

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Think back to a time when you felt like you were all alone in a room full of people. Were you searching for a place where you could be accepted and affirmed? Did you come to hear people tell the story of your faith and hope that people would listen to your story? These activities can shape the way we create sacred and safe space for those seeking community and connections, while introducing the seeker to the history, traditions, mission, and rituals of the faith community.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

Read the Bible focus passages listed above. Sit quietly and reflect on the words. Begin a journal to record any thoughts or feelings you have about the scriptures. In your journal, create a “gratitude list,” identifying all things great and small for which you are grateful.

Prayer: Divine Creator, reveal who you are. As things are above, make them so below. Lead us into peaceful places and holy spaces. Remind us that wherever we are you are. Thank you for your presence, your protection, and your love. Amen. And so it is.

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 Circle of Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity is intended to get the group’s energy concentrated on a single question relative to the exploration of faith. Exploring the question with a formal process allows each person a chance to get involved. It can also be a way to generate followup questions or discussion points based on individual responses. Create a “talking stick”—a stick or baton decorated with cloth or other colorful materials, to be passed around the circle and used as a prompt for people to answer the question. If a talking stick is not available, use any item that can be passed around, such as a ball of yarn, a ruler, a rolling pin, and so forth. Form a circle with chairs so that everyone can see one another.

Supplies:

- chairs
- talking stick or alternatives (see preceding suggestions)

Tell the group that you are going to lead them in a conversation about faith using a talking stick as a way that allows everyone to participate and have a chance to speak while she or he is holding the talking stick. Use the following questions, asking them one at a time and allowing everyone to respond to each question before moving to the next question. On the first question, begin with yourself to model participation. Encourage the participants to answer the questions with a sentence or two so that no one monopolizes the talking. Pass the stick around the circle in one direction and give each person a chance to respond. If anyone does not wish to respond, tell them to simply pass and give the stick to the next person.

- Why do you think it’s important to practice your faith?
- What do you believe are ways to practice your faith?
- Who are people of faith that you admire?

2 The Stories of Us

Leader preparation: Read about various cultures’ traditions of storytelling and oral history at “Traditional Storytelling” (<http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/dir/traditions/index.html>) so that you can share information about storytelling from this article. Prepare to share a story about yourself with the group that includes an early experience or lesson about God and your faith tradition.

Write these story prompts on newspaper or a whiteboard:

- When I was younger I liked to . . .
- A story I remember about growing up is . . .
- I learned about God when . . .

Supplies:

- prepared newsprint or whiteboard
- pens or pencils and paper

Relate some of the information you learned from Traditional Storytelling with the participants. Tell them that they are going to have an opportunity to do some personal storytelling about a few of their early experiences. Tell your story about an early experience or lesson about God. Invite the participants to use the story

prompts to create their own stories. You may divide the group into pairs and have each partner tell a story, or you may invite the participants to write their stories.

③ A Way with Words

Leader preparation: Gather various types of popular magazines. Choose a few articles and pay attention to words and phrases in the articles and headlines. Make note of action words and descriptive words that stand out to you. Think about words that bring to mind your beliefs, values, and faith.

Supplies:

- magazines
- sheet of poster board
- scissors
- glue sticks

Invite participants to look through magazines and find words or phrases that represent their values, beliefs, and practices of faith. Tell them to cut out the words or phrases to create a group collage on the sheet of poster board. When the collage is finished, invite people to share the words or phrases they added and tell why they chose those words.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Can We Talk? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read aloud Psalm 23. Then read it again silently. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for all the ways for which you are provided, protected, and guided in your life.

Supplies: None

Facilitate a discussion with the group about definitions of faith. Don't offer a formal definition. Encourage each participant to express his or her own ideas and opinions. Use the following questions as discussion prompts:

- What does the word "faith" mean to you?
- What do people do to practice their faith?
- How is faith important in your life?
- What would you like to learn about faith?

Take note of the group's responses so that you can follow up in future sessions, particularly in the area of what they want to learn about faith.



5 The Many Faces and Places of Prayer

Leader preparation: Reflect on all the formal prayers you have learned. Write down memories and observations about prayer in various stages of your life. Write reflections about who taught you prayers, how prayer has been useful to you, and reasons you feel compelled to pray. Gather photos of people at prayer in various ways and in various places. Collect pictures of sacred places where people pray. Post on the walls around the room pictures of people at prayer. In a circle on the floor place the pictures of various sacred places where people pray. Place a small table in the center of the room; place a candle in a candle holder on the table. Arrange chairs in a circle around the table.

Supplies:

- pictures of people praying
- pictures of sacred places where people pray
- candle, at least 6 inches tall
- candle holder
- matches or lighter
- votive candle for each participant
- small table
- “Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 5

The intent of this activity is to explore ways to attune to God and define prayer as a way to talk to God. Invite participants to sit around the table. Give each participant a copy of “Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 5. Light the candle on the table, and invite the group to read the prayer in unison. Next, invite each participant to light a votive candle from the center candle. As they light the candle, have them pray silently for God’s blessings.

6 Faith Scrabble®

Leader preparation: Make a list of words that represent your thoughts, feelings, and views about prayer and rituals of practicing faith. Bring it to read for the group.

Supplies:

- Scrabble® games or other word-based games

Invite participants to play Scrabble®. They may play in teams if they wish. Before the game begins, invite them to make a list of words related to thoughts, feelings, values, and actions about faith. Challenge them to use only these words in the game. You may want to share the list you made to give them some ideas for words.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prayer Action Plan (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity provides an opportunity for the group to develop a sense of cohesiveness and offers the participants various ways to experience prayer. Reflect on times you participated in group prayer. Think about the ways you experienced connection and community by committing to some prayer with a group.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the group to brainstorm different types of prayer practices. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Some suggestions might be prayer partners, journaling, weekly prayer meetings, or reading the newspaper and praying about specific events and people in the news. After you have a list, have the group choose a prayer practice to try for a period of time, with each person in the group committing to the prayer practice. Have them decide how long they will maintain the discipline, and choose a time and place to talk about the experience.

8 Let Us Pray

Leader preparation: Read Joshua 4:1–4, 19–24. Sit silently and reflect on the images of the men carrying the stones and creating a memorial related to their victorious exodus. Watch the movie *Glory* (DVD, Sony Pictures, 1998). Pay attention to the major themes of the movie. Read the following article: "Abolitionists' involvement in protesting Slavery" (<http://www.us-civilwar.com/abolitionist.htm>).

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video "Prayer Scene" from *Glory* (<http://movieclips.com/fsPc-glory-movie-prayers-of-the-54th/>)

Show the YouTube video "Prayer Scene" from *Glory*. Use the following questions to generate discussion about the scene:

- What was the attitude of the men as they headed into battle?
- What seemed to fuel their courage?
- What feelings did watching the prayer scene evoke in you?
- How did the prayer ritual prepare them for battle?

9 Seeds of Faith

Leader preparation: Sit quietly and relax your body fully. Begin to breathe deeply; inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Repeat with several deep breaths. Then breathe naturally. Close your eyes and focus on the rhythm of your breath. After a few minutes repeat the prayer that Jesus taught (Matthew 6:9–13). After you pray, think about the things you consider to be important to your beliefs and faith practices. Write a list of these things and reflect upon them.

Cut a seed shape and a raindrop shape, approximately 4" X 6" each, out of brown and blue construction paper, respectively, for each participant. Prepare a poster or bulletin board with a blue sky and brown soil.

Supplies:

- construction paper seed shape for each participant
- construction paper raindrop shape for each participant
- sky and soil poster board or bulletin board
- fine-point permanent markers
- glue sticks

Give everyone a construction paper seed and instruct them to create a seed of hope for what they want to gain from being in this group experience. Invite them to write their hopes on their seed. Then ask them what they believe they can contribute to the group experience. Give each person a construction paper raindrop, and invite them to write those ideas on their raindrops. Invite those who are willing to share with the group what they wrote and why. Glue all the seeds on the backdrop of the soil and the raindrops on the backdrop of the sky.

Reflect

First impressions are often lasting impressions. This Discovery Exploration may be the first impression of the faith community for seekers or new church participants. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to offer a closer look at worship and prayer to those who might otherwise remain on the sidelines.

Attachment: Activity 5

Prayer

God of love and of faith:

I give you my hands to do your work;

I give you my feet to go your way;

I give you my eyes to see as you see;

I give you my tongue to speak your words;

I give you my mind that you may think in me;

I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.

Above all, I give you my heart that you may love in and through
me—that I may love you and love all humankind.

I give you my whole self, God, that you may grow in me, so that
it is you who lives, works, and prays in me. Amen.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The opportunity to introduce or welcome a person back to a faith community can be a complex balance of honoring the fundamental tenets and culture of the faith group, while making allowances for the seeker's fresh perspective and personal interpretation of the established practices and rituals. In Christendom, the Bible is considered the primary guide and serves as the moral compass for followers. Persons who may have left the church may not see the Bible as a book to be treasured or heralded but merely a symbol of their past. Those seeking community in the Christian church who are rooted in other faiths honor holy scriptures that have some similarities with the Bible, but divergent views as well. This Exploration may be the conduit for seekers gaining insight and appreciation for the stories of faith and recorded miracles that longtime churchgoers may even take for granted. Skillful and prayerful use of the activities and discussion points can also reintroduce the Bible to some as a message of divine love and truth.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 11:1–13
1 Chronicles 29:10–18

Leader Preparation

Read the Bible focus passages listed. Take several deep breaths. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Sit silently, close your eyes, and focus on your heartbeat.

Prayer: God, who created the world by words alone, help us to be mindful of the words we speak. Bless us with clarity of thought and divine insight into the scripture. Refresh us with the familiar stories. May our prayers mirror the ancient ones in fervor and faith. Do this by the power of all that is holy. Amen.

Session Development

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Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Prayers in the Bible (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read stories about people praying with specific requests or praying for others: Exodus 32:11–13, Moses intercedes for Israel; 1 Samuel 1:10–11, Hannah prays for a son; John 17:6–26, Jesus prays for his followers; Philippians 1:9–11, Paul prays for the Philippians. Think about prayers you have prayed asking for specific blessings and intercessory prayers for others. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for people who have prayed for you.

Supplies:

- Bibles with concordances

Demonstrate how to look up scriptures in the Bible using a word or subject concordance. Assist participants as they look up “prayer” in the concordance and find scriptures and stories that highlight prayer. You may offer some of the scriptures referenced in the preparation as examples. Have individuals take turns reading aloud the various passages they find. Invite them to reflect on the focus of these prayers, their similarities and their differences, and which ones they are drawn to the most.

② This Reminds Me

Leader preparation: Pray the prayer that Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:9–13. Think about how prayer is a ritual in your life. Pay attention to the things in a day that prompt you to pray. Journal about your habits of prayer.

Supplies: None

Invite participants to pull out an object from their pockets or purses and to examine the object closely. Ask how might that object remind them to pray. Give an example, such as lipstick might remind you to let the words that come out of your mouth be acceptable to God, or a pen might remind you to journal your prayers and how prayers are answered. Other objects that might be used include a cell phone or smart phone, camera phone, keys, receipts, credit card, medication, photographs, money, and so forth. Place all the objects in the center of the group. As each person describes how his or her object can lead to prayer, and invite others to add their ideas about that same object. Remind participants to reclaim their object at the end of this activity.

③ Easy as ABC

Leader preparation: Brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you think of characteristics of prayer. Write them down. Read them aloud with feeling. Sit quietly and reflect on the words you wrote.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pens
- timer

Divide the group into smaller groups, or pairs. There are many creative ways to incorporate prayer into everyday living. This activity is designed to get creative juices flowing. Ask: *What words come to mind when you think about prayer?* Explain that participants will have three minutes to generate a list of words and ideas about prayer that begin with each letter of the alphabet. Start a timer and invite them to work collaboratively to generate their lists. At the end of the time, have each group share its list and see how many words the groups have in common and how many words are different.

Have the participants read Luke 11:1–13 and 1 Chronicles 29:10–18 to see which of their words are found in these two scripture passages. *What other ideas do these scriptures generate about prayer?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 On Our Hearts (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Seekers and new church participants may not know eloquent prayers to pray. Some of them may not even be familiar with what many Christians consider common prayers such as the prayer Jesus taught (Lord's Prayer) or the Doxology. This activity can be an illustration of how God knows what is important to a person, even when he or she cannot articulate it. Read 1 Samuel 1:10–13, New International Version (NIV). Take a moment to pray a silent prayer—praying only in your heart. Give thanks knowing that God will hear your prayer, even without words.

Supplies:

- Bible (NIV) or “Hannah’s Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 4
- red and pink construction paper, cut in the shape of hearts (approximately 4” X 6” in diameter)
- fine-point permanent markers
- glue sticks

Invite the group to share their thoughts and opinions about praying aloud. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the story of Hannah from 1 Samuel 1:10–13, NIV. Point out that Hannah’s prayers were answered. Encourage them to take a moment to think about concerns they have. Give them each a heart shape and invite them to write on the hearts words or phrases describing their concerns and requests for blessings. Encourage them to place them somewhere personal to remind themselves that God knows what is in their hearts.

5 Imagine That

Leader preparation: Take a walk outside near some form of nature, or find a quiet space inside that has plants or the sound of running water to remind you of nature. Close your eyes and think about sights and sounds of the world.

Supplies:

- tempera paint and/or watercolor paint
- paint brushes
- crayons
- colored pencils
- art paper
- fine-point permanent markers

Invite participants to imagine the history of God’s work on Earth as a sweep of colors and lines. Provide art supplies and invite them to draw and color what they imagine. Then invite them to visualize themselves in that history. Have them write words on their painting or drawing that describe their task in God’s work. Prompt them to add words that describe how they feel about being a part of God’s story in the world. Invite them to display their work and share with the group, as they wish.

6 The Reading

Leader preparation: Get a copy of children’s Bible or a book of Bible stories written for children. If possible, spend time reading a Bible story to a child, or read one aloud to another adult. Make note of the feelings that you have and the feelings the person being read to expresses. After you read, pray a simple prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for the story and the experience.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Reading” by Wilson http://www.art.com/products/p10278691-sa-i852604/s-wilson-the-reading.htm?sorig=0?WT.cg_n=Gallery+Search+Redirect&WT.oss=10278691A
- children’s Bible or book of Bible stories written for children
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read a Bible story from a children’s Bible or Bible storybook to the group. Invite the group to look at the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson. Imagine that the reader in the artwork is reading to the child in the picture the Bible story you just read to them. Discuss the following questions:

- What feelings did you have while listening to this story? (Write these words on newsprint or a whiteboard.)
- What might be the relationship between the reader and the listener?
- How do you think the child feels listening to the story?
- Who read or told you stories as a child?
- To what child can you commit to telling a Bible story?

Pray the following prayer: *Loving God, thank you for stories. Thank you for the feelings of [name feelings listed] that stories in the scriptures evoke in us. Thank you for people who share stories about life and love. Thank you for the story of Jesus, the greatest story ever told. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prayerful Breathing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In Exodus 14:13, Moses tells the Israelites to “stand still and see the salvation” of God. In Numbers 9:8, he tells them to “stand still” so that he could hear what God had to say to them. Meditation is considered by some to be an important spiritual discipline and a way to commune with God. Spend time practicing guided meditation exercises such as visualization or intentional breathing.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) meditative music
- (optional) music player

Find a quiet space where the group won't be interrupted for at least 15 minutes. Turn down the lights if possible. If there is unavoidable noise, it may be helpful to play background music or a tape of natural sounds. Read Exodus 14:13 and Numbers 9:8 to the participants. Sometimes the scriptures simply instruct us to "be still" in order to know and experience God.

Invite the participants to sit as straight as possible in their chairs, feet flat on the floor, hands in their laps. Use these directions:

- Take a few deep breaths into the abdomen. Notice the in and out rhythm of your breathing.
- Take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release any tension in your muscles.
- Add a "mantra," or prayer word, to the breath meditation. For example, on the in-breath silently say the word "feel" and on the out-breath the word "peace" or "into my heart" and "Lord Jesus," or "be still and know" and "that I am God." Use any combination or words and phrases that suggests relaxation and letting go.
- Continue to breathe, slow deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the lips, focusing on the sensations, and returning to the breath.

Continue with the meditation exercise for a few minutes. At the end of the exercise, use the following prayer: *Spirit of the living God, thank you for every breath we take. As we breathe in, may we be mindful of your divine love. As we breathe out, may we release our worries or anxieties. Help us know that you are as close as our next breath and that you care deeply about us. Amen. And so it is.*



⑧ Pass It On

Leader preparation: Take time to look intently at the artwork "Guatemala Processions" by Betty La Duke. Imagine where they may be taking the scripture as "light" to the world. Think of the messages of hope or truth that the world needs and wants to hear. Read Matthew 28:16–20 aloud three times.

Pray: *God of all nations, help me to take the Living Word to all I encounter. Teach me to know how best to describe your love and show by actions that you abide in me. Thank you for the Great Commission. Amen.*

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: "Guatemala Processions" by Betty La Duke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- paper and pens

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:16–20. Discuss Jesus' instructions to tell others the gospel story. Invite a second volunteer to read Matthew 29:16–20 again. Draw the participants' attention to the artwork "Guatemala Processions" by Betty La Duke. Invite them to imagine where the people are going and what good news they might share about their faith. Use the following questions as prompts.

- What do you think is good news about God that other people would benefit from hearing?
- How would you share your faith with others?
- In what different ways might people respond to hearing your “good news”?

Invite a third volunteer to read Matthew 28:16–20 again in closing.

9 An Altar of Prayer

Leader preparation: Read Joshua 4:21–22. Think about an important time in your life that you want to remember. Why is it important to you? What did you do to mark the occasion? Of what pieces of your heritage are you proud? Are there pieces of which you are ashamed? How do you hold onto the good and reconcile the bad?

If possible, make arrangements to gather your group by a body of water, such as a pond or a stream.

Prayer: God help me to learn and remember the stories that shape my life and the lives of others. Give me insight and understanding about each tale of victory and of sorrow. May I learn the lessons I need to learn for my highest and greatest good. Amen.

Supplies:

- water
- stones
- bowl (if not by a body of water)
- Bible

Have a pile of stones available where you meet. If meeting by water is not possible, place a large bowl of water in the center of your meeting space. Put river stones in the bottom of the bowl. Invite volunteers to take turns reading Joshua 3:3–8, 14–17, and 4:1–8 verse by verse to the group. Invite all who are able to walk in a circle around the water. At the close of the scripture, have each person take a stone from the water. Then have everyone sit in a circle and tell one story about one of their “tribes,” which could be family, friends, schoolmates, or others. When finished with the story, have them place their stones in a pile to create a collective commemoration of the tribes represented.

Reflect

Scripture is God’s divinely inspired words to humankind. “The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one.” (John 1:1–2 *The Message*). Remember, time and words can never be recalled. Use time wisely and choose words carefully.

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Attachment: Activity 4

Hannah's Prayer

1 Samuel 1:10–13, New International Version

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

By definition a disciple is a follower, one who assists in spreading the doctrines of another. A Christian disciple is a person who assists in spreading the teachings of Jesus the Christ. Christian discipleship might best be described as a coaching or mentoring program. The main purpose of Christian discipleship is to be like the Christ. Philippians 2:5 (King James Version) says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." This seems to support the notion that Christians should closely follow the examples in scripture of how Jesus lived and practiced faith. Seekers and new church participants may be in need of guidelines and examples of how to be Christ-like within the Christian and church cultures. Discipleship is about leading and guiding, not bossing and directing. Trust that the Christ within you will lead the way to the liberating Jesus.

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 give thanks in all circumstances informs our daily discipleship. This attitude of prayer embraces the rhythm of life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing. Rituals have been handed down that followers continue to use and find meaning in, as well as interpret, and they create new rituals in contemporary contexts.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

Leader Preparation

Read the Bible focus passages listed. Repeat the following affirmation: “I am grateful that God blesses my life with health and harmony. Each cell of my body is rejuvenated. I am healthy, happy, whole, and complete.”

Prayer: God, may I feel your guiding presence as I journey with this group. Thank you for being my help in every need. May the people I lead see you in me. Give me the courage to speak your truth with conviction. 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.

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Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 The Prayer that Jesus Taught (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the following article: “The Prayer That Jesus Taught Us” by Victor Hoagland (<http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/teach.html>). Journal your own “commentary” about each part of the prayer, deliberating about what each line means to you.

It is best to help seekers and new church participants become familiar with finding scriptures in the Bible and to learn that there is more than one Bible translation available. So the first preference would be to provide Bibles in a variety of translations and paraphrases. Search around the church for a variety of translations, perhaps in the church library, the pastor’s office, or other group meeting areas. You may find *The Message* in the youth area, the King James Version in the older adult area, and the New Revised Standard Version in the pews, in addition to the versions people bring with them. Another option is to find scriptures online. If Internet access is available, you can find Bible translations at <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/>. The NRSV can be found at <http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Matthew+5>. A third option is to use “The Prayer of Jesus,” Attachment: Activity 1.

Supplies:

- Bibles in at least four different translations, or “The Prayer of Jesus,” Attachment: Activity 1
- pens
- paper

Ask for volunteers to read Matthew 6:9–13, the prayer that Jesus taught, in various Bible translations. Invite the participants to write their own “commentary” about each line of the prayer, reflecting on what the lines mean to them. Invite the participants to read their reflections, as they feel comfortable. Share your personal commentary about the prayer as well.

2 Worldwide Witness

Leader preparation: Early Christian church leaders lived their faith in the public arena, incurring the wrath of some people and winning the hearts of others. In the twenty-first century, people are able to “go viral” with their faith with available technology. Think of ways that you can share your faith publicly.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Discuss the importance of bearing witness to how faith and prayer positively impact lives. Lead the group in a brainstorming session about how they can live their faith out loud. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Create a Facebook page for the group by going to Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>). Discuss ways the group can use Facebook to share their faith with a social network. List things that might be included on the page, such as upcoming church events or various life celebrations, prayer requests and answered prayers, photographs of church activities, information about times of church services and what the

church offers (such as child care, youth groups, Mom's Day Out), and so forth. Commit to update the page with information or video clips each time the group meets.



③ Five Finger Prayer

Leader preparation: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. Consider the apostle's directive to rejoice in creature comforts, as well to rejoice in God. Think about how you can seek a life of constant joy. Praying without ceasing is the fruit of always rejoicing in God. Prayer may be said to be the breath of our spiritual life. One that lives cannot possibly cease breathing.

Supplies:

- "Five Finger Prayer Guide," Attachment: Activity 3

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 to the group. Give each participant a copy of "Five Finger Prayer Guide." Explain how the prayer helps as a prompt to remember to pray for specific people and for the overall good of the world. Invite people to name people who come to mind for each part of the prayer as you lead them in the prayer.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Greeters (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: On half sheets of paper write the following roles: Clerk, Server, Bus Person, Customer. You may want more than one sheet for Customer.

Supplies:

- papers labeled for role play

Invite the participants to make a commitment that during the week they will give a Christian greeting to several other people. These may be people they know, such as friends, family, coworkers, or strangers, such as the clerk in a store. You might want to have the group practice this with one another to raise the comfort level of such as activity. Perhaps the group could come up with some greetings with which they feel comfortable using, such as "Have a blessed day" or "It's a great day to pray."

Invite the participants to role-play situations where they are in a coffee shop and offer a Christian greeting to someone else, such as the clerk who waits on them, a person in line with them, a person sitting at another table. Have them take turns playing each part—sometimes being the giver and other times being the recipient of the greeting.

Option: Have the group meet in a public setting somewhere other than your regular meeting space. Tell them that this will be an opportunity to practice discipleship as a group. Sit in a popular, well-attended public place, such as a coffee shop, bookstore, or shopping mall. Casually observe customers as they come in and out of the stores. Notice people's facial expressions and the tone of their voice as they place orders and make purchases. Pay attention to people who smile and those who don't. Watch for people who speak. Speak to people who cross your path.

5 Head, Heart, and Hands

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 22:36–40. Reflect on all the ways you love God with your heart, soul, and mind.

Prayer: Eternal God, I thank you that you are always accessible. I am grateful that my connection to you is so strong that it can never be broken. You are nearer than my very breath. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- sheets of newsprint, legal-size paper, or large construction paper
- markers

Invite the participants to read Matthew 22:36–40 in unison. Discipleship requires loving God with our entire being. Distribute the paper, and invite each participant to draw a self-portrait. This may be a stick figure or a more elaborate figure depending on the artist's preference. Have them personalize the figure by adding features that match the artist, such as glasses, curly hair, tattoo, piercings, and so forth. Around the head have them write or draw what they think about, near the heart what they care about, around the feet what they do for fun or are interested in, and around their arms and hands what they do as a vocation or volunteer. Display these portraits so that the participants can learn more about one another.

6 Prayer and Peace Rally

Leader preparation: Mother Teresa was once quoted as saying she would never attend a protest rally against something; rather, she would only attend a rally in support of something. For example, she wouldn't attend an antiwar rally; she would attend a pro-peace rally instead. Make a commitment to do something to add peace and joy to the world. Run errands for someone who is sick or homebound. Volunteer with a community group that supports a healing or peacemaking cause.

Supplies:

- poster board for each participant
- scissors
- markers
- wide roll of heavy clear tape
- paint stirrer for each participant

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 28:16–20 to the group. Sharing the gospel is sharing good news about the Prince of Peace, Jesus. Ask participants to think about words and phrases that represent and promote peace. Invite them to make rally signs. Cut sheets of poster board in half and write peace words, phrases, or symbols in large print on each half sheet. Tape the paint stirrer on the back as a handle, and tape the two sheets of poster board together to form a placard. Once the signs are made, have a mock rally. Invite the participants to hold up the signs, march around the meeting space, and say aloud their various peacemaking statements. Consider moving the rally to a public place. Debrief the rally by asking the following questions:

- What feelings did marching and saying the peace phrases evoke in you?
- What issues in our community or world do you think would benefit from having a collective voice of peace spoken?
- How might we put peace into action as disciples of Christ?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Libations Ritual (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: A libation is a ritual pouring of a drink as an offering to a god or deity. It was common in the religions of antiquity, including Judaism. An example of a libation can be found in Genesis 35:14: “And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it.” In certain African cultures, the ritual of pouring a libation is an essential ceremonial tradition and a way of giving homage to the ancestors. Ancestors are not only respected in such cultures, but also invited to participate in all public functions (as are also the gods). A prayer is offered in the form of libations, calling the ancestors to attend. The ritual is generally performed by an elder. Although water may be used, the drink is typically some traditional wine, such as palm wine, and the libation ritual is accompanied by an invitation and invocation to the ancestors and gods. This activity is a concrete example of a ritual that participants can easily reenact.

Supplies:

- potted plant
- pitcher of water
- small table

Place the plant on the table. Have the group form a circle around the table. Ask the eldest individual present to pour the libation in the direction of the four winds: north, south, east, and west, as a symbol of honoring the ancestors. This person asks God and ancestors to share in the festivities and in return, to bless all those who are not present at the gathering. The elder recites the following statement: “Everything we do we begin it in God’s name. In the end, we finish it in God’s name. God, we need your help. We need help in every undertaking.” After requesting this benediction, the elder pours the libation on the ground and the group says, “Amen.”

8 A Prayer for Protection

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 23. Sit silently and reflect on all the ways God is your “good shepherd.” Pray a prayer of thanksgiving. If you have Internet access, read about “The Prayer for Protection” at http://www.unityonthebay.org/prayer_protection.html. You can also find a visual meditation of the poem at <http://content.unity.org/prayer/guidedMeditations/prayerForProtection.html>.

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access and a projector
- “The Prayer for Protection,” Attachment: Activity 8

Invite participants to sit silently and close their eyes while you read “The Prayer for Protection” by James Dillet Freeman. Invite them to imagine the presence of God surrounding them and enfolding them. Show the visual mediation of the poem from <http://content.unity.org/prayer/guidedMeditations/prayerForProtection.html>.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 23. Discuss how the passage is also a prayer for God's protection as we go out into the world to be disciples. Give each participant two copies of the prayer, one to carry personally and one to give away.

9 Preparing Your Body Temple

Leader preparation: Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17. Be mindful of taking care of your body in order to be fit and energized.

Pray: God, thank you for keeping me alive with healthy meals. Help me to make good choices for my body. Use me as an example to tell others how to be healthy and whole as they become willing vessels to share your love with others. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- exercise mats
- reflective music or nature sounds
- music player

Lead the group on a brisk walk outside the meeting space. After the walk, invite a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 to the group. Invite participants to sit on the exercise mats, making sure each person has adequate space to place the mats and to stretch out arms and legs. Ask participants to choose one or two prayer words that each would like to repeat through the activity, such as “peace” or “joy” or “Spirit, come” and so forth. Play the music softly. Give the following directions:

- Sit on the mat with your legs straight out in front of you. Stretch your arms out to the side as far as you can. Hold that position while silently reciting your word of prayer.
- Stretch your arms out to the front toward your toes and pray aloud your prayer word.
- Stand and stretch your arms up silently, reciting your word of prayer.
- Bend at the waist to the right and pray aloud your prayer word.
- Bend at the waist to the left and silently pray your prayer word.
- Bow your head and hold your hands as you choose, for prayer.
- Pray the prayer of Jesus aloud together. You may want to provide printed copies of this prayer as it is used in your congregation. Do not assume that everyone in the group knows this prayer.

Invite the group to reflect on the importance of taking care of themselves in order to be prepared physically, mentally, and emotionally to be disciples of Jesus.

Reflect

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 NIV). The Great Commission is our call to action by Jesus himself. These activities may help lead the way to the liberating Jesus. And, if Jesus is lifted up, people will be drawn to him by divine love.

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Attachment: Activity 1

The Prayer Jesus Taught

Matthew 6:9–13

New King James Version (NKJV)

- ⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray:
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and
the glory forever. Amen.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- ⁹ Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

New International Version (NIV)

- ⁹ This, then, is how you should pray:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

The Message (MSG)

The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

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.

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

- ⁹ You should pray like this:
Our Father in heaven,
help us to honor
your name.
¹⁰ Come and set up
your kingdom,
so that everyone on earth
will obey you,
as you are obeyed
in heaven.
¹¹ Give us our food for today.
¹² Forgive us for doing wrong,
as we forgive others.
¹³ Keep us from being tempted
and protect us from evil.

Attachment: Activity 3

The Five Finger Prayer Guide

1. Your thumb is nearest to you. So begin your prayers by praying for those closest to you. They are the easiest to remember. Praying for our loved ones is, as C. S. Lewis once said, a “sweet duty.”
2. The next finger is the pointing finger. Pray for those who teach, instruct, and heal. This includes teachers, nurses, doctors, and ministers. They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.
3. The next finger is the tallest finger. It reminds us of our leaders. Pray for the president, leaders in business and industry, and administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God’s guidance.
4. The fourth finger is our ring finger. Surprising to many is the fact that this our weakest finger; as any piano teacher will testify. It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble, or in pain. They need your prayers day and night. You cannot pray too much for them.
5. And lastly comes our little finger, the smallest finger of all, which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others. As the Bible says, “The least shall be the greatest among you.” Your pinkie reminds you to pray for yourself. By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively.

Author: Anonymous

The Prayer for Protection

by James Dillet Freeman
(1912–2003)

The Light of God surrounds me.
The Love of God enfolds me.
The Power of God protects me.
The Presence of God watches over me.
The Mind of God guides me.
The Life of God flows through me.
The Laws of God direct me.
The Power of God abides within me.
The Joy of God uplifts me.
The Strength of God renews me.
The Beauty of God inspires me.
Wherever I am, God is!

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Traditions serve to preserve a wide range of culturally significant ideas, specific practices, and the various methods used by distinct cultures. The word “tradition” comes from the Latin and means “handing over, passing on.” For many Christians who attend church, the timeless hymns and age-old music and rituals in services of worship create a familiarity that is soothing and comforting. But being unwilling to change and grow creates stagnation. Resistance to change may mean that dogma overshadows welcome. Honoring the old while making room for the new will produce a hybrid of the best of the best that all people are moved by and loyal to. Most importantly, the spirit of the living God moves freely and love flows abundantly. Thus the long-time attendees as well as seekers and new church participants are inextricably linked and become the beloved community of Christ.

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

Read the Bible focus passages listed. Think about all the people in your life with whom you “break bread.” Imagine what it would have been like to be at the table with Jesus during the Last Supper. What do you think the conversation and mood was? What would you have said to Jesus? What questions would you have asked of Jesus? What questions would you have asked the disciples?

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

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 A Letter to You (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Imagine yourself wearing your favorite comfortable lounging clothes and looking through old family photos, mementos, and other personal memorabilia. Reflect on memories associated with the people and places in the photos. Write in a journal about various events that you remember as you reminisce. Who are the people who were consistently present throughout most of your lifetime? What events and activities were or still are traditions in your life? What nurtures you or makes you feel connected at church? Write a gratitude list of the people, places, and events that have impacted you in specific ways.

Supplies:

- notebook paper
- pens and pencils
- stamped envelopes
- “A Letter to You,” Attachment: Activity 1

Invite the participants to write a private, reflective letter to themselves using the questions on Attachment: Activity 1 as prompts. Encourage them to identify which of their values and ambitions they hope to preserve and which aspects and or habits they hope to have changed in twelve months. How might becoming a part of their church or faith community support them in their vision of their future selves?

When the letters are finished, place them in self-addressed, stamped envelopes and seal them. Invite participants to exchange letters with another person in the group, or someone else that they choose. Ask that person to keep the letter and then give or mail the letter back to the writer of the letter in six months. Review the activity with the following questions:

- In what ways has attending church or connecting with this faith community impacted you?
- What do you do differently as a result of your faith practices?
- Who have been key persons you have met in your church or faith community?
- Why is your connection to the church or your faith community important to you?



2 Circle of Support

Leader preparation: Read the story of Ruth and Naomi in the book of Ruth, paying particular attention to Ruth 1:16–17. This is a story of extraordinary commitment and support. Think about who has been supportive to you in your family, in your circle of friends, and in your church. List all those people and give thanks to God for them. Use a story Bible if you would like to read a shorter paraphrased version of the story of Ruth and Naomi with your group.

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

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) *The Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton (Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) or *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories* by March Batchelor (Lion Publishing, 1995)
- “Circle of Support,” Attachment: Activity 2
- pens and pencils

Read the story of Ruth and Naomi to the group. This story is an example of extraordinary commitment and support that Ruth gave to Naomi. Read Ruth 1:16–17, pointing out that these verses capture Ruth’s pledge to assimilate into Naomi’s faith traditions.

Distribute copies of Attachment: Activity 2 and invite the participants to fill in the circles. As they work they may notice the areas in which they may want more support and also notice who supports them in multiple areas. How might the church be more supportive to them? How might they be more supportive of one another and others in the church?



3 The Last Supper

Leader preparation: Read Luke 22:7–23. Then look closely at the artwork “The Last Supper Detail” by Crespi. Imagine what the people around the table might look like. What characteristics or personal specifics do you imagine? Think about your current faith community. What practices and rituals take place to make sure all are welcomed? Reflect on all the traditions in which you participate that invite all to the open table and radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ. You may want to write these in a prayer journal. Be prepared to share them with the group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- 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=0?WT.cg_n=Gallery+Search+Redirect&WT.oss=12061746A

Invite the participants to describe places they gather to eat or fellowship with friends. How open is the table where they gather? How do they invite others and make them feel welcome? Who, if anyone, might be excluded from these gatherings? Why? When the church sponsors a fellowship event, who is invited? How are they invited? In what ways is everyone made to feel welcome?

Display the artwork “The Last Supper Detail” by Crespi. Invite the group to envision the people at the table. Ask them who they think could be breaking bread together and what this picture says about who is invited to the table. Ask volunteers to read aloud Luke 22:7–23. *Who is welcome to participate in communion in your congregation? Who, if anyone, is excluded? Why?* (Some congregations do not welcome children in this tradition.)

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 Sweet Hour of Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Acts 3:1. Corporate prayer is a long-held tradition in the Christian faith. Ask a friend or fellow church member to be your prayer partner for a week. Commit to praying together each day throughout the week. Think creatively how you might get together—in person, on the phone, video chat, texting, and so forth. Start by sharing your gratitude for various things in your life. Be mindful of all the ways you recognize God’s blessings in your life and the lives of others. Take turns saying a prayer of thanks and petitioning God for blessings for your family, your church, and the world.

Supplies:

- Bible
- hymnal with “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” or <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/s/h/shop.htm>

As you introduce the tradition of corporate prayer, invite the participants to consider the example of musical instruments. It’s true that an instrument on its own can make beautiful music. It’s also true that when instruments play or symphonize together, they form a beautiful harmonious sound. So it can be with prayer. Personal prayer is important in the life of a disciple, and so is corporate prayer, praying with others. Corporate prayers help guide and train the congregation in the art of praying. They are a teaching tool in the church. We don’t all know how to pray; it’s something we learn, something that we get better at the more practice we have. Corporate prayers also manifest the unity of the church; they build us in love and concern for others as we intercede for them. We pray together as the body of Christ. We pray as the corporate body of Christ, not just a bunch of individuals. Corporate prayer also ensures congregation participation. Worship is not to be a spectator event, but rather something we do together. Invite the participants to talk about their views of corporate prayer. Why do they think this is an important tradition in the church?

Corporate prayers make take various forms: intercessory, responsive, movement, singing. There are also traditional set prayers, such as the psalms or the prayer of Jesus.

Ask a participant to read aloud Matthew 6:7–15. Invite the group to sing “Sweet Hour of Prayer” using a hymnal or the Internet. Then pray the the prayer Jesus taught, in unison.

5 Down to the River to Pray

Leader preparation: Read about the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11. Also read about baptism as a Christian tradition in the article “What is Baptism?” (<http://christianity.about.com/od/faqhelpdesk/f/whatisbaptism.htm?r=>). Highlight details of the article that you will share with the group in discussing baptism. You may want to invite your pastor to talk with the group about your church’s practice of baptism. Or check out your denomination’s website to find resources related to your church’s understanding of baptism.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1FOqSGxBso>

Invite the group to read Mark 1:9–11. The ritual of baptism is a foundational Christian tradition. While the form of baptism varies among churches, all Christian churches have some way of using water for baptism. Some sprinkle, some pour, and some totally immerse believers. Some go to a river, some to another church, and some have a place in their own facility. Some baptize infants; others baptize only those who make their own confession of faith. Share the details of the article about baptism that you found interesting. Have your pastor talk with the group about your church’s understanding and practice of baptism. If possible, hold this discussion in the place in your church where baptisms take place. Be aware that there may be some participants in your group who are totally unfamiliar with baptism. Others may have witnessed a baptism, but have never been baptized themselves. Take care to ensure that no one feels out of place in this discussion.

Show the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray.” Invite reflection and response.

6 Shapes of Faith

Leader preparation: Take a walk and intentionally observe what is going on around you. Pay attention to what you normally push past. Take particular notice of the routines and order of worship at your church or in your faith community. Try to reconnect emotionally and spiritually with things that have become habitual acts. Find a quiet space and reflect on what you noticed and how you felt when looking at things with a refreshed perspective. Think about how these things impact your faith and shape your life. Use modeling clay to create an object inspired by your observation and reflection.

Supplies:

- modeling clay
- (optional) reflective music with nature sounds such as found at
<http://naturesoundspa.com/>
- (optional) music player

Invite participants to share words or images that describe God for them. Ask: *What images or representations of God do you observe around you in everyday life?* Our thoughts, beliefs, and impressions of God may be shaped by the music, decorum, and rituals in church and in our faith communities. Show the clay object you created while reflecting about your images of God and how you see representations of God in church or in your faith community. Invite them to use the clay provided to create a shape based on what they described about God. Play music in the background as they work on their objects.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Lectio Divina (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Lectio divina, an ancient practice of the church, is Latin for “divine reading” or “holy reading.” It is one way of reading scripture while seeking to become closer to God and trying to discern what God is saying in one’s life. Reflecting on this practice may encourage fellowship and harmony in your faith community.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens or pencils

As you think about traditions of the church for prayer, lectio divina comes to mind as one of the most ancient traditions. Explain the ancient Christian tradition of lectio divina. Divine reading helps us discern God’s will for our lives, as well get inspired ideas of how we might apply what we learn and discover about God and faith principles. Invite the participants to experience this tradition using 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Distribute paper and pens or pencils for those who prefer to make notes for themselves.

Invite the participants to sit in a comfortable position. Tell them that you will be reading the same scripture passage multiple times with periods of silence between. Ask them to open their hearts and minds to fresh insights that may come from the scripture. Say, “Breathe deeply. If you are holding any tension in your body, let it go. If you are holding any thoughts, any emotions, any worries or joys, set them aside for now. Trust that God will hold them for you for this time.”

Pray for God’s guidance. You may say something like: “Prepare us, God, to hear your word. Make us know your ways; teach us your paths; lead us in your truth.”

Allow for a moment of silence. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 in a clear voice at a moderate tempo. After a few minutes of silence for reflection, invite the participants to listen for key words or phrases that have special meaning to them as you read the passage a second time. Read the text again, and again allow time for reflection. Invite the participants to speak aloud their key words or phrases.

As you read the text a third time, invite the participants to listen for a special meaning or direction that they might gain from this passage of scripture. Where did they hear God’s message just for them today? After time for reflection, invite people to share their insights.

Before leaving this time of reflection, ask for God’s continued presence with the group. You might say something like: “Gracious God, you gathered us here and blessed us with your word. Grant us now the courage to share your truth with others.”

Ask the participants to join with you as offer the text as a prayer. Read the passage a fourth time. Discuss the experience with the group.

8 Great Is Your Faithfulness

Leader preparation: Singing hymns is an important tradition for Christians. Hymns are often used as sermon topics to encourage and prepare congregants to take the gospel message with them. Hymns are also testimonials for people who see how God helps them face life challenges and have strength to serve God and humanity.

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” a hymn written by Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960) with a tune composed by William M. Runyan (1870–1957), is a worship song that uplifts through trials and tough times. It was written as a result of the writer’s daily experiences and realization of God’s faithfulness, with scripture reference from Lamentations 3:22–23, “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.” This sacred song has been an all-time favorite among Christians.

In a quiet space, sit in a comfortable position, with your feet flat on the floor and your back straight. Close your eyes. Mentally let go of the day-to-day concerns. When thoughts and worries arise, observe them, but do not linger on them. Focus on a particular word such as “peace,” “love” or “shalom.” After a few minutes pray a prayer thanking God for faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” accompaniment
<http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/h/19>
- YouTube video “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60o3UP4Kjwg>
- hymnal
- “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High,”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCXKnj2mF0o>

Discuss the significance of hymns in the Christian tradition. Hymns can be a reminder of what we experience in worship as we go out to live our lives and connect with other people. Share the historical background information about “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” with the group. Tell them that there are many modern variations of timeless hymns. Show the YouTube video “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” Play “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” accompaniment, and invite the group to sing along. Talk about ways that God is faithful in their lives.

Not all music in the church is old. Many churches now have praise bands with keyboard and drums as well as an organ. Some churches have contemporary services of worship in which new praise songs are used. Some churches have both a traditional hymnal and a praise songbook in the pews. One of the most popular Christian songs in the last few years is “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High.” Listen to the YouTube recording and invite the group to sing along.

9 Faith Exchange

Leader preparation: Christian traditions vary among denominations and settings. However, the birth of the church is a great example of how diverse people were bonded together by a common divine experience. They left the gathering forever changed and committed to taking the message of Jesus all over the known world. Read Acts 2. Imagine yourself in the crowd that day. Think about what made the more than three thousand people want to be a part of the community that Peter was showcasing. What do you appreciate about the fellowship of believers?

Today more than ever we are a global society with intrafaith and interfaith traditions that mirror a common need and a common expectancy. We can appreciate our own traditions while remembering that the early church was made up of many cultural groups including diverse Jews and Gentiles. The first recorded Christian conversion was in Ethiopia. Think about how we are inextricably linked to people of faith in many places. Look for and celebrate diversity among spiritual people.

Plan to visit and meet at another place of worship and go for coffee or a meal afterward to reflect on the experience. Send the information about meeting time and place to all group participants several days in advance so they can make appropriate plans.

Prayer: Gracious God, may our common faith and confession be strengthened by the diverse pathways through which we encounter Jesus Christ. May the power of relationship be strong within and among us. Help us to better do thy will so that we might love and serve others by the power of your love. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible

Meet at the designated place of worship and experience another faith tradition's worship service or other faith practice. After the visit, go for coffee or a meal and reflect on the experience. Invite volunteers to take turns reading Acts 2 aloud. The Christian church started among people from varying walks of life with diverse experiences and a myriad of beliefs. Appreciating other faith practices, while sharing our own with others, can help create stronger communities and promote peace and justice in the world.

Reflect

The habits and mores we form allow us to celebrate our past in deliberate ways. Such traditional practices also direct our present and shape our future. Some traditions in the church have been exclusive, offensive, and painful for some. Seekers and new church participants may be trying to reconnect with a faith community after having painful experiences spurned by traditions. Follow Dr. Maya Angelou's words: "When we know better, we do better." Be mindful of traditions that need to be retained, versus those that need to be released for the greater good of all.

Attachment: Activity 1

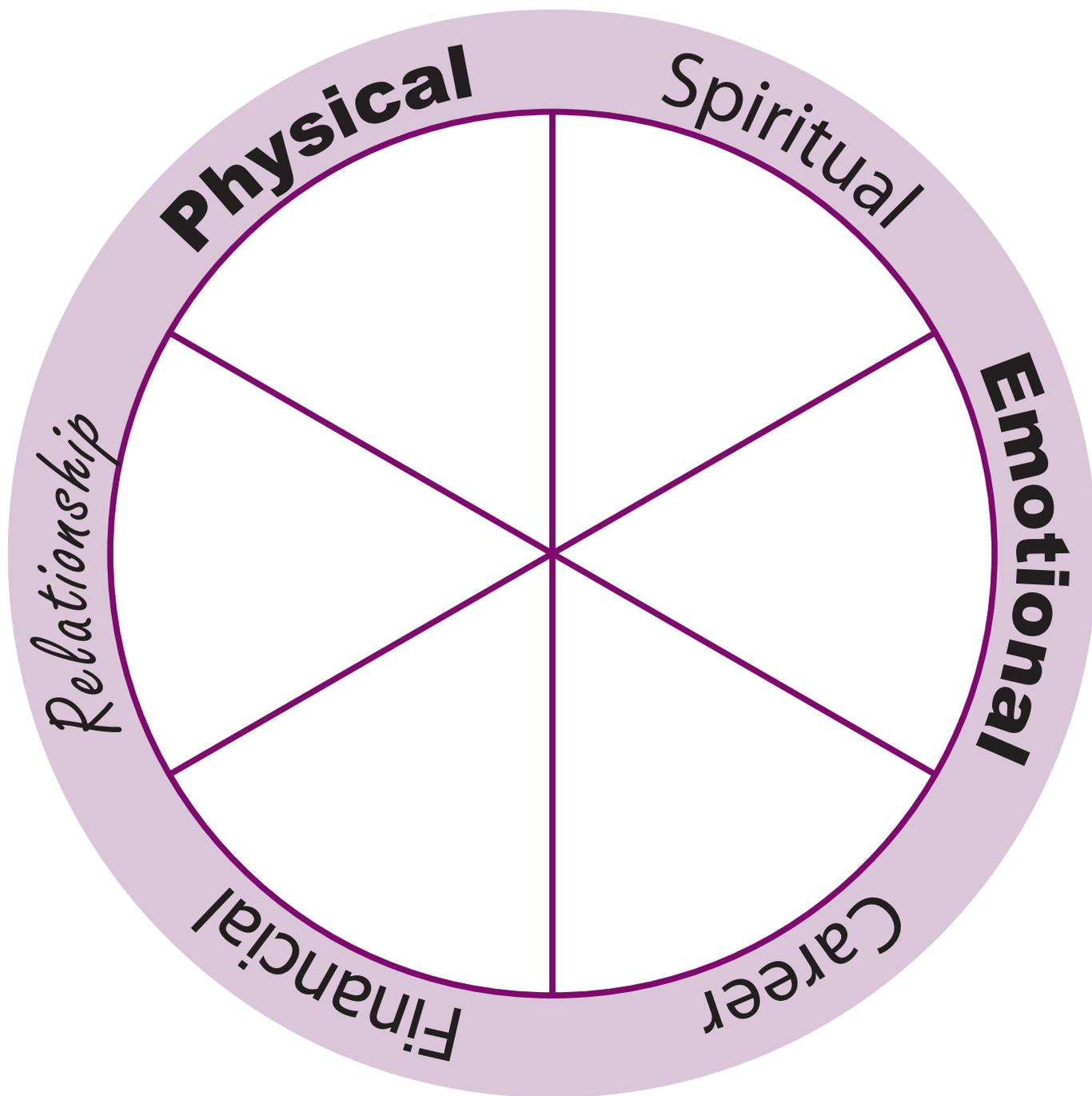
A Letter to You

Write a letter to the person you think you will be one year from today. Write at least three main paragraphs. Here are some possible starting points:

1. What is happening in your life right now that you might want your future self to remember, or to laugh about?
2. How do you hope you will be different from the person you are today? Describe how you imagine you will have changed.
3. What advice would you give to your future self?
4. What activities do you participate in at church or in your faith community that you enjoy?
5. Who are the people you most connect with at church or in your faith community?
6. What routines or rituals have you developed that you intend to make a lasting tradition?

Attachment: Activity 2

Circle of Support



Who are the people who support you in specific ways in various areas of your life? Place their names in the appropriate sections of the support circle. Make note of whose name appears in more than one area.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Embodying positive thoughts and feelings about what one is doing involves understanding and valuing the “why” along with “what.” For seekers and new church participants, this includes getting history and background information about faith practices. Moreover, those new to the faith community need a stimulating climate to help them tap into their will to act and be a part of the established group. Integrity in our settings is imperative to offer a warm embrace to those former outsiders. To carry out the mission of Jesus and the Christian faith, our deeds must match our testimonies. Relationship must be above rules. Sharing who we are with people will go further than just spouting what we know about church or Christianity. By putting divine love before any acts of service, the United Church of Christ’s welcome, “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcomed here,” is a truth, not merely a slogan, that all Christians can exemplify.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17
Philippians 1:3–4

Leader Preparation

Read the Bible focus passages listed. Write down all the images described in Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. Then, think about a recent disaster or tragedy. Reread the Joel passage and notice all the ways God is called upon to intervene. Remember that God is still intervening on behalf of humankind. The mission of the faith community and the context or lens through which we see the world are guided by our assurance that God is still speaking to us and moving among us and blessing us. With intentionality we can help others put prayer and ritual in context and suggest ways they might put faith into action.

Prayer: God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love, speak to my heart. May your divine love flowing through me touch the lives of others in powerful ways. Show me the way to be a blessing. In your many names. 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 Follow Your Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity may prompt seekers to think about where their faith journey might take them—literally and figuratively. Read the article “The Apostle Paul’s Missionary Journeys” (<http://mistieshaw.suite101.com/the-apostle-pauls-missionary-journeys-a205749>), which describes how Paul’s missionary journeys expanded and changed the early church. Many of writings that became the New Testament of the Bible were simply Paul’s letters to his newfound friends and colleagues. Mission work may not involve far and extensive travel; rather, it might simply be the relationship building that happens when people share excitement and passion about something with others. Write the following definition of mission on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard: “An important piece of work that a person or group of people has to do for a government or large organization, especially one that involves travel.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with definition of “mission”
- marker

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to the people he befriended and worked alongside to encourage them in their faith and to help them work through problems they encountered as they became a community of believers. Ask someone to read Philippians 1:3–4. Sending a letter of thanksgiving with a promise of prayer is a missionary act. Read the definition of mission you posted on the newsprint. Invite participants to think of what missionary journeys they might take. Ask them to consider the following questions:

- Who might they tell about their faith or church?
- Where might they go (near or far) to visit or help others?
- In what ways could they be in mission with their family, at work, or in the community?



2 Sweet Secrets

Leader preparation: This activity illustrates how to develop connections with others in a faith community. Obtain candy of five different varieties, enough for each participant to choose a piece of candy. Decide which candy will represent each question from the handout “Sweet Secrets.” Print out one copy of the handout and write the name of one of the candies by each question. Make a copy of the handout with the candy designations for each participant.

Supplies:

- bowl with five kinds of candy, enough for each participant to choose a piece
- “Sweet Secrets,” Attachment: Activity 2

Part of building community and preparing to work together on a common goal or mission is to get to know one another better. Pass around the bowl of candy, inviting participants to choose a piece. They are to follow the prompt on the handout according to the kind of candy they chose.

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

3 Standing in the Need

Leader preparation: Create a prayer list of all the people and situations for which you feel called to pray. If your church or faith community has a prayer list, get names from that list. Pray for those persons and situations. Ask God for direction about what your call to action or mission should be in the situations. Remember that intercessory prayer is a missionary act. Watch the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer.”

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P2YEC-ochc&feature=related>

Show the YouTube video. The humility of acknowledging our own need for prayer can increase our empathy and urge us to pray for someone else. Explain that intercessory prayer is a powerful way to address situations even when we can't physically or otherwise intervene. Suggest that praying for specific needs in our faith community and in the world may be a missionary act. Ask the group to make prayer requests for people and situations for whom they feel called to pray. Invite participants to say a prayer of blessing for the names and situations mentioned, or to just speak aloud a name or situation.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Prayer of Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Hebrews 11:6 says “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Carrying out the mission and ministry of Christianity requires faith. The Bible also says that God will never leave or forsake us. This Prayer of Faith is an affirmation reminding us of how faith in God is manifest in our lives. We can rest assured that we are equipped to do all things that God calls us to do. James 2:20 tells us that “faith without works is dead.” This might be interpreted as: “Just wishing something will happen won't make it happen.” Divinely inspired ideas require human motivation and action to become a reality. Reflect on how your life and the life of your church displays faith in action. Draw a vertical line on the newsprint or whiteboard to make two columns. At the top of the left column write “FAITH.” At the top of the right column write “ACTION.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- “The Prayer of Faith,” Attachment: Activity 4
- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with “FAITH” and “ACTION” headings
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask one volunteer to read Hebrews 11:6 and another to read James 2:20. Lead a discussion about the importance of taking meaningful, deliberate actions in conjunction with having faith. Faith in action is the evidence that the mission of Christianity is moving forward. Invite the participants to choose a partner with whom to brainstorm about issues, expectations, and outcomes for which they have desire and hope. Encourage them to consider these things for themselves, their faith community, and the world. They might think of these things as their faith items. After they have discussed and collaborated, have each set of partners

share their ideas with the rest of the group. Write their responses in the FAITH column. Now ask the group what actions they think are required to put faith into action for the items listed. For example, if “Getting more people to attend church” is a faith item, the action might be “Go door to door in the neighborhood and pass out flyers.” Write these suggestions in the ACTION column. God equips us through our faith to take the actions necessary for seeing the outcomes we desire. Affirming our faith in God can help us remain faithful. After the discussion, invite the group to pray The Prayer of Faith on the handout three times in unison.

Wisdom Walk

Leader preparation: Divine wisdom may be the difference between knowing something and practically applying knowledge. This exercise can be a way to help participants think more concretely about topics discussed. Write each of the following questions on a sheet of newsprint, and then place the four sheets of newsprint on the walls around the room.

- What strengths do I need to share my faith with others?
- What must I learn in order to equip myself for mission and ministry?
- What spiritual qualities will assist me during my growth process?
- What challenges might hinder my goal of sharing my faith?

Supplies:

- prepared newsprint sheets with questions
- markers

Divide the group into four small groups. Start each small group at one of the sheets of newsprint displayed in the room. Have them discuss the question and write their thoughts and opinions on the newsprint. Allow time for conversation, and then have each group rotate to the next newsprint. Continue the process until each group has answered all four questions. Gather the group and together reflect on each question and the response. What insights were gained? What additional questions were posed?

Tibetan Monk Artwork Reflection

Leader preparation: The Tibetan prayer wheel faith practice is more than a thousand years old. It is a practice used to bring wisdom and clarity to those who use it. Monks and yogis, as well as other people, recite a mantra, or prayer, while holding the prayer wheel. Read the article “Prayer Wheels” (<http://www.tibetanprayerwheels.com/about-prayer-wheels.html>) to gain more insight about prayer wheels and mantras.

Supplies:

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

Share information about Tibetan prayer wheels and mantras with the group. Note that there are Christian spiritual leaders who take part in formal prayer rituals, expressly praying for God’s guidance and protection for all in the community and beyond. Invite the group to look intently at the artwork “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor. Use the following questions for discussion.

- What divine wisdom or guidance do you imagine the monks are receiving?
- What divine wisdom or guidance do you seek from God right now?
- What kind of mantra or word might you use for prayer?
- Who are the spiritual leaders that you look to for prayer?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Statement of Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 1:3–4. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for all those who encourage you and support the faith works that you do. Write the following statements on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard.

- We want God to . . .
- We expect . . .
- We feel committed to . . .
- We will always . . .

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

A statement of faith frames how we live out and share the tenets of our faith. Invite the group to create statements of faith using the statement prompts on the newsprint or whiteboard. Ask the group to volunteer answers to complete the prompts. Then lead the group in reading their new faith statements by saying, “As followers of Jesus Christ” to begin each prompt and corresponding statements.

8 The Keys to Our Faith

Leader preparation: Gather old keys, one for each participant. Place them in a basket. Read Matthew 28:16–20. Pick up the various keys. Think about what is needed to be prepared to share the gospel message with others.

Prayer: O God, thank you for the promise of Jesus to be with us always. Guide my feet, my hands, and my heart in the direction of all who need to know more about your love and grace. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- basket with old keys
- fine-point paint pens

Pass the basket of keys around the group and have each person choose a key. Prompt them to think about actions and words that are necessary to share stories of our faith with others. Ask: *What or where do you think these keys could lead to in mission and ministry? What opportunities might these keys unlock?* Invite them to choose one word and write it on their keys using the paint pens. Suggest that they attach the key to their keychain as reminder to share their faith story.

9 Be Like Geese

Leader preparation: The mission and context of faith practices is often most powerful when done in groups. Think about the people who make up your faith team, the people who worship and serve with you in your faith community. Write down their names. Silently reflect on the things you do as a group. Thank God for your “gaggle,” or group traveling with you on your faith journey.

Supplies: None

Ask the group what they think makes a successful team. Discuss how working together as a group can be helpful to sharing our stories and telling others about our faith.

Describe why geese fly in a V formation. For one reason, this formation conserves their energy. Each bird flies slightly above the bird in front of him, resulting in a reduction of wind resistance. The whole flock adds at least 71 percent more flying range than if each bird flew alone. The birds take turns being in the front, falling back when they get tired. In this way, the geese can fly for a long time before they must stop for rest. Geese in the rear of the formation honk to encourage those in the front. Another benefit to the V formation is that it is easy to keep track of every bird in the group. Flying in formation may assist with the communication and coordination within the group. Fighter pilots often use this formation for the same reason. When a goose gets sick or is wounded, other geese drop out of the formation and follow it down to help and provide protection. They stay with the unhealthy goose until it is able to fly again.

Invite participants to name people in their “gaggle” and share those in your “gaggle.” Pray the following prayer with the group: *At the beginning of time God told us that “it is not good for this human to be alone.” Thank you, God, for our companions, helpers, and colleagues in the faith. Help us to put our efforts together and move forward on our faith journey. In your many names, Amen.*

Reflect

Mission and context for followers of Jesus the Christ are synonymous with relationship. In what ways did you see relationship form and strengthen while leading these activities? How will you continue to foster genuine relationships among the participants beyond the group experience?

Attachment: Activity 2

Sweet Secrets

Name of candy	Prompt
	Your favorite Bible verse or positive quote
	A person you admire and why
	A place you would like to visit and why
	A person from the Bible or in history with whom you would like to spend a day
	Wild card (tell the group anything about yourself)

Attachment: Activity 4

The Prayer of Faith

by Hannah More Kohaus

God is my help in every need;
God does my every hunger feed;
God walks beside me, guides my way
Through every moment of this day.

I now am wise, I now am true,
Patient and kind, and loving, too;
All things I am, can do, and be,
Through Christ the Truth, that is in me.

God is my health, I can't be sick;
God is my strength, unyielding, quick;
God is my all, I know no fear,
Since God and Love and Truth are here.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

In his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann asserts that the contemporary American church is so influenced by consumerism that its power to believe or act is limited. He further states that our consciousness has been dulled by false perceptions and rhetoric. What is Brueggemann's solution? We must reenergize our memories and reclaim our faith tradition. More specifically, the task of prophetic ministry is to raise our consciousness to a view beyond and aside from the dominant culture. Some would call this nourishing our "Christ consciousness." Indeed, Jesus the Christ offered a radically inclusive gospel that was counter to the establishment and religiosity of his day. As followers of Jesus, the Christian church's legacy is to spread that gospel. The people who come into our churches as seekers or new participants offer zeal, energy, and fresh imaginations that can embolden and recharge our vision and vocation in the body of Christ.

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

Vision gives us new perspectives on our world and also shows us different ways of behaving. This prayer may help you clarify your vision: As you breathe in, say, “The vision . . .”; as you breathe out, say, “leads me on.” Practice visioning by yourself or with others. Visioning is usually done in a group. You can also vision alone or with only one other person. Decide on a topic that you want to vision about: a ministry of your congregation, a life goal, the development of a creative project, or an existing organization such as a new business.

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

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Beyond the Bumper Stickers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Pay attention to slogans and sayings you see on bumper stickers, billboards, and church signs. Note which ones motivate you or move you in a personal way. Sometimes catch phrases and buzzwords are over-used and become gimmicky. Record some of the slogans you observe and share them with the group.

Prayer: Speak to my heart, Holy Spirit. Give me the words to say that will create peace and love. May my words speak truth to power. Thank you, God, in me, through me, around me. Amen.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Some words can change meanings over time, and some words mean different things in different contexts. Have the group brainstorm some possibilities, such as mouse (it was only a rodent, now it can be a piece of computer hardware,) or rap (used to mean to knock on something, now it can identify a type of music). There are always the slang words, as well, such as “cool” or “sweet,” which are no longer just a temperature or a taste but words to indicate that something is good. Sometimes, in order to understand a phrase, you need to know the culture from which it comes. Think of this in terms of Bible translations. Language has changed drastically since the first manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek were translated into English and other languages.

A cliché is a trite or obvious remark. Clichés are not always effective because they are overused. Ask the group to name some common clichés or catchphrases that they hear at work, in church, or in the culture.

It is easy to use religious catchphrases, jargon, or words that have different meanings when trying to talk to someone about what you believe. Suggest that words and phrases such as salvation, born again, or eternal life may be confusing for some people. Even more disconcerting is that they may be offensive or cause a negative reaction from others.

Invite the group to consider the following religious quotations and catch phrases. Ask them which ones intrigue and may even help them express their faith.

- WWJD: What would Jesus do?
- Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Jesus)
- Jesus is my co-pilot.
- Too blessed to be stressed
- In prayer, one should always unite herself or himself with the community. (The Talmud)
- God said it. I believe it. That settles it.
- God don’t make no junk.
- Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find fulfillment. (Bhagavad Gita)
- I am God. Today I will be handling all of your problems. Please remember that I do not need your assistance.

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.

Invite the participants to describe other ways in which they feel comfortable talking about or sharing their faith. For some, sharing faith may not be so much about words as actions.



2 The Glory of God's Works

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 19. Study the artwork “No-Traveler’s Borne” by Jess. Read the psalm again. Write in your journal any thoughts or feelings that the scripture and the artwork evoke in you. Display the artwork in a space where all can gather around it. Arrange chairs facing the artwork.

Prayer: God, your creation amazes me. When I look at all you have created, it speaks. It shouts that you formed it, and you are glorious. Your creation speaks day and night to all people. You’ve set the heavenly bodies in motion and clothed the earth in beauty. Thank for your handiwork. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- “Psalm 19,” Attachment: Activity 2
- paper, pens and pencils

This activity involves listening, looking, and imagining. Suggest that imagery can evoke divinely inspired insight into scripture. Ask a volunteer to read the first few verses of Psalm 19 to the group. Invite the group to focus on the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess while keeping in mind the words of the verse. Give the participants paper and pens or pencils and invite them to write words and phrases that come to mind after hearing the verse and observing the artwork. Pass the Bible to another person to read the next few verses of the psalm. Continue the process of listening, looking, and writing as the entire psalm is read.

We know that God is the God of creation, from the very beginning until now and into the future. The earth has changed, but God is still present and active. *What vision of the future does one get in hearing this psalm? What does this say about our faith as we live into the future? What does it say about our responsibilities as Christians for the care of the earth?*



3 We Wear the Masks

Leader preparation: Read the poem “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In this poem, mask is a metaphor for the psychological façade that conceals the true feelings of the mask wearer. Although the mask grins, the face beneath the mask may display desperation or disappointment. In the dramas of ancient Greece, actors wore masks to reveal to the audience the emotions of the characters they were portraying. What parts of your life, personality, or past do you wish to have transformed by God’s presence? How might your individual change help you change your community and the world?

Supplies:

- paper plate for each participant
- pen or pencil
- magazines
- scissors
- paints

- paintbrushes
- craft glue
- colorful paper
- tape
- embellishments, such as foil, feathers, yarn, sequins, buttons, and so forth
- “We Wear the Mask,” Attachment: Activity 3

Read the poem “We Wear the Mask” to the group. Ask: *What parts of your life, personality, and/or past do you “hide” behind masks?* This may be a question posed for thought, as many participants will not be willing to disclose hidden thoughts and feelings. Be sensitive to the level of intimacy in the group and allow people to remain silent if they wish. Invite the participants to create a mask using the materials provided to represent themselves as the person they want to show to the world. When the group has finished making their masks, invite the participants to share their masks with the group. Ask: *What three things might you need to do to transform yourself to this person on the mask? On whom would you rely to encourage you in this? In what ways can you be an encourager for someone else, perhaps as a mentor or role model?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Vision Board (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Proverbs 29:8 states that “without a vision, the people perish . . .” A modern interpretation of this could be related to goal setting and accomplishments. A goal is just a pipe dream until it has definition and a deadline. The purpose of this exercise is to use images to create a visual representation of future goals and desires. Use the creations to prompt discussion about the mission and vision of the church.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) old magazines
- half-sheet of poster board for each participant
- scissors
- glue
- markers
- (optional) reflective music and music player

Ask one volunteer to read Proverbs 29:8 and another person to read Habakkuk 2:2. This activity offers an opportunity to create a concrete, visual representation of what participants want to see on their personal faith journey, in their faith community, and in the world. Invite the group to sit quietly and reflect on the intent and purpose of creating a vision in an attitude of kindness and openness. Ask what it is that they want for their faith community or church. Maybe the answer will be just one word or an image. Maybe it’s an entire scene or symphony.

Have the group look through the magazines and find images and words that relate to their vision. They may want to be spontaneous and cut out pictures, words, and headlines that catch their interest and be more selective later. Have them arrange the images and words that feel right, that communicate a message of their vision on their pieces of poster board. When they are satisfied with their arrangements, have them glue their items to the sheets of poster board. Invite them to share their vision boards with the group.

5 Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters

Leader preparation: 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks of new identity that comes through being in Christ. When we are renewed and transformed, we can draw others to Christ. The future of the church depends on new people being added to the body of Christ. This song is a petition for God to help us become the renewed and strengthened vessels that make up the Beloved Community.

Prayer: God who was, who is, and who always will be: I am grateful that you are rearranging people, places, things, and events so that the future is divinely ordered. Help me to see myself in your divine plan. May I do my part to co-create a world full of love and peace. Amen.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHEvIRiqBYo> and lyrics <http://www.justsometr-ics.com/823745/Oleta-Adams-Wash,-O-God,-Our-Sons-%26-Daught-Lyrics>

The song “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” may be seen as a petition for God to help us become the renewed and strengthened vessels that make up the Beloved Community. Display the “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters” lyrics. Show the YouTube video “Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters.” Play the video a second time, and invite the group to sing along with the song.



6 Baptism of Christ

Leader preparation: Take a walk by a body of water. If this is not possible, visit a place with an artificial well, fountain, or waterfall or listen to some water sounds. Imagine you are witnessing the baptism of Jesus. What thoughts or feelings do you have? What questions would you ask of John the Baptist if you were at the scene? What would you want to say to Jesus?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West Baptism of Christ https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- song: “Water, River, Spirit, Grace” http://riversvoice.com/index.php?page=songs&category=Splash-exclaim--oparen-new_2010_edition-cparen-&display=238
- water sounds <http://naturesoundspa.com/nature-sounds-for-reflection/reflective-river-stream>

Play the song “Water, River, Spirit, Grace” or play water sounds while the group is studying the artwork “Baptism of Christ.” Play the song at least two or three times while the participants look closely at the entire artwork. Suggest that they look at sections, such as upper corners, lower corners, sides, then center. Then step back as take in the entire image. Engage the group in conversation about the artwork using the following questions:

- How would you describe the facial expressions and body language of Christ?
- What do you think he is thinking?
- What do you think he is feeling?
- What do you imagine onlookers are saying?

Invite three volunteers to read the three biblical accounts of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11, and Luke 3:21–22. Offer the following observations about Jesus' baptism and John's role in it. *John had devoted his life to preparing for the arrival of Jesus. He focused all of his energy toward this moment. He was set upon obedience. Yet, the very first thing Jesus asked him to do, John resisted. He felt unqualified. In what ways, if any, do you feel unqualified to fulfill your mission from God? John felt unworthy even to unfasten the shoes of Jesus, yet Jesus said John was the greatest of all prophets (Luke 7:28).* Encourage the participants by telling them not to let any feelings of inadequacy hold them back from their God-appointed mission.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer for Peace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 4:27. Repeat this affirmation: "I connect with the peace that is God, and I become the peace I desire to see. I create peace in my environment by taking care of the Earth. I create peace in my community by volunteering and contributing to the betterment of all people. I choose peace in every situation and circumstance."

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pens

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:6–7. Then ask the group to read it silently. Use the affirmation in the Leader Preparation above, and invite the group to repeat it with you phrase by phrase. Then ask them to write a prayer expressing their hearts' concerns and asking for peace. They may want to use Philippians 4:6–7 as a model. Ask anyone who is willing to share her or his prayer with others.

8 Time Capsule

Leader preparation: Time capsules are a fantastic method of preserving a moment in time to be remembered and celebrated at some point in the future. The first time capsules were found in temples in Egypt and Babylon. Those ancient time capsules were filled with small statues and scrolls, as was the custom. Some modern-day religious temples and churches still practice the tradition of placing items of significance in the cornerstone of the building. Prior to the session, tell the group to bring one or two things that say something about their faith that they want to leave for future generations. Instruct them not to bring food, candy, or food products as these may carry bacteria or moisture, and not to include staples, paper clips, or rubber bands as those items can corrode or leave a residue on your preserved items.

Determine a site to bury the time capsule. Check with the property committee or trustees to get approval. Excavate the ground to approximately four feet below the surface. If an outdoor place is not available, check with the property committee about a secure place in the church, perhaps in a basement storage area.

Supplies:

- large kitchen food storage container with a lid
- shovel
- items for time capsule (brought by the participants)
- paper
- pen

Invite the group to gather in a circle, share the items they brought to put in the time capsule, and tell why they want each item included in the time capsule. After each person shares about his or her items, invite the group to say, “O God, bless this [name item] for the future.” Have the participants place their items in the capsule. When everyone has finished sharing, ask the group to write a letter to include in the capsule. Suggestions to include in the letters may be ideas such as favorite family traditions, their concerns, their joys, and a description of their faith traditions and rituals. Have the participants place their letters in the capsule and seal the capsule. Go to the spot where you prepared a place to bury the time capsule. Place the capsule in the hole and fill in the hole with the dirt you removed for the hole. Pray a prayer thanking God for all the experiences of the past, blessings of the present, and hopes for the future.

If you are placing the time capsule somewhere inside the church, be sure to clearly mark the capsule so that in the future people will know what it is and will preserve it.



9 Fellowship of Faith

Leader preparation: Read Acts 2:43–47. The fellowship meal is very common throughout the pages of the Bible. These meals had deep significance. They were not simply for the purpose of satisfying hunger. Nor were they simply social in purpose. They were for celebrating one’s common relationship in and union with God. They were eaten “before the Lord your God.” The meals were celebratory, joyful, interactive, and done in the presence of God. Prior to the session, tell the group to plan for a “potluck” dinner at the next session. Invite volunteers to contribute various dishes and beverages.

Supplies:

- Bible
- food and beverages for a potluck meal (provided by participants)
- plates, cups, napkins, and dinnerware
- celebratory music and music player
- “Food and Fellowship Blessing,” Attachment: Activity 9

Reflect

Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” What have you learned during this Faith Practice that will equip you to promote positive change? What has been revealed to your spiritual eye? How have you been divinely inspired to create change and build a better future in the world?

Invite a volunteer to read Acts 2:43–47. Ask the group what activities they hear happening with the believers of the early church. Point out, if necessary, that they shared meals together with glad and generous hearts. Sharing a meal is more than just satisfying hunger. It brings people together on their journey as companions as they break bread together. Invite the group to share a meal together and celebrate the relationships they have with one another. Distribute copies of “Food and Fellowship Blessing,” and invite the group to pray the prayer together. Play music during the meal, and enjoy the fellowship.

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Attachment: Activity 2

Psalm 19
From *The Message*

¹⁻² God's glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.

³⁻⁴ Their words aren't heard,
their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

⁴⁻⁵ God makes a huge dome
for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.

⁶ That's how God's Word vaults across the skies
from sunrise to sunset,
Melting ice, scorching deserts,
warming hearts to faith.

⁷⁻⁹ The revelation of God is whole
and pulls our lives together.
The signposts of God are clear
and point out the right road.
The life-maps of God are right,
showing the way to joy.
The directions of God are plain
and easy on the eyes.
God's reputation is twenty-four-carat gold,
with a lifetime guarantee.
The decisions of God are accurate
down to the nth degree.

¹⁰ God's Word is better than a diamond,
better than a diamond set between emeralds.
You'll like it better than strawberries in spring,
better than red, ripe strawberries.

¹¹⁻¹⁴ There's more: God's Word warns us of danger
and directs us to hidden treasure.
Otherwise how will we find our way?
Or know when we play the fool?
Clean the slate, God,
so we can start the day fresh!
Keep me from stupid sins,
from thinking I can take over your work;
Then I can start this day sun-washed,
scrubbed clean of the grime of sin.
These are the words in my mouth;
these are what I chew on and pray.
Accept them when I place them
on the morning altar,
O God, my Altar-Rock,
God, Priest-of-My-Altar.

Attachment: Activity 3

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar (1876–1902)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Attachment: Activity 9

Food and Fellowship Blessing

Full of joy and thankfulness, we say, “Thank you, God” from the bottom of our hearts. We look at the food that has been prepared by loving hands. This food was born from the bounty of the Earth, in warm sunlight, rich soil, and cool rain. May it nourish us in body, mind, and spirit. We are grateful for those who cultivated it, those who harvested it, those who brought it to us, and those who prepared it.

As we partake of this food in one another’s company, may we remember what we have in common and what brings us all together. May this sharing of food foster peace and understanding among us; may it bring us to the recognition that we depend on one another for all the good we can ever hope to receive, and that all the good we can accomplish rests in helping others in turn.

All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above, and we will never forget our true provider. We thank you as you bless this food and bless this time together. Lord Jesus Christ, be thou our guest, and share the food which thou hast blessed. Amen.