back on God. When everyone has had a turn, ask the children facing outward how they feel. Read Joel 1:15–16 to the group, and ask the children facing inward to go to those facing outward, turn them around, and bring them to the center while you read verse 13. Invite them to hold hands and repeat the following prayer after you, phrase by phrase:

*Gracious God,
when we do something wrong,
help us to turn around and make it right.
Forgive us when we move away from you.
Let us forgive others who hurt us.
Thank you for loving us so much.
Amen.*

5 Global Spin

Leader preparation: Find out what missions your congregation or denomination supports on local, national, and global levels. Collect brochures and pictures or locate websites that will help explain them to your group. You may want to locate the states and countries these missions are in on the globe or map before the session so that you can find them easily.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- globe or world map
- information on local, national, and global missions
- small round stickers
- blindfold

Talk with your group about the different missions your congregation and denomination support. Use the brochures, pictures, or websites to help them understand more about each mission. Invite the children to locate the states or countries served by these missions on the globe or map and mark them with stickers. Let the children take turns spinning the globe and stopping it with their finger. Ask them to say a brief prayer for the people of the country or state they land on. If they land in water, they can pick one of the missions to pray for or pray for people who live or work on the water, such as sailors, people who fish for a living, oil workers, conservationists, and so forth. If you are using a world map, have the children cover their eyes with the blindfold, turn around a couple of times, and point at the map.

⑥ Sandy Prayer Garden

Leader preparation: Prepare a sample garden.

Supplies:

- sandwich-sized plastic food storage container with lids for each child
- clean play sand
- cups
- plastic fork for each child
- small rocks or marbles
- small artificial flowers or figures
- tape
- marker

Invite the children to make a prayer garden. Give each child a plastic container, lid, and fork. Label the container or lid with the tape and marker. Invite them to fill their containers about halfway with sand. Ask them to sit quietly, close their eyes, and clear their minds. Say a short prayer asking God to be with each of you as you create pathways and designs in your sand gardens with the forks. After a few minutes of quiet, invite them to add some decorative touches with the rocks, marbles, flowers or figures. As they create the sandy gardens, ask them if anyone has a flower or vegetable garden that he or she helps plant and cultivate. Discuss how working in the garden can be a way to spend time with God. Tell them that the lid needs to be able to snap on so that they can get their garden home without spilling. Tell them that the gardens can be a way for them to slow down and focus on God.

Sending & Serving Activities

 7 Praying for Others (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 1:3–4. Find out who is on your congregation’s prayer list or shut-in list and decide how much if any background information is appropriate to share with your group. If you have a young group, or long list, you may want to write the names on the slips of paper ahead of time. Prepare a simple worship space with a cloth, cross, and Bible. If you are using candles, arrange them on your worship space.

Supplies:

- Bible
- congregational prayer list or shut-in list
- slip of paper for each person on the list
- (optional) candle for each person on the list
- matches, if using candles
- pencils
- prepared worship space
- paper
- markers or crayons
- envelopes and stamps
- church directory

Invite someone to read Philippians 1:3–4 to the group. Explain to the children that Paul gives us the example of praying for others and that they are going to be praying prayers of intercession. Explain that these are prayers for others, especially those who are hurting in a physical or emotional way. As you go through the list of names with the group, if you have not already done so, ask children to write the names on the slips of paper. Give whatever appropriate background information you can about the person and why each needs prayers. Distribute the name slips among your group and gather around the worship area. Tell them they will be given the chance to lift up that person by reading the name and placing it on the worship table. Begin the prayer by saying: “Loving and Gracious God, we ask you to be with . . .” As the children say the names and place the slips down, you, or they, may light a candle for each person, if you are using candles. End the prayer by saying: “Please be with these people in their time of need. Amen.” Send the slips with names on them home with the children and ask them to continue to pray for the person every day for the next week.

Sending Cards: If you choose, have each child make a card for the person he or she prayed for. The card could say “You were prayed for today” and have a cheerful drawing or design on it. It could be signed by the child or come from the group. Collect the cards and make sure they are mailed or delivered to the appropriate people.



8 Pretzel Praise

Leader preparation: The total time for shaping, resting, and baking pretzels is 45 minutes. Thaw dough and divide into twelve sections per loaf. Decide to whom the group will give the Pretzel Praise bags and how many you will need. Make as many copies of the attachment as you need, and cut apart the cards.

Supplies:

- “Pretzel Recipe,” Attachment: Activity 8a
- “Pretzel Praise Cards,” Attachment 8b
- ingredients and supplies for making pretzels
- bag(s) of small pretzels
- snack size plastic bags
- markers or crayons
- scissors
- tape or stapler

Show the group one of the small pretzels and ask if they know what pretzels have to do with praying. Tell them that long ago people would pray by crossing their arms and placing their hands on their shoulders. Ask if they can see that in the shape of the pretzel. Share with them that pretzels were originally made as a reminder to pray during Lent and as a treat for children who remembered their prayers. Tell them that you will be making pretzels for a snack as well as bagging up pretzels to give to others. Follow the recipe on the attachment to make pretzels. While the pretzels are resting and baking, tell the children that they are going to make up bags of pretzels to give away to remind people to pray. Have them put ten small pretzels in each bag to give away. Have the children decorate the “Pretzel Praise” cards and attach one to each bag. When the homemade pretzels are done, invite everyone to share something wonderful she or he has seen this week, with the whole group responding, “Praise God!” Enjoy the warm pretzels, and have the children distribute the bags of small pretzels to another group or to family members.

9 Feeding Others Prayer Walk

Leader preparation: This activity will require at least two sessions to complete. You may want to combine it with Christian Tradition Exploration Activity 8. Depending on the size and age of your group, you will need to have at least one other adult with you. You will need to notify parents or guardians a week ahead so that they can sign permission forms and make sure the children are appropriately dressed for the weather. Decide on the date you will deliver information and when you will be back to pick up donations. Decide on the route you will take, the number of cards you will need, and the safety measures you will use to cross streets and stay together. Make arrangements for the food to be delivered.

Supplies:

- adult helper(s)
- permission form for each child
- blank index cards
- pens and pencils
- crayons or markers
- wagon(s) or car(s), as appropriate
- grocery bags or boxes

Tell the children that they will be walking around the neighborhood and giving people cards explaining that they are collecting food for a particular organization and will be back on a certain day and time to pick up any donations. Have

the children make cards with the following information.

- Who: [group from your congregation]
- What: collecting canned goods for [name of organization]
- What is needed: [list particular donations that are needed]
- When: pick up donations on [date and time]; food may be left by door

Make sure you have signed permission forms for each child, that everyone is appropriately dressed, and that they understand whatever safety measures you will be using. As you walk let the children take turns leaving the cards tucked under door handles or other appropriate places and saying a brief prayer asking God to be with the people who live there. When you return to your space, create thank-you cards that can be left when you pick up the donations.

On the day of your collection again make sure you have signed permission forms for each child, that everyone is appropriately dressed, and that they understand whatever safety measures you will be using. Take the wagon(s) or car(s), as appropriate, and thank-you cards, leaving a card at each house that leaves a donation. As you walk pause to marvel at different things you see along the way and to thank God for each donation given. When you return, have the group pack up the donations in bags or boxes. Gather around it and say a prayer, asking God to bless those who will receive it.

Reflect

Which activity did you and your group, enjoy the most? In what ways do you feel that you and your group are growing spiritually?



Attachment: Activity 1

Ways to Pray

1. Prostrate in Prayer

Invite a volunteer each to read Deuteronomy 9:18 and Daniel 8:17 to the group.

Lying on the ground in front of someone is even more humbling than being on your knees. Moses is afraid for the people of Israel because they have sinned against God. Daniel is having a vision in which he sees the angel Gabriel, and he is afraid.

Invite the children to lie on the floor on their stomachs with their arms outstretched and say a short prayer.

2. Silently

Invite a child to read 1 Samuel 1:13 aloud to the group.

Hannah prays earnestly and silently to God for a son. This verse also reminds us that we should not be quick to judge others.

Invite the children to spend a few minutes praying silently. They may stand or sit.

3. Standing with Hands Lifted

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Kings 8:22 and another to read 1 Timothy 2:8 to the group.

Solomon stands before God and the people with his hands lifted to heaven. Paul says that people should pray with hands raised without anger or argument. We lift our hands as a way to reach out to God and to open ourselves to God's leading.

Invite the children to lift their hands and say a prayer of praise or one asking for God's help.

4. Laying on of Hands

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 19:13–15 and another to read Acts 6:6 to the group.

It is not unusual for people to hold hands with or to place their hands on the shoulders, head, or arm of someone for whom they are praying. This is a way of letting the person feel the prayer as well as hear it.

Invite the children to take turns placing their hands on the shoulders or arms of other members in your group and ask God to bless that person.



Attachment: Activity 4

Repentance and Forgiveness

Say mean things to a friend.

Hide your younger sister's favorite toy.

Don't let the dog out when you are asked.

Poke the person in front of you and blame it on someone else.

Throw trash on the ground.

Borrow your older brother's iPod without asking.

Laugh at the kid who forgot his lunch (or doesn't have the money to buy lunch).

Get mad when your parents won't let you watch TV.

Pray to God every day.

Ask your friend to forgive you when you hurt him or her.

Ask God to forgive you.

Help unload the dishwasher without being asked.

Sit with the kid who always sits alone.

Read the Bible regularly.

Find out how you can help others in your community.

Forgive someone who has hurt you, even if the person doesn't ask you to.



Attachment: Activity 8a

Pretzel Recipe

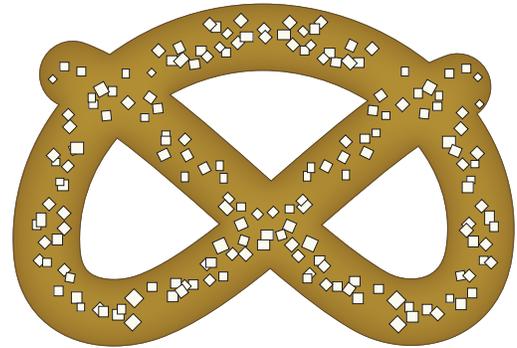
12 servings

Ingredients

- 16-oz. frozen bread dough—white or whole wheat—thawed overnight in refrigerator
- water
- coarse or kosher salt
- aluminum foil or parchment paper
- baking sheets

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Give each child a piece of foil or parchment paper on which to work.
- Divide dough into twelve pieces, giving one to each child.
- Have them roll out the dough into a long rope.
- Show them how to fold the dough around, cross over, and pinch ends to middle section to make traditional pretzel shape.
- Sprinkle lightly with water and then with salt.
- Place on baking sheet, leaving 2 inches between each pretzel.
- Let stand for 20 minutes.
- Bake for approximately 20 minutes, until golden brown.
- Let cool and enjoy.



Attachment: Activity 8b

Pretzel Praise Cards

Here is a bag of pretzels
Shaped liked praying arms.
Every time you eat one,
Say a prayer of praise to God.

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Shaped liked praying arms.
Every time you eat one,
Say a prayer of praise to God.

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Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are moving from being self-centered to being more aware of the world around them. However, with the twenty-four hour news cycle and technology connections of today, it is possible that children will feel overwhelmed or become immune to the issues of the world. Guidance and encouragement will help them understand that they can make a difference, that even small actions can have a big effect.

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

Read both scriptures several times and from several versions if possible. The website biblegateway.com, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>, has many versions and you can even view versions side by side. Think about your vision for the future of the children you are working with, your church, and the world. Dream big—don't let anything get in the way.

Prayer: Creator God, give us the faith and courage to take the steps, both large and small, that will make a difference in the world. 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 Guided Meditation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the attachment several times so that you are familiar with it. Read it out loud, speaking softly and slowly. Be sure the pauses are long enough for the children to create the pictures in their minds. Print the attachment and cut apart the paragraphs to make cards. Make a “Guided Meditation” card for each child.

Supplies:

- “Guided Meditation,” Attachment: Activity 1
- prepared “Guided Meditation” card from attachment for each child

Explain to the group that a guided meditation is a way of focusing on God. It can help them become aware of God’s presence and help them to keep that feeling with them. Invite them to find a comfortable spot within your space where they are not too close to others. Let them know that this is a time of quiet. Speaking slowly and softly, lead them through the meditation using the attachment. Once you have finished and all have opened their eyes, ask if anyone would be willing to share about his or her experience. Give the children copies of “Guided Meditation” cards so that they can use them at home. If you made the prayer boxes in Scripture Exploration Activity 8, let them know that they can keep it there for future use. Keep one copy for the group prayer box if you created one.

2 Wash, O God

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters.” If this song is not in your hymnal, print and copy “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” lyrics for each child.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UBS1AEs_dg
- hymnals with the song “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” or copy “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” lyrics for each child, <http://www.justsomeslyrics.com/823745/Oleta-Adams-Wash,-O-God,-Our-Sons-%26-Daught-Lyrics>

Show the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters.” Play it a second time, but turn off the sound. Play it a third time, instructing the group to close their eyes and just listen to the music. Encourage them to share their reactions to this piece using the following questions.

- How did it make you feel?
- What did you especially like, or dislike, about it?

Invite the children to look at the words. Read the song one verse at a time. After each verse ask what it makes them think of. Ask them in what ways this song is like a prayer.



3 Creation Art

Leader preparation: Study the artwork “No Traveller’s Borne” by Jess. What do you notice? What do you think it means? How does it make you feel? Will you have enough space for every child to paint at the same time and to lay the paintings out to dry, or will you need to find another location to work? Mix a few drops of liquid dish detergent with each container of paint for easier cleanup. Cover the tables, and possibly the floor in your space.

Supplies:

- artwork: “No Traveller’s Borne” by Jess, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- heavy paper, approximately 18” x 24”, for each child
- tempera paint in a variety of colors
- liquid dish detergent
- paintbrushes
- newspaper or plastic tablecloths for tables and floor
- paint shirts or smocks
- tubs of water for cleanup
- paper towels or rags

Invite the children to spend a few minutes looking at the artwork No Traveller’s Borne by Jess. Ask them what they see in the picture. What do they think it means? How does it make them feel? Invite them to close their eyes and imagine how they would like the world to look in the future. Let them know that this can be a vision of the entire earth or just a small area. When they have a vision, they may start painting. As they work, encourage them to share their ideas. Give them a warning several minutes before it will be time to clean up so that they can finish. When the artwork is dry, display it for others to see.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Mandala Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The mandala is an ancient symbol representing the universe and wholeness. Mandalas are used by several religions, and mandala forms can be found in Christian art, most obviously in rose-shaped stained glass windows. Coloring a mandala can be a way to become focused and centered in your time with God. Take the time to do this activity yourself before doing it with the group. More pictures and information can be found at the Wikipedia article “Mandalas,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandalas>.

Supplies:

- “Mandala,” Attachment: Activity 4
- colored pencils or fine point markers
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector

Show your mandala to the group. Share the above information with them and, if you wish, you can also show pictures of different mandalas from the Wikipedia article "Mandalas." Ask the children to think of a person or situation for which they would like to pray. Hand out the copies of the attachment and the pencils or markers. Invite the children to talk to God about the person(s) or situation they thought of as they color in the mandala.



5 Lectio Divina

Leader preparation: Try lectio divina yourself before leading the group. How did it speak to you?

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Lectio Divina," Attachment: Activity 5, two copies for each child
- clipboards or magazines as a writing surface
- pencils

Invite everyone to find a comfortable seated position. Explain that today they will use lectio divina (LEX-ee-oh dih-VEE-nuh) as a way to listen to a Bible passage. Let them know that this is a way to listen to God and help figure out what God is saying to them personally through a scripture passage. Read Philemon 1:4–9 (Fi-LEE-mon) to the group. Give the children a copy of the attachment, pencils, and items to write on. Lead the children in the lectio divina using the following directions.

- Invite them to read the prayer in the middle of the page with you.
- Ask them to listen to the scripture passage and write down a word or phrase that is important to them. Read Philemon 1:4–9 again to the children.
- Invite them to write everything that comes to mind when they think about this word or phrase.
- Read the passage one more time.
- Invite them to talk with God about whatever comes to mind. After an appropriate amount of time say, "Amen."
- Invite everyone to take a deep breath and just sit with God for a moment.

After you have finished the lectio divina, ask if anyone would like to share her or his experience with the group. Tell the children that they can do this practice of lectio divina on their own with any Bible passage. Give them another copy of the attachment to take home. If you made the prayer boxes in Scripture Exploration Activity 8, let them know that they can keep it there for future use. Keep one copy for the group prayer box, if you created one.

6 Bubble Prayers

Leader preparation: If you want to try the bubble cluster, it will be easier if you add a few drops of glycerin to each container of bubble solution.

Supplies:

- 4-oz bottles of bubble solution
- bubble wands for each child
- (optional) glycerin

Blowing bubbles is not only fun, but a way to relax and connect with God. The children can watch the bubbles filled with prayers float away. Inside or outside, when the bubbles burst the prayers are released to God. Give everyone a bubble wand and container of bubble solution. Ask them to think of something or someone they want to pray for. This can be a prayer for help or a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Tell them to hold that thing or person in their mind as they gently blow bubbles. Invite them to watch in wonder as the bubbles float around and burst, releasing the prayers. You can try a group prayer by deciding on one person or thing. The first person blows a bubble; the next person catches it on a wand and blows another, and so on, until you have a cluster of bubbles. This can take a little practice, but don't let it become frustrating. At the end of the activity praise God for bubbles and fun together.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer Catchers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a sample prayer catcher using the Attachment 7a. A blank diagram is provided on Attachment 7b if the children would like to make their own prayer catchers.

Supplies:

- “Prayer Catcher,” Attachment: Activity 7a
- “Blank Prayer Catcher,” Attachment: Activity 7b
- crayons or markers
- scissors

Give the children copies of the prayer catcher attachment and invite them to color them as they wish. Tell the children to keep the instructions for folding the prayer catchers before they cut them out and toss the scraps. Instruct the children to cut out the prayer catcher and fold them according to the directions. Divide the group into pairs, inviting one child hold the prayer catcher with the corners closed and the other choose the sides. The “chooser” picks a side and the “holder” opens and closes the prayer catcher while spelling the word that was chosen. The “chooser” picks an inside side and the “holder” opens the flap, revealing a prayer activity the children should do. Have the children trade places so that each child has a turn as “chooser” and “holder.” Encourage them to use their prayer catchers at home with family and friends. They may want to design their own prayer catcher using specific people or situations, or other activities. Give each child a copy of a blank prayer catcher to take home. If you made the prayer boxes in Scripture Exploration Activity 8, let them know that they can keep it there for future use. Keep one copy for the group prayer box, if you created one.

8 Prayers for the World

Leader preparation: Cut out pictures of current world situations from the newspaper or news magazines. Have at least one picture for each child.

Supplies:

- world situation pictures, at least one for each child
- blank index cards
- pencils

Spread out the pictures and invite each child to choose a picture. As they look at their pictures, invite the children think about how it makes them feel. Ask what they would like to pray to God about based on this picture. Hand out the index cards and pencils. Ask the children to write their prayer for the world on the card. Invite the children to read their prayers aloud. If possible, share the prayers with your congregation either in worship or through your newsletter.

9 Worries and Blessings

Leader preparation: What are some things you worry about? How hard is it to let go of your worries and turn them over to God? How have you been blessed by God? Take a few minutes to lift those worries and blessings up to God. Now that you have named them, do you feel differently about them? Blessing bowls are small shallow bowls that may be purchased online, but any bowl will do.

Supplies:

- blessing bowl
- cup or other container filled with water
- eyedropper or spoon
- access to a sink or outdoors

Invite the children to name some of their worries. Reassure them that everyone worries about something at sometime. Tell the group that sometimes it is hard to let go of our worries, that sometimes we get so worried we forget to remember our blessings. Let them know that today's activity will help them to do both. Place the blessing bowl and cup of water in the center of the group. Have the children think of one or two things that they are worried about. As you go around the group invite them to take a few drops of water from the container using the eyedropper or spoon and put the drops in the blessing bowl as they say, "I am worried about . . ." If someone does not want to share verbally, encourage that child to say it silently. When everyone has had a chance, carefully carry the bowl filled with "worries" to a sink or outdoors. As you pour the "worries" down the drain or on the ground say, "Loving God, here are the things that [name each child and don't forget yourself] are worried about. We give our worries to you." Return to your space and ask the children to think of some way in which they are blessed, something or someone in their lives that is really good. As you go around the group this time, each will again move a few drops of water from the container to the blessing bowl as she or he says, "I am blessed because . . ." When all have had a chance to add their blessings to the bowl, lift it up and say, "Wonderful God, thank you for our blessings." Invite the child on your left to hold out the back of his or her hand. Dip your finger in the water of the blessing bowl; make a cross on the back of the child's hand and say, "God be with you this week." Ask that child to do the same for the next child and so on around the circle.

Reflect

In what ways has your prayer life been enriched by working with this group?

Attachment: Activity 1

Guided Meditation

Close your eyes and be aware of your breathing. *(pause)* Take a deep breath in *(pause)* and let it out slowly. Again, a deep breath in *(pause)* and slowly let it out. One more time, in *(pause)* and out. *(pause)*

Imagine that you are in your favorite place. It may be a comfy chair, your room, or under a tree. Wherever that place is, imagine yourself sitting there. *(pause)*

Now imagine that the people you really care about are there with you. It may be your parents or grandparents, your brothers or sisters, your best friend. There is room for all of them to be with you. *(pause)*

Imagine that Jesus joins you. *(pause)* Feel the love that he brings. *(pause)* It looks like there is a glowing light all around. *(pause)* You feel completely at peace. *(pause)*

Jesus smiles at you. *(pause)* He gives you a hug. *(pause)* He waves good-bye because he must go visit with others, but even though he leaves, the light, the love, and the peace stay with you. *(pause)*

One by one each of your family members and friends must leave too. As they go they are surrounded by the light and peace of Jesus, but the light and peace that you feel is just as strong as when Jesus was with you. *(longer pause)*

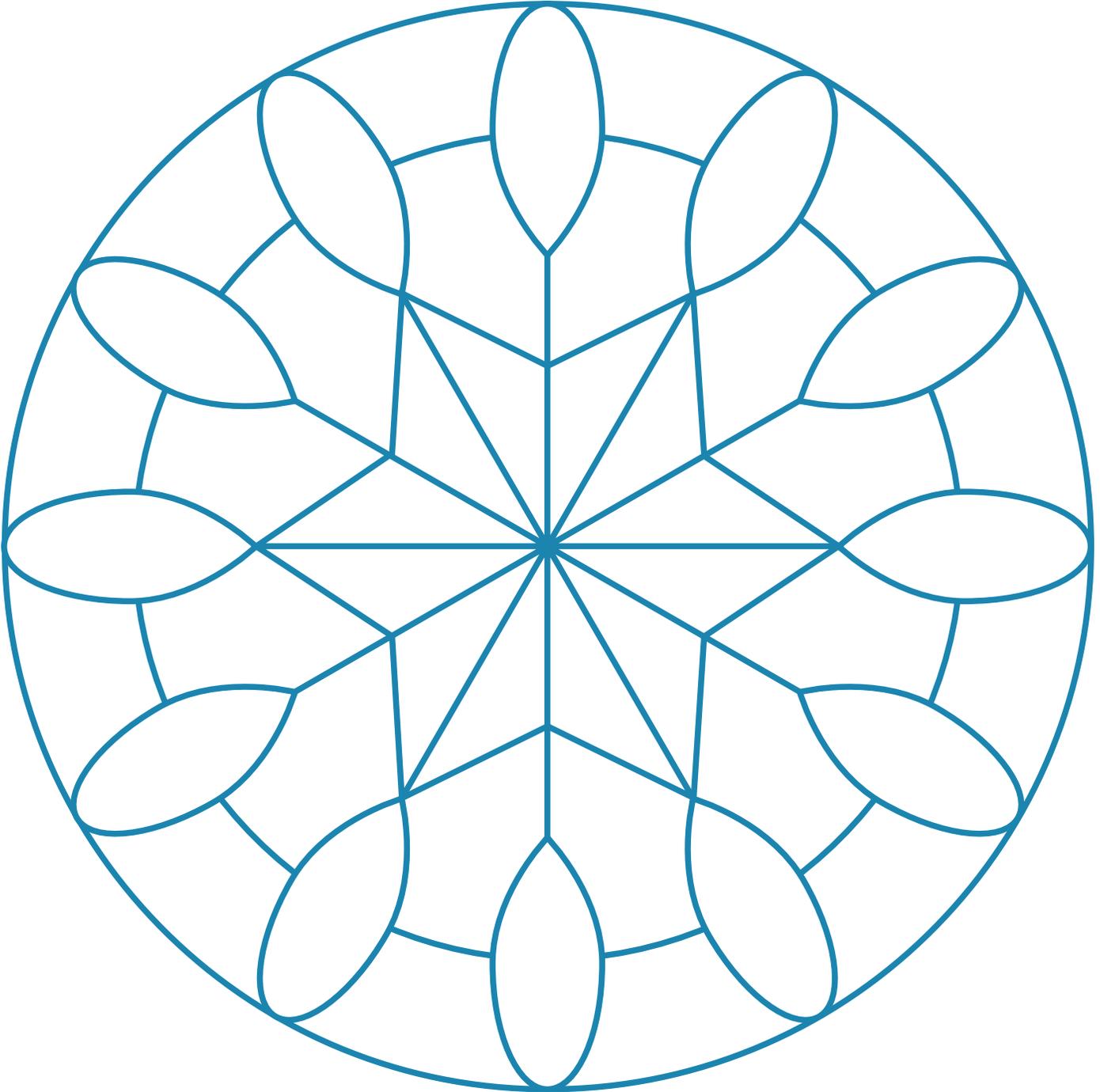
You know that you will always be connected to Jesus and to the ones you love by that light and peace. *(pause)*

Each day you will find a way to share Jesus' love with someone. Because Jesus loves you, you will be able to show love to others in the way you act. *(pause)*

Breath in. *(pause)* Breathe out. *(pause)* Slowly open your eyes.

Attachment: Activity 4

MANDALA



Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a way of reading the Bible and listening for God. It is a combination of personal prayer and ritual.

Select a scripture passage with which you want to work. Find a comfortable place to sit.

Scripture:

Pray: *Loving God, open my ears and my heart. Help me to hear your word for me. Amen.*

Read: Read the scripture passage two times, the first time silently and the second time aloud.

Meditate: Write down a word or phrase that seems important to you. Now write down everything that comes to mind when you think of this word or phrase. Think about this list.

Read: Read the passage one more time.

Pray: Talk to God about whatever comes to mind. Take time to listen to God.

Rest: Take a deep breath and sit quietly with God.

Attachment: Activity 7a

Prayer Catcher

1. Decorate and cut on solid lines.
2. Fold and open: top to bottom side to side, both diagonals.
3. Lay upside down. Fold all 4 corners to the middle.
4. Turn over and fold all 4 corners to the middle.
5. Fold in half and push top corners to center.
6. Place thumbs and first fingers under flaps.

Attachment: Activity 7b

Prayer Catcher

