

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Young children love stories. They often love to hear them repeated again and again. The sequential flow of a story or ritual becomes so important that the children know if you're telling the story differently or changing the order or practice of a ritual. Young children often want to do things "right," whether it's playing a game, saying a prayer, making something, or learning a verse. They also feel and express things deeply, whether it's with uncontrollable giggles or unstoppable tears. These types of emotions can be channeled into heartfelt prayers under the guidance of adult leaders and friends.

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

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

Leader Preparation

The activities in this Exploration strongly connect to the scripture passages from Joshua and Psalm 23. Images of rocks, markers, paths, and sheep and shepherd will occur in many of these activities. As you prepare, consider how these images and scriptures connect with you and your faith. Psalm 23 may evoke emotions because it is often used at funerals. Stones as markers, memorials, and monuments may do the same as they may be connected with cemeteries. These emotional responses are part of our faith life and prayer life. Be prepared to help children understand these emotional connections if the situations arise. Some activities involve artwork and simple crafts. Always be ready to assist young ones in these endeavors, and affirm their budding creativity.

Prayer: *God, be with me as the children and I seek to discover you in these Bible passages. Guide me in directing the paths of prayer for these young children. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Stones Help Us Remember (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Joshua 4:1-7, 19-24, and then read the Attachment "Newscast of Israelites Crossing the Jordan River," which is a creative retelling of the story as a newscast of the event. Practice reading or telling the story as a newscast so you can present it to the children as such. Note that the stones are significant in both a tangible and symbolic way. The stones were a foothold on the riverbed floor for the priests' feet to stand firm while they held the Ark of the Covenant. This created a barrier or dam to hold back the river's waters so that the people of Israel could cross the River Jordan on dry land into Canaan. The stones were then placed as a symbolic reminder of God's provision to bring the people into the Promised Land. As the Israelites were brought safely through the Jordan River's waters, they were reminded of their previous crossing of the Red Sea as God delivered them from Egypt years before. The number twelve is significant because it signifies the twelve tribes of Israel. In the process of the storytelling and remembering, this is an important part.

Consider places in your community where stones or rocks serve as memorials, monuments, or symbols of remembrance and storytelling. Examples include special walls constructed for war heroes and veterans, statues to remember famous people or founders, a tombstone or graveyard, and even a pet memorial in a backyard.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Newscast of Israelites Crossing the Jordan River," Attachment: Activity 1
- (optional) microphone, real or play

Show the children the Bible and open it to Joshua 4. Tell the children that there is a story in Joshua about 12 special stones. Explain that instead of reading the story from the Bible, you are going to pretend to be a newscaster and tell them a news story. Invite them to listen as you present your newscast of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River. When you have finished the newscast, engage the children in conversation about the story and the use of memorials to remember past events using the following questions.

- What do you think it would have been like to have been at the Jordan River that day? What would you have seen and heard if you were one of the priests? Or one of the Israelites crossing the river? Or one of the twelve men who brought out a stone?
- How do you think the priests felt when they had to carry the Ark and stand in the river? How do you think you would feel if you were there down in the river?
- Why do you think those twelve stones were so important?
- What are ways that we use stones today that are like in this story?
- How do we use stones to remember or mark things in special ways? What are some examples?

Close with a prayer: *Thank you, God, for stories and stones and markers that remind us that you are with us always. Thank you for your care and love for us in the glad and sad times. Amen.*

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.

2 Going Down to the River to Pray

Leader preparation: The children will hear the song “Down to the River to Pray” while touching water and praying and again while looking at pictures of water and bodies of water and praying. Gather pictures of water and bodies of water, enough for each child to have a picture. You may have duplicates of some pictures. Obtain a recording of “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Krauss or use the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray” for the music. The visual part of this video is just a still picture of Alison Krauss. There are other videos of this song, but with this one you will be using your own water pictures and water for the children to experience while they hear the song.

Supplies:

- recording of “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Krauss
- music player
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) YouTube video “Down to the River” to Pray by Alison Krauss http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68_zDlzJDF8
- picture of water or body of water for each child
- preschool water table or a several large basins of water
- hand towels
- markers

Invite the children to touch the water in the table or basins. Make sure everyone has a space to touch the water. Invite them to let the water run through their fingers or gently splash the water, but not at one another! Use the following questions to engage the children in conversation about the water while they are touching the water.

- What does it feel like to touch the water?
- How does the water make you feel? Why?
- What does the water remind you of?
- What are some ways water is used? As the children mention a use of water, invite the group to respond, “Thank you, God, for water.”

Play “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Krauss while the children play in the water for a few minutes. Then have the children dry their hands and gather in a circle.

Give each child a picture of water or a body of water. Ask them to describe the pictures. Tell them that you are going to play the song again, a song about going to a river to pray. Explain that while they listen to the song, they are going to pass their pictures to the person on their right so that they can see all the pictures while the song is being played. Determine a slow rhythm for passing the pictures and then begin the music. When the song is over, engage the children in conversation again with the following questions.

- What did you hear in the song?
- Why do you think water is important? As the children mention why water is important, invite the group to respond, “Thank you, God, for [repeat what was mentioned].”
- Why do you think people would go down to a river, or to water, to pray?

Invite the children to write “Down to the Water to Pray” on the pictures of water they were holding at the end of the song. You may need to write the words for younger children.

End the time with a prayer: *Thank you, God, for rivers. Thank you, God, for water. Thank you for all the things we can do with water and in water. It's special that water can be places and reminders to pray. Amen.*



3 Twelve Stones Relay

Leader preparation: Read Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. The children will have a relay carrying 12 “stones” and building a memorial that creates a prayer, a simple table grace. Make 12 paper bag “stones” using the Attachment for directions. You will need 12 “stones” for each group of six to eight children. Determine a spot in your meeting place to be the starting point, the Jordan River, and mark it with a piece of masking tape. Place all the stones in separate piles for each group in this spot. Choose a spot a good distance from the starting place, and mark it with a piece of masking tape. This will be Camp Gilgal.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 12 prepared paper-bag “stones” for each group of six to eight children, using “Paper-Bag Stone Directions,” Attachment: Activity 3
- masking tape

Show the children the Bible and explain that there is a story in the Bible from the book of Joshua that tells about the time when God led the Israelite people across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. Use the following talking points to tell the story.

- The Israelites were on the one side of the Jordan River and the Promised Land (Canaan) was on the other side.
- The priests (like the ministers of the people) carried the Ark of the Covenant that held God’s Law—the Ten Commandments—as they started to cross the river.
- The priests stood in the river with their feet were lodged between large stones, and the river was held back.
- The river bed became dry, and the Israelites were able to cross the river to the Promised Land.
- This reminded the Israelites of the time that God led them out of Egypt across the Red Sea.
- When the Israelites got to the other side of the river, Joshua instructed 12 men, one from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, to go back into the river to pick up one of the large stones and bring it to Gilgal, where the Israelites were camped.
- The 12 stones were placed as a memorial to remind the people—and their children, their grandchildren, and many others for generations to come—that God had led the people across the Jordan River to the Promised Land.

Tell the children that they are going to have a relay to bring 12 stones from the Jordan River to Camp Gilgal. Point to the designated spot where the children will set up their memorial. Then gather at “Camp Gilgal” and explain how the relay will work, using the following directions.

- I will say a prayer. Listen carefully, because at the end you will need to put the stones with the words in order of this prayer.
- One person, or a pair, at a time will go from Camp Gilgal to the Jordan River, pick up a stone, carry it on your shoulder or between two people,

and bring it back to Camp Gilgal. Take only the stones from your spot in the river.

- Once all twelve stones have been carried across the river, put the stones in the order of the prayer to make your memorial.
- When your stones are in order, sit down, raise your hands, and say, “We are ready to pray!”

When everyone is ready and understands the directions, begin the relay by saying the prayer: *God is great. God is good. We thank God, for our food.* When a team has its stone in order and the members raise their hands, invite them to say the prayer aloud.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Wants and Needs (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 23 in several children’s Bibles, paraphrases, or translations. Find a Bible that uses “want” in verse 1 and one that uses “need.” *The Message* uses the phrase “I don’t need a thing.” The New International Version (NIV) uses the phrase “I lack nothing.” The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) uses “I shall not want.” *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories* by Mary Batchelor (Lion Publishing, 1985) uses “want.” *The Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton (Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) and *Spark Story Bible* (Augsburg Press, 2009) both use the word “need.” Consider what difference this word makes for you. What do you need God to provide for you? What are the wants in your life that aren’t essential to basic survival but might be nice? Do you trust God to provide both the needs and wants in your life? Think about how the children will understand wants and needs.

Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard, and write “NEEDS” as the heading of one side and “WANTS” as the heading of the other side. Do the same on white drawing paper, and make one sheet for each child.

Supplies:

- Bible
- two Bibles or Bible storybooks, one that uses the word “want” and one that uses the word “need” in Psalm 23:1
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- prepared “NEEDS/WANTS” drawing paper for each child
- pencils
- crayons

Explain, if necessary, that a psalm can be a prayer or a song or a sung prayer. Open a Bible and show the children where the book of Psalms is found. Tell the children that they are going to hear one of the psalms, Psalm 23, that is probably the most well-known of all the psalms. Read Psalm 23 using a Bible that uses the word “want” in verse 1. Tell the children that you are going to read the first verse of Psalm 23 again from a different Bible. Read Psalm 23:1 from the first Bible you read and then from a different Bible that uses the word “need.” Invite the children to see if they can tell the difference between the two readings. Point out, if necessary, the words “want” and “need.” Ask the children to describe things that they need. Some suggestions might be food, water, clothes, a place to live, and school. Write their ideas on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard under the heading “NEEDS.” Ask the children to describe things that they want. Write their

ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard under the heading “WANTS.” Help the children distinguish between “wants” and “needs.”

Give the children the prepared “NEEDS/WANTS” drawing paper and invite them to draw pictures on each side of the paper of things they need and things they want. As time allows, move around and talk with each child about his or her pictures and invite the children to share their pictures with the group.

Close with a prayer: *Thank you God that you care about our needs and our wants. Thanks that you can take care of us. Help us decide what we really need. Please be with us when we don't get what we want. Amen.*



5 Baptism of Christ

Leader Preparation: Look at the artwork “The Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West and consider the following questions. How does it speak to you about the event of the baptism of Christ? What new insights come to you as a result of looking at the artwork? What images are contained within the artwork? Can you see a rainbow? Do you see a sail and a boat? Take note of the frame around the outer edge of the picture that shows hands. Can you see more than one face? Notice the details of the ripples of the water. What else do you see? Be prepared to consider these questions and images and others that will come when looking at the picture with your group of children.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Baptism of Christ” by Pheoris West
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/794350630?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15627&store_id=1401

Gather the children around “The Baptism of Christ.” Invite them to look very carefully at the picture and invite them to share what they see—first the overall picture and then the details. Use the following questions as needed.

- What do you think is happening in this picture?
- Where do you see hands in this picture?
- Who can show me a rainbow?
- Where do you see the ripples in the water?
- Some people say they see a boat in this picture. Where can you see a boat?
- What do you think it would have been like to be there when Jesus was baptized?



6 Psalm 23 Hopscotch

Leader preparation: This activity reminds us that prayer is a pathway to God. Praying the psalms is a good ritual. The games we play in childhood involve ritual. In this game of hopscotch, we pray while we play. Many games have traditions and ritual associated with them and may vary from place to place or people to people. Refresh yourself on the rules or ritual of playing hopscotch and consult with other adult leaders about their understanding and interpretation of hopscotch play. The creative twist on traditional hopscotch in this version is that instead of numbers in the hopscotch squares, this design uses words adapted from Psalm 23:1, “God is my Shepherd. God gives me all I need.”

Make a hopscotch course for each group of four children, and learn how to play the game using the attachment “Hopscotch Instructions.”

Supplies:

- “Hopscotch Instructions,” Attachment: Activity 6
- supplies for making hopscotch course
- pebble for each child

Tell the children that they are going to play Psalm 23 Hopscotch. Invite the children to look at the hopscotch course that you prepared and read aloud the words going up the board from “God” to “need.” You will need to read the words to nonreaders. Tell them that this is the first verse of a very well-known psalm, Psalm 23. Tell them that prayer is a path to God and they can pray while they play!

Divide the groups into small groups of no more than four children, and explain how to play the game. Demonstrate how to play, if necessary. Give the children their pebbles and let them play and pray. At the end of the game, invite the children to say the words from the hopscotch course aloud together again.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 God’s the Shepherd, We’re the Sheep (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather pictures of sheep and shepherds. Sources might include posters, storybooks, children’s Bibles, and pictures from an Internet image search. Familiarize yourself with the song below so you can teach it to your group.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible with Psalm 23
- (optional) pictures of sheep and shepherds

If possible, show the children pictures of sheep and shepherds. Tell the children that long ago there was a boy named David who was a shepherd who loved God. He thought God was like a shepherd who took care of God’s people, just as a shepherd takes care of sheep. David wrote a prayer that could have been a song, too, in order to share that idea. We know David’s prayer as the 23rd Psalm. Read Psalm 23 from a children’s Bible. Ask the children what David says God is like and what the shepherd does for the sheep.

Teach and lead the children in singing “God’s the Shepherd, We’re the sheep” to the tune of “Mary had a Little Lamb.” Sing the song together several times. You may want to invite the children to follow you like sheep would follow a shepherd once they are familiar with the words.

God’s the Shepherd, We’re the Sheep

(tune: “Mary had a Little Lamb”)

God’s the Shepherd
We’re the sheep. We’re the sheep. We’re the sheep.
God the shepherd knows the sheep
And calls them all by name.

God is with me
Every day, every day, every day.
Loves and cares and comforts me.
God leads me all the way.

Pray to God my
Soul to keep, soul to keep, soul to keep.
Pray to God my soul to keep
As I lay down to sleep.

WORDS BY LYNN M. SOMERS; USED BY PERMISSION.



8 Prayer Rocks

Leader preparation: This activity involves collecting and coloring rocks to make them reminders to pray. In the most basic way, a rock can be a reminder to the children that God is their rock and solid as a rock. Whenever they look at the rock, they can know God is with them. You will have each child paint or color two rocks. One rock will be for them to keep as that reminder. The other rock will be for the child to share with a special adult or older child in their life and have a special poem to accompany it to explain the concept of the prayer rock. You will need to collect small rocks for the children to paint or color, being sure to have enough for two per child. Make copies of the Prayer Rock Poem to attach and accompany the rocks. Prayerfully read for yourself the prayer rock poem and pray for all those who will receive the decorated rocks.

Supplies:

- two small rocks for each child
- acrylic paints, brushes and water cups or paint pens
- paint smock for each child
- “Prayer Rock,” Attachment: Activity 8 (two copies for each child)
- envelope for each child
- yarn
- scissors
- single-hole punch
- pencils or pens

Invite the children to paint two prayer rocks, one for themselves and one for a special friend. Have the children put on paint smocks. Invite the children to choose two rocks and paint them as they wish. As they finish painting their rocks, set them aside to dry. As the rocks are drying, read “Prayer Rock Poem” to the children. Give each child a copy of the poem and an envelope. Instruct them to sign their names to the copy of the poem, if they are able. You may need to assist some children with writing. Have them fold the poem and put it in the envelope. Instruct them to write the name of the person to whom they want to give the prayer rock on the envelope. Again, you may need to assist younger children with writing. Have the children punch a hole in the corner of the envelope. When the rocks are dry, tie a piece of yarn around one rock and attach it to the hole in the envelope. Tell the children to give this prayer rock and poem to their special friend. Have the children take their prayer rock and a copy of the poem home as well.



9 I Just Wanna Be a Sheep

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video “I Just Wanna be a Sheep.” This song connects the idea of the 23rd Psalm, that God is our shepherd and we are God’s sheep. It also refers to Jesus’ teaching in the New Testament when he says that he is the Good Shepherd and we are his flock. Although the song mentions groups of people (hypocrites, Pharisees, and Sadducees) that Jesus thought weren’t being like sheep and following God, focus the children on being good sheep and following God. Make a sheep puppet as a sample to show the children.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “I Just Wanna be a Sheep”
<http://www.butterflysong.com/>
- “Paper-Plate Sheep Puppet Instructions,” Attachment: Activity 9
- supplies for making sheep puppets
- sample sheep puppet

Show the children the sheep puppet you made, and invite them to make their own sheep puppet. Guide them using the directions on the attachment. Set the puppets aside to dry.

Show the children the YouTube video “I Just Wanna be a Sheep,” and invite them to sing along with the song. Tell the children that being a sheep is being a follower of God and trying to do what God would want us to do. Invite the children to get their puppets and sing along with the song again, moving their sheep puppets and “baa-ing” when appropriate.

Reflect

Think about rocks or stones as they were encountered in this Exploration. Do you think about them differently now, as reminders of people or events? How can rocks or stones be reminders to pray? Even though you may have been familiar with Psalm 23 before this Exploration, what new insights have you gained through this experience? How did focusing on the sheep impact your understanding? Carefully and prayerfully consider how the children in your group now think and feel about these things. What special moments did you and the children share around prayer and these images?

Attachment: Activity 1

Newscast of the Israelites Crossing the Jordan River

This is your news reporter from CBN—that's Canaan Broadcasting Network—here with the greatest news of the day, which comes to us from the Jordan River. The Israelites are camped by the river, ready to cross over into Canaan, the Promised Land. This time it looks like they are really going to do it! Our camera crews have been here all day on the scene ready to bring the events to you live.

Yes, we now see the Israelite priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the Law of God, you know, the Ten Commandments. The Ark is a large chest that is carried by two long poles. It takes several priests on each side of the Ark to carry it.

The priests are approaching the water's edge. Now they are standing ankle-deep in the water. Wait! Something unusual is happening. The water has been blocked in some way and the river bed seems to be drying out! It seems as if the priests have their feet wedged against stones on the river bed and are creating some sort of barrier or dam holding the water back. It appears that all the people and the troops will be able to cross on dry land! Not since the parting of the Red Sea has such a thing been seen!

Now the last of the people have crossed, and the priests are beginning to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the river bank, but wait . . . there are twelve men that we have been told represent the twelve tribes of Israel going down into the river. They are each bringing out a stone from where the priests were standing! This is fascinating!

The priests and everyone have reached the other side of the Jordan River and arrived in Canaan safely, and, yes, the water in the river is beginning to flow again as it did before this amazing event! Stay tuned for more information on those stones.

Wait, this just in. We have an update on those stones. The twelve men have placed their stones in some sort of formation, a monument of sorts. We are being told that these stones will serve as a reminder for generations to come that the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River on dry land, just as God held back the waters of the Red Sea when they were delivered from Egypt years before. Amazing, truly amazing! Well, I have to say, that's one spectacular God. And you heard it here first, on CBN—Canaan Broadcasting Network. Good news, and good night.

Attachment: Activity 3

Paper-Bag Stone Directions

Make a set of twelve stones for each group of six to eight children.

Decide if you want to make lunch bag size stones or grocery bag size stones.

For twelve stones you will need:

- 24 brown paper bags, grocery-bag size or lunch-bag size
- lots of newspaper for stuffing 12 bags
- masking tape
- marker

To make each stone, stuff one bag with crumpled newspaper. Place a second bag over the opening and tape the bags together to make a "stone."

When you have finished twelve stones, write each word from the prayer below on a stone. Write the word in big letters and on each large side of the stone. There will be two bags with the word "is" and three bags with the word "God."

God
is
great.
God
is
Good.
We
thank
God,
for
our
food.

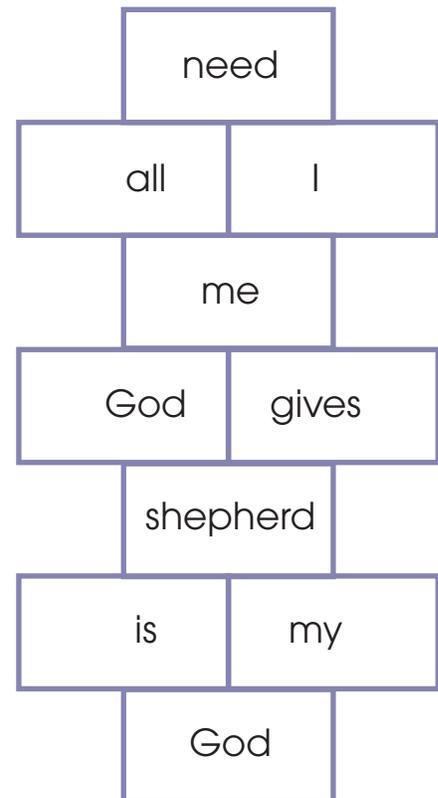
Attachment: Activity 6

Hopscotch Instructions

Use the diagram below to make a hopscotch course for each group of four children. First, determine if the children will play hopscotch indoors or outdoors. If they can be outdoors, use sidewalk chalk. If they will be playing indoors, use masking tape for the outline and index cards with words written on them taped inside each square.

How to Play

- On the first turn, a child tosses a pebble onto the hopscotch course at the first square, labeled "God."
- When a stone is on "God," the child hops over the square and lands on the next two squares, with the left foot on "is" and the right foot on "my."
- The child continues hopping, on one foot when there is one square and on two feet when there are two squares.
- At the top square—"need"—the child turns around and hops back in the same manner, picking up the pebble and then hopping off the course.
- Each child takes a turn tossing a pebble onto the first square and then hopping through the hopscotch course.
- The play continues with teach turn as the children toss their pebbles to each following square—"is," "my," "shepherd," and so on. The hopping pattern is repeated with the children hopping over the square with the pebble on the way back
- Make your own rules about how many tries the children have to land their pebbles on each square of the course.



Attachment: Activity 8

Prayer Rock

I'm your little prayer rock,
And this is what I'll do.
Just put me on your pillow
Until the day is through.
Then turn back the covers
And climb into your bed.
And WHACK—your little prayer rock
Will hit you on the head.
And then you will remember
As the day is nearly through
To kneel and say your prayers
As you really wanted to.
Then when you are finished—
Just dump me on the floor.
I'll stay there through the nighttime
To give you help once more.
When you get up next morning—
CLUNK . . . I'll stub your toe.
So you will remember
Your morning prayers before you go.
Put me back upon your pillow
When your bed is made,
And your clever little prayer rock
Will continue in your aid.
Because our tender God
Cares and loves you so,
God wants you to remember
To talk to him, you know!

Attachment: Activity 9

Paper-Plate Sheep Puppet Instructions

Supplies

- white paper plate for each child
- black markers or crayons
- craft glue
- cotton balls, about 30 per child
- pink pom-pom for each child
- 3" pink chenille stem for each child
- 2 wiggle eyes for each child
- 2 black construction-paper ovals, about 2" x 3"
- large craft stick for each child
- hot glue gun (optional)

Directions

1. Color the center of the paper plate black.
Option: cut a large circle for the face from black paper and glue to the plate.
2. Put a generous amount of craft glue around the white edge of the paper plate and attach cotton balls. See picture on this page.
3. Glue a pom-pom onto the center of the paper plate to be the lamb's nose.
4. Fold the chenille stem in half, and then bend out the end of each half, so that the stem looks like a smiling mouth. See the picture. Glue the "mouth" below the pink pom-pom "nose."
5. Glue on a pair of wiggle eyes.
6. For ears, glue on the two black construction-paper ovals.
7. Glue a large craft stick to the back side of the puppet at the bottom of the face. This stick can be used to hold the puppet up. For quick gluing, you can use a hot glue gun to adhere the craft stick to the puppet. Only an adult should use a hot glue gun.



Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Young children may not grasp or understand all of the meaning of the scriptures, but they will appreciate and connect with stories, songs, and prayers found in the Bible. Telling the sacred story to children is important. Children will take it in at their level of comprehension, and layers and understanding will grow as the child grows. Children will learn prayers not only from adults but with adults. Often they can say or sing a prayer, including motions or postures with adults guiding them. Children at this age are helped by tangible reminders to guide their prayers.

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

This Exploration has a wide range of activities. It includes reflectively looking at a piece of artwork and making a piece of edible artwork. There are ways to teach prayer that include fingers and whole bodies. There are songs to sing and games to play. All of these activities are rooted in scripture that teaches us to praise and pray. As you consider which activities you will choose, note that many of them need a computer with Internet access and a digital projector to view video segments, songs, or artwork.

These sessions have a common thread, one set forth by the disciples: “teach us to pray.” As you prepare to lead, reflect on who taught you to pray and what methods or ways were used. Ask yourself if you are open to learn new ways to pray.

Prayer: God, teach me to pray, even as I join these children in exploring prayer and praise in your Word. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Praise Litany (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 from the attachment. As you read, pay attention to the verses that praise God for who God is and for God’s qualities that are worthy of our praise or cause us to say, “Wow!”

Supplies:

- Bible
- “1 Chronicles 29:10-13 Reading and Litany,” Attachment: Activity 1

Show the children the Bible and turn to 1 Chronicles 29. Tell the children that the Bible tells us about a time when King David stood in front of his whole kingdom and gave God praise. Explain that King David praised God using his own words, whereas today’s children might praise God by saying, “Wow God! You’re awesome!” Read the passage using the attachment. Ask the children what words they heard that sound like words of praise or “Wow!” words. Suggestions might be “praise,” “great,” “powerful,” “glory,” “majesty,” “beauty,” “honor,” “strength,” “power,” “ruler,” and “glorious.”

Tell the children that together you are going to say a prayer of praise to God. Explain that you will say a line, and then they will respond with the same line each time: “Wow, God you’re awesome!” Encourage the children to raise their hands toward the sky as they say this line each time. Read the litany on the attachment.

2 Praise God in the Morning

Leader preparation: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-18. In this passage David gives praise to God in the community of God’s people. Praise is often best expressed and conveyed in song. Many praise songs and praise choruses are repetitious. Young children learn by repetition and reinforcement. The song they will learn in this activity is a simple praise song that can remind them of the times to praise or pray: in the morning, in the noontime, and when the sun goes down. Watch the YouTube video “Praise God in the Morning” so you may teach the songs and motions to the children.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Praise God in the Morning”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8bJYaNqfWo>

Invite the children to learn a song that can remind them when to praise God. Show the video “Praise God in the Morning.” Have the children join the song and use the motions as they become comfortable in moving with the song. Consider sharing the song with others in a worship service or other setting.

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.

③ Drawing on Prayer

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–13. Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. This activity may help the children think about ways to pray through a wondering exercise and to draw their prayers through their own pictures as a way to talk to God.

Supplies:

- art paper
- pencils
- crayons

Invite the children to sit comfortably on the floor with you. Tell the children prayer is talking to God and you want them to think and wonder about it with you. Use the following wondering questions to talk about prayer with the children.

- I wonder if we always have to use our words to talk to God. What are ways to talk to God without words?
- I wonder if it matters where we pray or what position we are in when we pray. What do you think about where or how we pray?
- I wonder if we can talk to God about our feelings in our prayers. What feelings would you share with God?
- I wonder if it is okay to tell God about the things I want and the things I need. Tell me about a time you told God those things.
- I wonder if we can just say, “Thanks, God” or “Wow, God, you are awesome!” What are you thankful for?
- I wonder if we can talk to God about our mess-ups and mistakes. What would you say to God about this?
- I wonder if we can talk to God about other people. What people would you talk to God about?
- I wonder if it’s okay to just listen for God and not say anything at all. What do you think it would be like to do that?

Tell the children that your conversation began about talking or praying to God without words. Explain that one way to do that is to make pictures that show prayers to God.

Give the children paper, pencils, and crayons, and invite them to draw picture prayers that can show their praises, feelings, mistakes, and people they are thankful for or people they want to pray for. Invite the children to share their pictures as they feel comfortable. Conclude with a prayer that lifts the children and their prayers to God.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Ask, Seek and Knock (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:5–10 from the attachment. The focus of the story and the passage is persistence. Young children can be very persistent and insistent when there is something they want. The children will play a game called “Ask, Seek, and Knock,” which is a variation on “Duck, Duck, Goose.” The action is similar, but this game involves some scripted lines for the children to say.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Luke 11:5–10 Reading,” Attachment: Activity 4

Have the children sit in a circle that has room to run around the outside of it. Show them the Bible and turn to Luke 11. Tell them that in the Bible Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer. Read from the attachment. Invite the children to play a game called “Ask, Seek, and Knock.” Explain how to play the game using the following directions.

- Choose a child to be the hungry neighbor who needs bread. Have that child stand on the inside of the circle facing the children sitting in the circle.
- The hungry child stands in front of a seated child and says, “Knock, knock.”
- The seated child says, “Who’s there?”
- The hungry child says, “A friend. Do you have bread to share?”
- The seated child may give one of three answers:
 1. *Yes.* If the seated child answers, “Yes,” then that child stands up, runs around the outside of the circle, and tries to get back to his or her spot before being tagged by the hungry child. If the hungry child tags the child, that child becomes the new hungry neighbor. If the child makes it back to his or her spot, then the same child remains the hungry neighbor.
 2. *No.* If the seated child answers, “No,” then the hungry child needs to go ask someone else.
 3. *Maybe.* If the seated child answers, “Maybe,” then the hungry child may ask the same question again of that same child, hoping that by being persistent there will be a different answer.
- Continue playing the game until everyone has had a chance to be the hungry neighbor needing bread.
- You can move the play along if it seems one child is stuck in the role of the hungry neighbor.

Closing prayer: Thank you, God, for teaching us that we need to keep on praying. Remind us of ask, seek, and knock when we say our prayers to you. We thank you that you hear us and will answer. Amen.



5 The Reading

Leader preparation: Spend time gazing intently at the artwork “The Reading” by Wilson. What is your interpretation of what is taking place in this scene? How does this picture make you feel? What connection can you make between this artwork and ritual or prayer? Consider the ritual of reading with children and reading to children. Who read to you as a child? Have you had the experience of reading to a particular child or children? Perhaps the book could be the Bible or a Bible storybook. If so, in addition to sharing the value and importance of reading and books, there may also be a faith tradition being shared and nurtured.

Supplies:

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

Display “The Reading” and invite the children to gather around the picture. Invite the children to use their imaginations and tell a story of what the picture may be about. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you see in the picture?
- What do you think is going on in the picture?
- How do you think the people in the picture are feeling?
- I wonder what kind of book they are reading in the picture. What do you think?
- If the book in the picture is a Bible, what story do you think they are reading?
- Tell me about a time when someone read to you. What was that like? How did you feel?
- What stories do you like to hear?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for pictures that let us wonder and imagine what is taking place inside them. Thank you, God, for books to read, including Bibles and Bible storybooks. Thanks, God, for our families and times spent with them that are special like reading together. Amen.



6 Pray with Me—The Five Finger Prayer

Leader preparation: In Luke 11 the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus gave them a model to guide them in their prayers. The Five Finger Prayer and the song “Pray with Me” are models that can help the children learn to pray. Watch the YouTube video “Mother and child prayer and song” and examine the attachment. Decide if you will show the video to the children or lead the prayer and song yourself.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- YouTube video “Mother and child prayer and song”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szsr_xuRDWY
- “Five Finger Prayer Guide,” Attachment: Activity 6

Tell the children that long ago Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus to show them how to pray. Jesus taught them a special prayer that showed them how to pray. Explain that you are going to teach the children a fun way to remember prayers using the fingers on one hand. Show the video “Mother and child prayer and song,” or teach the prayer and song using the attachment. Invite the children to follow along with you as you point to each finger. Sing each verse of the song having the children echo you, repeating each line. Send home a copy the attachment with each child so that they may pray and sing with their families.

Sending & Serving Activities

 7 Praying with Your Body (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Body prayer involves praying not only with your words but also with simple gestures or movements of your body. Since young children are such naturally active beings, introducing them to a type of prayer that encourages them to move rather than to be still is a natural connection. If available and you have the time, watch the YouTube video “Body Prayer” to learn the motions to the prayer so that you can teach them to the children.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- YouTube video “Body Prayer”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qf2kveMP_ZA

Tell the children there are lots of different ways to pray. Explain that they can pray using more than just words; they can also pray using their bodies. Pray the prayer with the children several times using the words and motions below. Have them sit for the first time. Then have them stand and pray it again. Then have the children move around the room and tell them that when you call, “Stop,” they are to stop where they are and pray the prayer again. Explain that they can pray with their words and body anywhere, anytime. Encourage the children to teach this prayer to their families.

Good Morning, Lord. (*raise your arms in the air praising God*)

This is your day. (*circle your arms in the air bringing palms together in your lap*)

I am your child. (*place your right hand over your heart*)

Please show me the way. (*extend your left hand straight out with palm up*)

WORDS FOR THE PRAYER BY BRYER HELMER AND SALLY WISNER-OTT;
USED WITH PERMISSION.

8 Praying The Lord’s Prayer

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:1–4 from a children’s Bible. This is a version of the Lord’s Prayer that may be more understandable to young children. It is important for the children in your group to learn the version of the Lord’s Prayer prayed in your church’s worship services. Although the children may not understand all the words of the prayer, there is value in them experiencing the ritual of saying it. As they mature in faith, their understanding will grow. Be prepared to teach it to your children by having them repeat each line after you like an echo. Be prepared to answer questions the children may have about words or meanings, but keep it simple, and don’t worry about explaining if they don’t ask.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible that includes the Lord’s Prayer
- the version of the Lord’s Prayer used by your church

Read aloud Luke 11:1–4 from a children’s Bible. Ask the children if these words are familiar and they know what this prayer is called. Explain, if necessary, that this prayer is what is known as the Lord’s Prayer, which Jesus taught to his disciples. Tell the children that they are going to say the Lord’s Prayer with you as it is prayed in the worship services at your church. Invite the children to echo you, repeating each line of the prayer as you say it.

9 Painted Toast

Leader preparation: Read Luke 11:3–8 paying attention to the theme of bread. This activity allows the children to have some “daily bread” as a colorful and creative experience. Read the directions, and plan your preparation. Cover the table or work space with washable tablecloths, so the food coloring does not stain the surface. The toast is best served warm, and the colors sparkle brightest immediately after the butter is spread. Be aware of any gluten or milk allergies in your group, and provide gluten-free and milk-free options as necessary.

Supplies:

- white bread, one or two slices for each child
- milk
- liquid food colors—variety of colors
- 1 or 2 new paint brushes for each “milk paint” cup
- small paper or plastic cups
- paper plate for each child
- toasters or toaster ovens
- butter or margarine
- table knife or plastic knife for each child
- smocks or aprons

Follow these directions for making Painted Toast:

- Have the children wash their hands and put on a smock or apron to protect their clothes.
- Give each child a plate and a slice of bread.
- Pour some milk in the small cups and add some food coloring to create different color “milk paints.” Invite the children to choose the colors they want to make and help mix the colors.
- Put the paint brushes by each milk cup. Tell the children to dip the brushes in the cups to get the “milk paint,” but then to put the brushes next to the cups when they have finished using them so the cups don’t tip over.
- Invite the children to use the “milk paints” to paint pictures on their bread canvases. Tell the children not to soak the bread with too much “milk paint.”
- Place the painted bread in the toaster or toaster oven on a light setting.
- When the toast is done, butter it lightly, and see how the colors sparkle.
- Say a prayer of thanks for daily bread and painted toast. Enjoy eating your colorful creations!

Reflect

What new ways of learning to pray did you experience? What was the most memorable experience for you in this Exploration? Prayerfully consider where you saw and encountered God in this experience. Give thanks and praise for it all!

Attachment: Activity 1

1 Chronicles 29:10–13 Reading and Litany

1 Chronicles 29:10–13, New International Readers Version (NIRV)

David praised the Lord in front of the whole community. He said,
“Lord, we give you praise.
You are the God of our father Israel.
We give you praise for ever and ever.
Lord, you are great and powerful.
Glory, majesty and beauty belong to you.
Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you.
Lord, the kingdom belongs to you.
You are honored as the One who rules over all.
Wealth and honor come from you.
You are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power.
You can give honor and strength to everyone.
Our God, we give you thanks.
We praise your glorious name.”

Litany based on 1 Chronicles 29:10–13

Leader: God, we praise you. You are the God of Israel.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: We praise you forever and ever.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: God, you are great and powerful. Glory, majesty, and beauty are yours.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: God, the whole world belongs to You.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: You are honored as the One who rules over all.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: Wealth and honor come from you, You rule over all things.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: In your hands are strength and power.
Children: Wow! God, You're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: You can give honor and strength to everyone.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: God, we give you thanks. We praise your glorious name.
Children: Wow, God, you're awesome! (*lift arms to the sky*)
Leader: Thank you, Awesome God, for your Word that helps us to praise You!
Children: Amen!

Attachment: Activity 4

Luke 11:5–10
New International Readers Version (NIRV)

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose someone has a friend. He goes to him at midnight. He says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. A friend of mine on a journey has come to stay with me. I have nothing for him to eat.’

“Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked. My children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’

“I tell you, that person will not get up. And he won’t give the man bread just because he is his friend. But because the man keeps on asking, he will get up. He will give him as much as he needs.

“So here is what I say to you. Ask, and it will be given to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks will receive. He who searches will find. And the door will be opened to the one who knocks.”

Attachment: Activity 6

The Five Finger Prayer

1. The Thumb—It is close to you, so pray for those closest to you.
2. The Pointer—It points the way, so pray for those who teach, instruct, preach and heal, like teachers, ministers, doctors.
3. The Tall One—It is the tallest finger, so pray for our leaders, like the President, community leaders, and business leaders.
4. The Ring Finger—It is the weakest of all the fingers, so pray for those who are sick, weak, in trouble, or pain.
5. The Pinky—It is the littlest finger and reminds us that we are little, so pray yourself and your own needs, remembering to give thanks and also to ask for forgiveness.

“Pray with Me”

Sung to the tune “Where Is Thumbkin?” or “Freres Jacques.”

Verse 1

Pray with me-e, pray with me-e.
Won't you please? Won't you please?
We can talk with God. We can talk with God,
Everywhere, everywhere.

Verse 2

How to pray? How to pray?
What do I say? What do I say?
I can use my hands. I can use my hands.
As a guide. As a guide.

Verse 3

Here's my thumb. Here's my thumb.
Closest to me. Closest to me.
Pray for those I love. Pray for those I love.
Close to me. Close to me.

Verse 4

Here my Pointer. Here's my Pointer.
Points the way. Points the way.
Pray for those who teach. Pray for those who
preach.
Show the way. Show the way.

Verse 5

Here's my Tall One. Here's my Tall One.
Leads the way. Leads the way.
Pray for all the leaders. May they seek God's
guidance.
Every day. Every day.

Verse 6

Now the Ring finger. Now the Ring finger.
It's so weak. It's so weak.
Pray for the sick ones. Pray for those seek God.
They need help. They need hope.

Verse 7

Here is Pinky. Here is Pinky.
It's so small. Not at all tall.
Say, "I'm sorry, God." Pray for what I need.
I pray for me. I pray for me.

Verse 8

That's my hand prayer. That's my hand prayer.
Now it's done. Now it's done.
See how I've prayed. See how I've prayed.
Prayed for all. Prayed for all.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children in this age group learn by doing. In the preschool years children love to mimic or model the behavior and actions of others. Young disciples are open to experiencing different prayer practices and rituals. Being joyful and praying nonstop, as suggested in the scriptures, connect with the natural exuberance and repetition of young children.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration you may encounter some prayer practices new to you. Be willing to open yourself to breath prayers and walking a labyrinth, as well as to consider different prayer postures. As you introduce young children to various ways to pray, you nurture them as disciples.

Prayer: Spirit of the living God, guide and inspire me to nurture my young disciples in their prayer life. Please disciple and nurture me even as I lead and mentor them. Amen.

Session Development

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

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- 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 A Hand-y Prayer Reminder (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 giving attention to the verses that guide us in ways to pray, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks. This activity creates a very simple guide for children to remember the people and things they would like to pray for. Think of people and things you pray for that will help the children in creating their own “hand-y prayer reminder.” Following the instructions below, make a sample hand-y prayer reminder to show the children.

Supplies:

- Bible (*The Message* is good for this age)
- pencils
- crayons
- colored construction paper
- (optional) scissors
- sample hand-y prayer reminder

Show the children where 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18 is found in the Bible, and read it to them. Ask the children to listen for instructions in these verses. After the reading, invite the children’s responses to the instructions they heard. Tell them, if necessary, that these verses say that we should pray all the time and be thanking God in all things. Tell the children that they are going to use their hands to make a hand-y reminder about prayer. Show them the hand-y prayer reminder you made, and use the following instructions to help the children make their prayer reminders.

- Choose a piece of colored construction paper.
- With a pencil or crayon, trace one hand on the paper. Spread your fingers to make it easier to trace around them. You may need to assist younger children with the tracing.
- Write or draw simple pictures on each finger and the thumb of their hand tracing of the people or things they want to pray for or are thankful for. Make suggestions if a child gets stuck.
- Write your name in the middle of the hand tracings to remember to pray for yourself, too!

If you wish, the children may cut out their hand tracings, but you may want to keep the full page and have children decorate the rest of the paper. Encourage the children to hang their hand-y prayer reminders in a place at home that will remind them to pray.

Close with a group prayer: *Thank you, God, for our hand-y reminders we have made. May they help us to pray and lift up people and things to you. As we look at the hands we traced, we thank you for our hands, too. Amen.*

2 Prayer Postures—Strike a Pose

Leader preparation: Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11, with special focus on verse 10: “So now, God, I’m bringing you the first share of crops from the soil. After all, you have given them to me. Place the basket in front of God and BOW down.” This passage speaks of giving thanks and offering to God, and verse 10 highlights a particular prayer posture in relation to God. The people making offering were to

bow down to God. This activity helps you explore various prayer postures with the children through a short devotional and a game. Consider various prayer postures that you are familiar with and that the children may already know or practice in your church or with their families. Arrange your space so that there is as much open area as possible or arrange to use a different space for this activity.

Supplies:

- music player
- lively, upbeat music

Use this short verse to help the children explore different prayer postures. Invite them to repeat your words and actions as you lead the verse line by line. Repeat the verse several times so the children are comfortable with it.

I can pray like this with my hands together,
(press hands together, interlace fingers)

I can pray like this when I kneel at night,
(kneel on floor, with hands folded, head bowed)

I can pray like this with my arms held high looking at the sky,
(stand with arms raised and look up)

I can pray in many ways, and God says, "It's all right."

Have the children spend a few minutes trying out different prayer postures, such as kneeling, hands folded, hands outstretched, and face lifted to heaven. Invite the children to share with you any other prayer poses or postures they can think of and add a few more lines to the verse.

Invite the children to play a prayer posing game with music. Have everyone spread out in your space. Explain that when the music starts they can dance and move around, but when the music stops and you call out "Pray!" they are to freeze in a prayer pose until the music starts again. Each time the music stops, choose a different prayer posture. When you are done playing, say a prayer thanking God for the many ways to pray.



③ Walking a Labyrinth

Leader preparation: One way to explore the concept of praying without ceasing as mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is to walk a labyrinth. Walking a labyrinth involves being in motion while praying. Young children are often in perpetual motion. Working with children to follow the path and pattern of the labyrinth is a way to channel that energy and motion in the practice of prayer. Like many prayer practices, it needs to be modeled for young disciples by their leaders. If you would like to learn more about labyrinths, visit the following websites: "Labyrinth Society" (<http://labyrinthociety.org/>), "Labyrinth" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labyrinth>), and "The Labyrinth Project" (<http://www.labyrinthproject.com/bibselfpublished.html>). The Labyrinth Project" lists a number of books about using the labyrinth, several for use with children. You might also watch the YouTube video "Family using a Labyrinth," which provides ideas to talk about or do while walking a labyrinth.

Research your local area to see if there is a church, denominational office, resource center, retreat center, or other group that has either a labyrinth at its site that you can visit or a portable labyrinth that you can borrow. The website of the Labyrinth Society includes a segment that provides instructions for making a chalk-line labyrinth on parking lots or a masking-tape labyrinth on a floor for inside use, if you would want to try to make your own. If you need to travel to

a labyrinth, make the necessary travel and permission arrangements. You may want to meet at the site and include parents in the experience. If experiencing an on a ground labyrinth is not possible, use the finger labyrinth on the attachment. Enlarge the image so that young fingers will not have trouble following the path.

Supplies:

- labyrinth
- “Finger Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 3
- (optional) crayons or markers
- adult helpers, if necessary

Explain that a labyrinth is like a maze on the floor, except that in a maze there are tricks and dead ends. A labyrinth is a path that twists and winds in to the center and then out again. There are no tricks or dead ends to get someone lost. Labyrinths are used for prayer and meditation. As people go through a labyrinth they will stop to lift up a prayer or listen for God. They might sing quietly to themselves as they walk.

Suggest a simple prayer chant, such as repeating the word “Jesus” over and over or vocalizing a simple prayer or praise song while walking. If the labyrinth is in a woods or natural setting, urge children to be still and listen to the sounds of nature around them. Suggest that before they start to move along the path, they silently greet God and then pause for a moment as they start, when they reach the middle, and as they come out—to lift up a prayer or listen for God. Invite the children, and adults if present, to walk the labyrinth. You may want to have an adult helper or parent accompany young children through the labyrinth.

If visiting a labyrinth is not possible, provide enlarged copies of the finger labyrinth on the attachment. Have the children follow the path with a finger or with a crayon or marker. You might want to make extra copies if the children will be using crayons or markers.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Breath Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. Read about breath prayers at Breath Prayer. Practice saying one or more of the suggested breath prayers. Create your own breath prayer and try using it.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 to the children. Ask the children what instructions they hear in these verses. Ask them how they think we can never stop praying. Explain that one way to pray is called a breath prayer. It is a short prayer that can usually be said in the space of one breath in and out. Tell them that they can use a breath prayer throughout the day to remember that God is near. Show them how they can say a breath prayer using the phrase “Jesus” (*breathe in*) “loves me” (*breathe out*). Have them find a place to sit quietly and slowly breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. Tell them to say the breath prayer quietly or silently to themselves as they continue to breathe slowly. After a few minutes, gently bring them back together.

5 Door Hanger Prayer Reminders

Leader preparation: The idea conveyed in both Bible Focus Passages, Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24, is about remembering to pray to God and being thankful and joyful for all that God is and all that God has given you. The children will make door hangers with the word “PRAY” on them to remind them to pray always.

Supplies:

- craft foam door hanger for each child (available at craft stores)
- craft foam letters “P,” “R,” “A,” and “Y” for each child
- sequins, stickers, craft foam shapes, glitter glue, and other embellishments
- craft glue, if the letters and decorations are not self-adhesive

Engage the children in conversation about prayer using the following questions.

- Do you think that sometimes we get too busy to pray?
- The Bible says that we should pray all the time. How do you think we can remember to do that?
- The Bible says that we should be thankful for everything. What do you think about that? What things are easy to be thankful about? What things are difficult to be thankful about?

Invite the children to decorate a door hanger to hang on their bedroom door, or a door they use a lot in their house, to remind them to pray. Give each child a craft foam door hanger and the letters “P,” “R,” “A,” and “Y.” Tell them to put the letters on their door hanger in that order: P-R-A-Y. If the letters are not self-adhesive, the children will need to use craft glue. Invite the children to decorate their door hangers with other embellishments that you have provided.

Close with the following prayer: *Gracious God, we thank you that we can pray to you all the time, but sometimes we forget. When we see our door hangers that say “PRAY,” let us remember to pray and give you thanks. Amen.*

6 It’s Me . . . I Need Prayer, Too

Leader preparation: Oftentimes our prayers focus on others. It is helpful to remember that we can pray for ourselves as well. The children will hear and sing the song “Standing in the Need of Prayer,” an African-American spiritual that can remind us that while others also need prayer, “It’s me, it’s me, it’s me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” Watch the YouTube videos “Haitian children sing ‘Standing in the Need of Prayer’” and “Guitarist leads ‘Standing in the Need of Prayer’ with preschoolers.” Familiarize yourself with the song. Decide if you will show one or both videos or teach the song to the children yourself.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Haitian children sing ‘Standing in the Need of Prayer’” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P2YEC-ochc&feature=related>
- YouTube video “Guitarist leads ‘Standing in the Need of Prayer’ with preschoolers” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCOUD_LuYHs
- rhythm instruments

Tell the children that they are going to hear and sing a song about praying to God. The song tells God that it is you who needs prayer. Tell the children that singing

is a way of praying, too. Show the children the YouTube video(s) you have chosen. Invite the children to sing along as they feel comfortable with the words. Play a video again as accompaniment music. Give the children rhythm instruments and invite them to sing and to play the instruments. You may want to have the children sing for another group or in a worship service, leading others in song and prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Arrow Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Arrow prayers are short prayers sent up to God in spontaneous moments, often prompted by an event or situation suddenly encountered, like an arrow shooting heavenward. Say your own arrow prayers to God for guidance as you lead the children. Cut out the arrow prayers from the attachment.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Arrow Prayers,” Attachment: Activity7

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 aloud and ask the children how they think they can always be praying. Tell them there are lots of ways they can pray. One way is a quick prayer said at the spur of the moment that is shot up to God, like an arrow. Explain that there are times when something happens that makes us want to say a quick prayer to God. Invite the children to think of times they may want to pray a quick prayer, such as when sirens are heard or an emergency vehicle is seen. They may not know the circumstances, but a quick prayer for safety may be prayed. Another time may be before a test at school, a sporting event, or another type of competition, inviting God to be with them in those situations. Ask the children to name some other situations when a quick prayer might be helpful. Write their suggestions on blank arrows cut out from the attachment.

Invite the children to practice arrow prayers. Choose an arrow prayer from the attachment and read the situation on the arrow. Invite them to say a quick prayer, or an arrow prayer, about that situation. If children want some help, they can point the arrow toward another child, or you, and ask for help. You may want to do one or two arrow prayers as an example.

Close with the following prayer: *Thank you, God, that we can say quick, short prayers to you for things we see or hear going on around us. Thank you that you hear our arrow prayers. Amen.*

8 First Fruits Shared

Leader preparation: Obtain, or ask donations for, a variety of fruits for fruit salad, being sure to include some soft fruits that the children can cut and prepare. Gather supplies needed for this activity.

Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11. Bringing and making an offering to God of first fruits is a way of expressing thankfulness to God, who provides us with all that we have. Sharing what we have and what we have been given is a way of serving others. God required this offering from the children of Israel as thanksgiving for the land God gave them, the “land of milk and honey.” Be mindful of any food allergies that the children may have.

Supplies:

- Bible
- fruits for salad, such as bananas, strawberries, blueberries, seedless grapes, seedless oranges or clementines, apples, pears, and melon
- milk
- honey
- big bowl
- cutting boards
- sink
- paper towels
- child-safe knives or plastic knives
- sharp knife (for adult use only)
- 2 large stirring spoons
- pitcher
- paper plates or bowls
- plastic spoons or forks
- small paper cups
- napkins

Read aloud Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and ask the children what they heard God instruct the people of Israel to do. Explain, if necessary, that the Israelites were instructed to offer the first fruits of their harvest to remember and be thankful for the land that God gave to them. The people called the Promised Land a land of milk and honey, meaning that it was so sweet. Tell the children that sharing what we have been given with others is a way of saying thank you to God and serving others.

Invite the children to make a salad of fruits and a drink of milk and honey to remember the first fruits offered to God. Have the children wash their hands. Give children jobs to do:

- Set the table with plates or bowls, cups, spoons or forks, and napkins.
- Cut soft fruits, such as bananas, strawberries, and melon and put them in the bowl.
- Wash grapes and blueberries and dry them gently with paper towels. Put them in the bowl.
- Peel and separate oranges or clementines and put the sections in the bowl.

Only an adult should cut hard fruits, such as apples or pears.

When all the fruit is in the bowl, invite children to take turns stirring the fruit. Pour the milk into the pitcher and add some honey. Have a few children stir the honey in the milk. Pour milk into the cups for the children. Invite children to put some fruit salad in their bowls. Before enjoying the salad and milk together, say the following prayer: *Thank you God for all the good gifts you give us every day. Thank you for these sweet fruits and sweet milk that remind us of your goodness. As we enjoy these fruits, let us remember those who do not have enough to eat or drink. Let us serve you by serving others. Amen.*

9 Harvest Home Offering

Leader preparation: In many rural communities there has been a ritual or tradition of a harvest home offering, which involves bringing produce and foods that were home grown to be shared with others. Some churches practice this type of celebration in conjunction with a holiday, often Thanksgiving, or sometime in the autumn. Coordinate with your church's mission or outreach committee on this project, determining the organization to receive the food collection, particular items that may be needed, a date for collection, and volunteers to help collect and deliver items. Coordinate with your pastor for a time in the worship service to celebrate the collection of the food offering with a dedication and prayer. Create an announcement for the worship bulletin and church newsletter. The children will make some posters and decorate collection boxes or baskets.

Supplies:

- Bible
- large baskets and/or cardboard boxes
- large craft paper
- tape
- markers and crayons
- magazines, especially with food pictures
- scissors
- glue sticks
- several sheets of poster board

Read Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and tell the children about a Harvest Home offering or food collection. Share the information you have about the details of the food collection and the organization that will receive the collection. Tell the children that they will make some posters and collection baskets and boxes to place around the church.

Help the children cover the boxes or baskets with craft paper. Have them decorate the collection baskets and boxes with pictures of food. Help them choose pictures of items that are particularly in need. Write, or have them write if they are able, the name and date of your food collection event on the boxes and baskets. Have the children make posters with the food pictures and important information such as date of collection, the organization that will receive it, and food items needed.

Distribute the boxes and baskets and display the posters around your church. Encourage children to be present on the Sunday when you will dedicate the food offering. You may want to have the children bring some of the baskets, boxes, and items forward for the dedication during the worship service. Consider using children's wagons or wheelbarrows as a way of bringing the items forward. Deliver the food to the organization. If possible, invite children and their families to accompany you.

Reflect

Think about what ways you disciple young children in prayer practices. Were you able to help children experience prayer as both "being" and "doing"? What rituals did you share and model with the children that will help them to pray constantly incorporating thanksgiving and joy as part of their prayer life? Consider any new insights and experiences about prayer and discipleship that you have gleaned and harvested for yourself.

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Attachment: Activity 3

Finger Labyrinth



Attachment: Activity 7

Arrow Prayers

Your grandparent is
in the hospital.

Your parent has a job
interview today.

Your older brother
or sister has a big
test at school.

Your uncle is in the
Army and is being
sent to a country
far away.

Attachment: Activity 7 (continued)

Arrow Prayers

You just learned that
your aunt is going to
have a baby.

Your best friend
is moving away.

An ambulance goes by
your house with a loud
siren and flashing lights.

Attachment: Activity 7 *(continued)*

Arrow Prayers

It's your first big soccer game, and you want to play well.

It's your first day of school.

Today is your first dance recital, and you are nervous.

Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Children in this age group love repetition of activities and events. Christian tradition offers many ritual practices that connect with the children's natural desire to do things again and again. Exploring aspects of prayer and ritual with young children allows them to participate in the Christian tradition of the church and the church year. The children can look forward to celebrations, holidays, and special times that occur each year.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

What does it mean to you to open the treasury of Christian traditions? What comes to mind for you when considering traditions of rituals and prayer? Think back to your earliest childhood memories of traditions, celebrations, and holidays, whether they were marked at home, community, school, or church. Consider the children in your group and what their experiences of traditions are like in their lives today. Use this information to guide you in your choices of activities in this Exploration, challenging both yourself and the children to experience new faith practices in light of Christian tradition. There may be some traditions within the church that young children may not fully comprehend, but participating in and observing these traditions is important to their faith development and inclusion in the faith community.

Prayer: God of all time and tradition, be present with us all as we explore our Christian rituals and celebrations. May this time form our faith in new and wondrous ways. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 What Do You Say When You Pray? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 6:7–15 in different versions of the Bible as well as in a children’s Bible. Think about how these versions make the prayer more approachable for young children. Write the Lord’s Prayer that your church uses in worship services line by line on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible that includes the Lord’s Prayer story
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Ask the children: *What do you say when you pray or talk to God?* Write their responses on newsprint or a whiteboard so you can remember them and refer to them later. Some of the younger children may need some prompting. There are no right or wrong answers because we each talk to God in our own way. You may want to suggest some prayers such as: “Wow, God! You are great,” “I’m sorry,” “Thank you,” “I’m scared,” “Help me, God,” and “Help others.”

Read Matthew 6:9–15—the Lord’s Prayer story—from a children’s Bible. Read the prayer again slowly. Ask the children what kind of words or prayers they hear in the prayer Jesus taught. Refer to the prayers the children mentioned, and help them make those connections. For example, “hallowed is your name” is a “Wow God!” sort of prayer and “forgive us” is an “I’m sorry” sort of prayer. Tell the children that Jesus gave us a prayer that we can use to pray, but we can also use our own words to pray to God. Draw the children’s attention to the Lord’s Prayer you wrote on newsprint or a whiteboard. Invite them to pray the prayer with you, repeating the lines as you say them line by line. Learning by repetition is important, so do it several times. As the children seem to be mastering it, erase each line as they have accomplished it. Even though many of these children cannot yet read, making the visual connection between spoken word and written word can be helpful.



2 Exploring Labyrinth—Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Leader preparation: Use heavy paper to print copies of the finger labyrinth on the attachment. Consider laminating the finger labyrinth and using washable markers so that the labyrinth can be used again and again. Spend time experiencing the finger labyrinth for yourself. Gather pictures of labyrinths from an Internet image search or from books from your local library. If possible, visit a labyrinth. Check your local area to discover if churches, camps or retreat centers have one. If you would like to learn more about labyrinths, visit the following websites: “Labyrinth Society,” <http://labyrinthsociety.org/>, and “Labyrinth,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labyrinth>. Find the song “Simple Gifts” to play, if possible. This song is nice to use because of its simplicity but also because its lyrics talk of turning and turning round, which is appropriate to the labyrinth pattern.

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.

Supplies:

- “Finger Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 2
- pictures of labyrinths
- music player
- quiet, meditative music (“Simple Gifts,” if possible)
- crayons, chalk, dry-erase or washable markers

Show the children the pictures of labyrinths you gathered. Explain that a labyrinth is like a maze, except that in a maze there are tricks and dead ends. A labyrinth is a path that twists and winds in to the center and then out again. There are no tricks or dead ends to get someone lost. Labyrinths are used for prayer and meditation. As people move through a labyrinth, they will stop to lift up a prayer or listen for God. Show the children the finger labyrinth and tell them that instead of walking through a labyrinth, they can use their finger or a crayon or marker to move through the labyrinth. The purpose is still the same; as they move through the labyrinth, they can pause to pray or listen for God.

Invite the children to find comfortable spots to sit, and give each child a copy of the finger labyrinth. Show them how to move a finger slowly through the labyrinth on the white space between the black lines. Then guide the children in a simple prayer chant, such as repeating the word “Jesus” over and over, or a simple prayer line to use while running a finger through the labyrinth. Give children a crayon, marker, or chalk to use to trace the path. Turn on the music and have them try the finger labyrinth on their own. Let them know that you will spend several minutes doing this activity, and they may move through the labyrinth more than once.



3 Making Pretzels and Prayers

Leader preparation: Read the history of the pretzel as described on the attachment. Familiarize yourself with it so you can tell the children about the history of the pretzel. It may be necessary to double or triple the recipe for the size of your group, especially if you plan to share these pretzels with others as is suggested in Activity 9.

Supplies:

- “Pretzel Recipe,” Attachment: Activity 3a
- ingredients and supplies needed for making pretzels
- apron or smock for each child
- “History of the Pretzel,” Attachment: Activity 3b

Share information about the history of pretzels with the children, as age appropriate. Tell them that they are going to be pretzel makers! Have the children wash their hands and put on aprons or smocks. Use the pretzel recipe, and invite the children to make pretzels. Invite different children to assist in making the pretzel dough and mixing it. While pretzels are baking, invite the children to share simple prayers they may know or to say simple thank-you prayers. Say a prayer before eating and enjoy eating the pretzels!

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 Paul's Proper Table Manners (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 in several versions of the Bible. In this text Paul seeks to guide the early church in the proper and appropriate way to celebrate their shared meal, the Lord's Supper. Think about how to have a conversation with young children about the ideas presented in this text. Ways to discuss these matters in an age-appropriate manner with young children may be to remind everyone about sharing, taking turns, taking your fair share, and waiting until all have been served before beginning to eat. The special part of this scripture is Paul's passing on the Christian tradition of the Lord's Supper as instructed by Jesus.

Children may be aware of the tradition and sacrament of communion, even if they might not personally partake. Keep in mind that different faith traditions, different congregations, and different families have different ideas, perspectives, and theologies about children participating in communion. All children can understand a special meal or snack with a friend, which in its simplest form is what the communion is—a special meal with Jesus and friends.

Gather several different communion sets, such as a chalice and plate and trays that hold individual cups and plates.

Supplies:

- Bible
- communion sets
- (optional) table with a table cloth

Talk with the children about the rules their families have at meal time. Some ideas might be: no TV or cell phones or any electronic devices, always begin the meal with a prayer, take only the amount you can eat, take turns talking, don't leave the table until everyone is finished eating, take your own dishes to the sink, and so forth.

The Bible tells about a community that did not follow good rules for eating when they were together.

Gather around the communion table in a chapel or sanctuary, if possible, or around a table set with a table cloth in your meeting space. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Engage the children in conversation about communion using the following questions.

- What were the problems the people were having that Paul wrote to them about?
- How do you think Paul felt about this?
- What did Paul tell them?
- I wonder if people back then knew about good manners and table manners. What might have been better manners or actions for these people when they were eating at church?
- Look at the things on this table. I wonder if any of you have ever seen these items before. What are they used for?
- What is put in on the plate(s)? What does Jesus tell us about this?
- What is put in the cup(s)? What does Jesus tell us about this?

- Why do you think we celebrate this special meal that we call Communion or the Lord's Supper?



5 Looking at the Last Supper

Leader preparation: Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 and study the artwork “The Last Supper” by Crespi. Imagine yourself and the children sitting around this table. What would it have been like to be there? Breathe a prayer for yourself and the children as disciples of Jesus gathered together.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Last Supper” by Crespi, <http://www.art.com/products/p12061746-sa-i1508087/daniele-crespi-the-last-supper-detail-of-the-food.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+last+supper+detail+of+food+by+crespi%09>.
- fish-shaped crackers
- grape juice
- napkins
- cups

Display “The Last Supper” by Crespi. Invite the children to look at the picture, and use the following questions to engage them in conversation about the picture.

- What do you see in this picture?
- What food do you see in this picture? What would you want to eat? What would you not want to eat?
- What do you think is happening in this picture?
- This picture is just part of a bigger picture. What else do you think is in the picture?
- This is a picture of what one painter thought the Last Supper, Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, might look like. What do you think the Last Supper looked like?
- Imagine yourself at the Last Supper. What would it have been like to be there? Where would you be in this picture?

Share a snack together of fish-shaped crackers and juice. Tell the children that Jesus often shared food with friends. They are sharing a snack with friends because sharing food brings people closer together.



6 Celebrations and Traditions throughout the Church Year

Leader preparation: The church year provides many opportunities for celebrations and traditions. Young children love celebrations and enjoy marking traditions with activities. Consider the various celebrations within the liturgical or church year and the way your church celebrates these events. Study the attachment and decide which stations and activities you will set up. You may wish to include or substitute other stations and/or activities depending on special traditions your congregation or community may observe. Gather supplies and set up the stations. Decide how you want the children to explore the stations, such as rotating in intervals or wandering as they choose.

Supplies:

- “The Church Year,” Attachment: Activity 6a
- “Celebration Stations,” Attachment: Activity 6b
- supplies for stations
- (optional) adult helpers

Ask the children what seasonal holidays they enjoy. Tell the children that the church has seasons and special days, too. Some days may have been mentioned, such as Christmas and Easter. Use the talking points on the “The Church Year” to explain the church year to the children. Introduce the celebration stations to the children. Invite them to explore the stations as you have determined.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 A Prayer Walk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Plan a prayer walk for the children around your church building, including outside if possible. Determine places you will stop and have a prayer, such as the sanctuary, baptismal font or baptistry, communion table, pulpit, pews, learning areas, office, choir room, nursery, maintenance room, fellowship hall, doors to the church, and so forth. If you do not feel comfortable praying a short extemporaneous prayer at each spot, write a short prayer on note cards to take with you, such as: *Dear God, thank you for all the people who sit in these pews. Thank you for people we know and visitors who we don't know yet. They are all your children. Be with them today as they seek to follow you. Amen.* When you are at places where you can mention a particular person, include that person's name in the prayer, such as: *Miss Peggy is our church secretary. Dear God, we thank you for Miss Peggy and her friendliness whenever anyone calls on the phone. Be with her when the business of the church gets very busy. Amen.* Be sure and include volunteers and staff in your prayers. Depending on the size and age of your group, you may want some extra adult helpers.

Supplies:

- (optional) prepared prayers
- (optional) additional adult helpers

Invite the children to take a prayer walk. Along the way you will pray for different people and places in your church. Tell children that one way to pray for people is to look at a particular place where they serve, work, or learn; imagine them there; and say a special prayer for them. Take your prayer walk. Invite the children to say “Hear our prayer” or “Amen” at each stop. As your walk progresses, the children may want to offer prayers. Encourage participation from the children and adult helpers beyond any prayers you may have prepared.

8 Sing and Dance!

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube videos “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters” and “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters’ Liturgical Dance.” Decide if you would like the children to watch the dancer and follow her movements or play the music again and have them move with the music as they wish. Watch the YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters’ Lyrics” if you would like to see the lyrics. This song is about baptism, washing us and making us clean as God’s children. The words of the song are not easy for young children to sing, but the tune lends itself well to movement. Consider having the children share their creative movement to this song in a worship or group setting.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHEvIRiqBYo>
- (optional) YouTube video “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters’ Liturgical Dance” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UBS1AEs_dg
- blue scarves, ribbons, or flowing fabric, such as chiffon, for each child

Tell the children they are going to hear a special song about baptism and see pictures that go with the song. The song is called “Wash O God, Our Sons and Daughters,” and it is about baptism washing us and making us clean. Show the YouTube video of the song. Ask the children what images or pictures they saw that made them think of washing or being made clean. Explain that water is used in baptism as a symbol of being made clean in God’s eyes.

Tell the children that they are going to watch another video of the same song, but that this time a woman is dancing to the song. Give the children blue scarves, ribbons, or flowing fabric and invite them to follow the movement of the dancer, if you choose, or to move as the music makes them feel like moving. Show the YouTube video of the dance or simply play the song video again. Ask the children what it felt like to move with the song.

Close with prayer: *Dear God, thank you for this song that reminds us of water and baptism. Thank you for our bodies to move to music and in praise to you. Amen.*



9 Sharing Pretzels and Prayers

Leader preparation: This activity can be a followup to Activity 3. It can, however, be done on its own if you buy pretzels or make pretzels in advance to share with others. If your group did not do Activity 3, familiarize yourself with the history of the pretzel (Attachment: Activity 3b) to explain to the children as they assemble packages of pretzels to share with others. Photocopy the attachment of the “Pretzel Sharing” cards and cut apart the prayer cards. Make a card for each pretzel package the children will assemble. If you would like, you could organize a field trip to a local retirement community, or another place of your choosing, and have the children share their pretzel packages there

Supplies:

- pretzels, made in Activity 3 or store-bought pretzels (traditional pretzel shape), enough pretzels for each child to make at least two bags
- “History of the Pretzel,” Attachment: Activity 3b
- “Pretzel Sharing Cards,” Attachment: Activity 9 (at least two per child)
- plastic closeable bags, at least two per child
- plastic food service gloves, small size, for each child
- paper lunch bags (at least two per child)
- crayons and markers
- glue sticks or tape
- single-hole punch
- 12-inch pieces of ribbon (at least two per child)

Tell the children that they are going to work in an assembly line to package pretzels to share with others. Explain that pretzels are a special reminder of prayer. Tell, or remind, the children of the history of the pretzel. Show them how they will assemble the pretzel packages, and tell them that they will each get to make at least two packages to give away to others. Have the children wash their hands

and put on the food service gloves, explaining to them that people who work with food for others wear gloves like these so that they won't spread germs. Tell the children that if they have to sneeze or cough, to turn away from the food, as good food workers would do. Set up the assembly line and guide the children through it using the following instructions.

- Take a "Pretzel Sharing" card and glue or tape it to one side of a paper lunch bag.
- Decorate the lunch bag with markers or crayons.
- Put a handful of pretzels (if you are using store-bought pretzels) or one homemade pretzel in a closeable bag and close the bag.
- Put the closeable plastic bag in the paper bag and fold down the top of the paper bag.
- Punch a hole in the folded top of the bag and thread a ribbon through the hole. Tie a bow with the ribbon. (Children may need assistance with the hole punch and the bow.)
- Repeat the process to make a second bag.
- Tell the children to give away their bags, sharing the message of the pretzel.

Close with a prayer for those who will receive these pretzels.

Reflect

What were some "aha!" moments for either you or the children in this Exploration? What new experiences and traditions shared? In what new ways did you engage in prayer and ritual through the lens of Christian tradition? Give thanks to God for all that you and the children have gleaned through this Exploration.

Attachment: Activity 2

Finger Labyrinth



Attachment: Activity 3a

Pretzel Recipe

This recipe makes 6–8 small to medium pretzels.

Ingredients

1 T yeast
½ cup warm water
1 tsp Honey
1 tsp salt
1⅓ cup flour
flour for hands and surface
1 beaten egg
coarse or Kosher salt to sprinkle

Supplies

oven
mixing bowl
measuring spoons
measuring cups
wooden spoon
pastry brush
baking sheets
hot pads/mitts
cooling rack

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425° F.
2. Dissolve yeast in the warm water in a bowl. Add honey and salt. Mix well. Add flour and stir only enough to mix the ingredients.
3. Flour your hands and knead the dough in the bowl. Have everyone flour their hands and the surface in front of them. Divide the dough into six to eight sections. Have children take a section of dough and roll it into a long rope, about 12 inches long.
4. Form the long strips into pretzel shapes. Hold each end of the strip and bring the ends around as if you are making a circle. Cross ends and twist, placing each end at the 4:00 o'clock and 8:00 o'clock positions, as if the circle were a clock.
5. Place the pretzel on a baking sheet and brush with beaten egg. Sprinkle with coarse salt. Bake 10 minutes at 425° F. Remove from oven and place pretzels on a cooling rack.

Attachment: Activity 3b

History of the Pretzel

The pretzel has a long-standing tradition, not only as the world's oldest snack food but also as a Christian symbol linked with prayer. You can follow its twists and turns as early as 610 C.E. at a monastery in Southern France or Northern Italy where monks formed scraps of dough into strips to represent a child's arms folded in prayer. In those days arms were often crossed over the chest as a prayer posture. This shape also has the three holes that represent the Christian Trinity: God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The monks soft-baked these doughy treats and offered them warm to children who had memorized their Bible verses and prayers. The monks called it *pretiola*, which was Latin for "little reward." From there the pretzel was transformed into the Italian word *brachiola*, which means "little arms." Then the tradition traveled to Germany, where it was called *bretzel*, or pretzel. Pretzels were brought to the United States by people of German descent. Whatever it is called or whatever shape it now takes, the pretzel is a prayer reminder and a Christian symbol for the Trinity. It is often connected with the season of Lent because Lent is a time of prayer and reflection. Consider the power this symbol has, in that it is around us everywhere and helps all of us remember to pray every time we see or eat a pretzel.

Attachment: Activity 6a

The Church Year

The church has a calendar that revolves around the life of Jesus.

The church calendar begins with the four weeks of **Advent**, which is the time before Christmas when people in the church are preparing for the birth of Jesus on Christmas day.

The church calendar continues with the season of Christmas to the day of **Epiphany**, January 6, when we celebrate the visit of the wise men.

The church year has two times called **Ordinary Time**, which isn't at all ordinary but rather counts the Sundays until the next season. The first Ordinary Time is from Epiphany to the season of Lent. During Ordinary Time we learn about Jesus and his life and teachings.

Lent is a time for prayer and penitence. Penitence is a big word to say, "I'm sorry, God." Lent is the 40 days leading up to Holy Week and Easter.

Holy Week begins with **Palm Sunday**, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and many people greeted him as a king. In the days following, Jesus had his last supper with his disciples, was betrayed by one of them, taken to the courts, was crucified, and died on the cross.

On **Easter** day we celebrate that God raised Jesus from the dead, that he is alive, and that he visited with many of his friends. During the season of Easter we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and that he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us always.

Pentecost is called "the birthday of the church" because that is the day the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and many others in Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples started to preach and teach, and others wanted to be followers of Jesus. This was how the church began long, long ago.

After Pentecost is another season of Ordinary Time, counting the Sundays until we are back at Advent.

Attachment: Activity 6b

Celebration Stations

Set up stations in your space for each of the six seasons/special days of the church year. Each station suggests two activities. You can use one or both, or you can substitute with an activity of your own choosing that has special significance to your church or community. Add décor and symbols at each station to enhance the theme. Suggestions are given, but use your own creativity and supplies available as well. You will need an adult helper at each station to guide the children as they explore that station.

Advent

Display Suggestions

Advent wreath, Advent banners, Advent calendar, purple or blue fabric (liturgical color for Advent)

Activities

- Play the “Wait a Minute” game. You’ll need a stopwatch or way to time exactly one minute. Begin by telling the children that Advent is a season of waiting—waiting for Christmas. This can be hard, just like waiting for anything for very long is hard. Tell the children they are going to play a game called “Wait a Minute.” Invite them all to stand and stay standing for however long they think that a minute really is (which you will be actually timing). Tell them that they can sit down at whatever point they think has been a minute. Remind them that a minute is probably going to be longer than they think it is. Remind them to decide for themselves, rather than doing what other children might be doing. At the end of the minute (slightly past it), announce the end of the time and announce the one or ones who were closest to the minute mark.
- Sing an Advent song (tune: “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”):

Advent is a time to wait,
Not quite time to celebrate.
Light the candles one by one.
Till the Advent time is done.
Christmas Day will soon be here,
Time for joy, and time for cheer!

Attachment: Activity 6b (continued)

Christmas:

Display Suggestions

A Nativity set, angels, a Christmas tree, some Christmas, music player playing Christmas music

Activities

- Wrap up a baby. Provide various sizes and types of baby dolls and blankets or pieces of cloth. Demonstrate various ways to wrap a baby in a blanket, which might include what swaddling clothes would have been like. Invite the children to take turns wrapping up “baby Jesus.” Provide as many dolls and wraps as possible, so many children can do this at once.
- Sing “Away in the Manger” (*with suggested motions*).

Away in a manger, (*hold arms like holding baby—could even be the baby dolls from previous activity—and rock the baby back and forth*)

No crib for his bed, (*continue rocking baby, but shake head “no” on word “no”*)

The little lord Jesus

Laid down his sweet head; (*place two hands together and place them under head, tilted to one side or other*)

The stars in the heavens (*point up to the stars in the sky*)

Looked down where he lay, (*point downward and look down*)

The little Lord Jesus

Asleep on the hay (*lay head on hands again and sway back and forth in rocking motion*)

Attachment: Activity 6b (continued)

Epiphany

Display Suggestions

Nativity set. Especially focus on the kings/wise men. If possible, have many different depictions of pictures and figures of the wise men, stars hanging around (especially a big one lit up), incense burning or scented candle, and either real gold, frankincense, and myrrh or things to represent such gifts.

Activities

- Dress up as kings. Have various crowns (paper or play ones) and kings' costumes and robes for a time of dress-up play. You could perhaps make a relay race out of taking turns dressing in the king's clothes.
- Star craft. Make a simple star craft out of paper, felt, or foam.

Lent:

Display suggestions

Ashes, crosses, nails, palm branches, liturgical color of purple, a Lenten cross, pretzels, banners appropriate for Lent

Activities

- Pretzel forgiveness prayer. Provide each child with a good-sized pretzel. Tell the children they will use the pretzel to help them in prayers of forgiveness. As you mention each thing to ask forgiveness for, the children will say that thing to themselves in their heart and take a bite of the pretzel.

Bite 1: Ask forgiveness in a family relationship.

Bite 2: Ask forgiveness in a friendship.

Bite 3: Ask forgiveness in matters of cruelty or thoughtlessness toward creatures or creation.

Bite 4: Ask forgiveness for those you have quarreled/fought with.

Bite 5: Ask God to remind you that God forgives us in *all* things.

End the prayer with: "Thanks be to God. Amen!"

- Invite the children to act out Palm Sunday. Use pieces of green crate-paper streamers, ribbons, or pieces of material for palm branches. Allow someone to pretend to be the donkey that Jesus rode upon. Shout "hosanna" and sing a Palm Sunday song, if desired.

Attachment: Activity 6b (*continued*)

Easter

Display suggestions

An empty cross, an empty tomb, flowers, especially lilies, plastic eggs (opened up to be like an empty tomb), butterflies, banners appropriate for Easter (white, the liturgical color)

Activities

- Play Hide 'n Seek. Tell the children that when Jesus was in the tomb, he was hidden from his followers. When they went to seek Jesus on Easter morning, he was GONE! So, play a game of Hide 'n Seek in honor of that mystery.
- Butterfly craft. The Easter/Resurrection message is like caterpillars going into cocoons and becoming butterflies. Make simple butterflies by placing colorful tissue paper into the clip part of a clothes pin and then fluffing out the tissue paper. Use a twist tie to secure it and serve as the antenna, too.

Pentecost

Display suggestions

Descending doves to be the Holy Spirit; red candles and flames; something to represent wind, such as a fan and windsock or kite; red balloons (red, the liturgical color); birthday cake (since it is the birthday of the forming of the church)

Activities

- Red Balloon release. Balloons remind us of birthday parties, and on Pentecost we celebrate the birthday of the church's beginning. Balloons are red to remind us of flames that were part of the first Pentecost; thus, red is the color of Pentecost. Balloons are full of air, which reminds us of the wind of the Holy Spirit. Give each child an uninflated red balloon. Invite them to blow the balloon up, if they are able; be ready to assist them if needed. Once the balloon is blown up, DO NOT tie it, but rather have everyone just pinch it or hold it shut with their fingers. Then, on the count of three, everyone releases their balloons and lets them fly all over the room, thus showing the movement of the air/wind to represent the Holy Spirit.
- Sing "Happy Birthday" to the church, or sing the song "We Are the Church."

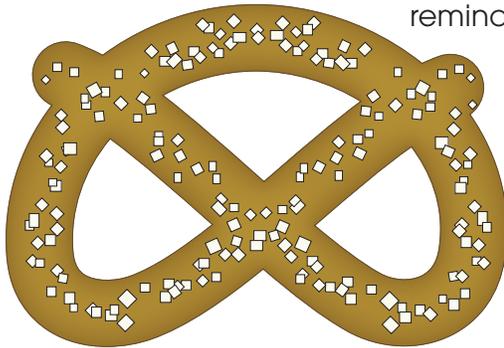
Attachment: Activity 9

Pretzel Prayer Cards

Pretzels and Prayers

Did you know that pretzels have a religious meaning? Many years ago in Europe monks and priests molded bits of dough into the shape of arms crossed across the chest or heart in prayer. That was a common prayer posture of the day. They crafted these treats as prayer reminders and rewards for the children who had learned and said their prayers.

The special shape with the three holes was to remind them of the Trinity: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

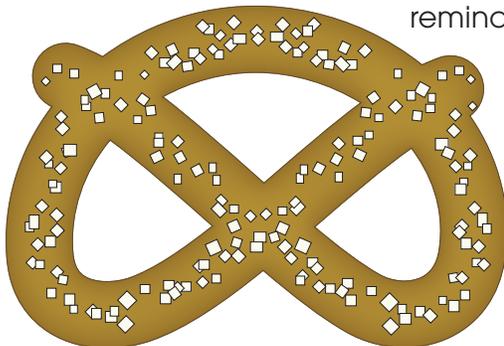


As you look at and eat these pretzels, accept our prayers for you that God will love and care for you every day. We also pray that whenever you see a pretzel you will remember God and remember to pray!

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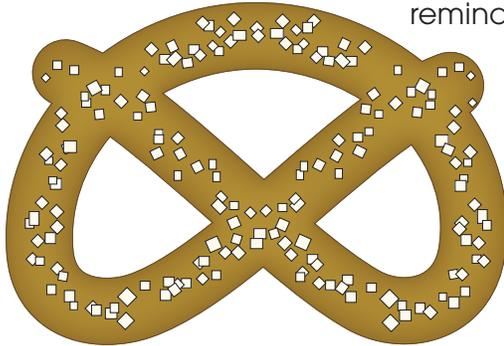
Attachment: Activity 9 (continued)

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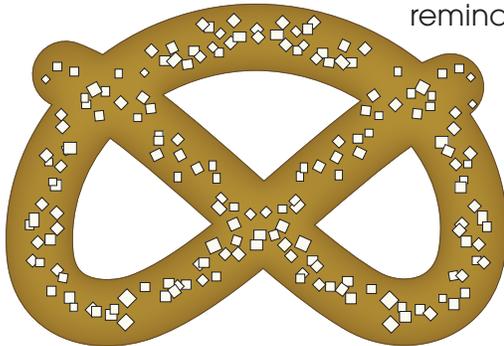


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Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Young children have a capacity for caring deeply about things. It is easy to see them focused on themselves, because that is where they are developmentally. Young children may also be quick to offer a hug or a loving touch when they see someone crying, sad, or hurt. Some children have a natural instinct, and young children model what they see. They want to help and make it all better. Young children can be introduced to people and situations in our churches, communities, and the world that need our help and prayers. They may be curious about people in other places, and that opens the door for learning about mission and offering prayer support.

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 amongst 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

Some of the activities will explore a few countries of the world and their faith rituals and prayer practices. Take a look at these opportunities, and embrace them as ways to celebrate common practices while learning about differences. It is important to model respect for other faiths, traditions, and practices. This is an important lesson for children in a multicultural world. Opportunities are offered to be in mission through prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, as well as blessing or benediction. Throughout all these activities we invite God to “kum ba yah”—“come by here”—and be with us.

Prayer: God, guide me to look within myself and see if there be attitudes, hurts, or other things I need to confess and turn over to you. Thank you for your loving kindness and forgiveness that frees me from these things and allows me to open myself to others in my family, church, community, and the world. Help me in leading these young children in avenues of outreach and mission. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Thank You Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 1:3–4. Who do you thank God for every time you remember that person? Remember each child in your group and thank God for him and her. In this activity you will help the children thank God for people in their lives. Note that the attachment has an option for younger children who are learning to write with dashed-line letters so that they can trace the letters, practicing their writing skills. These notes will be used as way to give thanks for people in their lives. Make enough copies for each child to have at least one, or more if they have time and interest, and enough so that you can make a note to give each child in your group. Write your own note of thankfulness for each child in your group.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “I Thank God for You,” Attachment: Activity 1
- pencils, crayons, and markers
- prepared notes of thankfulness for the children in your group

Tell the children a little about Paul using the following talking points.

- Paul was a follower of Jesus.
- He wrote many letters to people and new churches encouraging them to be faithful followers of Jesus.
- In his letters, Paul always gave thanks to God for the people in his life.

Read Philippians 1:3–4 to the children. Ask the children who they are thankful for in their lives. Tell them they are going to have an opportunity to write notes to these people to let them know that they are thankful for them.

Invite each child to choose one person for whom they are thankful. Give the children a copy of “I Thank God for You” note paper, giving younger children who are learning to write the dashed-line version and older children who can write the blank version. Tell the younger children that the words spell out “I THANK GOD FOR YOU” and have them trace the letters. Invite the older children to write their own notes of thanks. If the children are able, have them say why they are thankful for the person in their note. Younger children may need to dictate and have you write it for them. Give the children crayons and/or markers and invite them to decorate their notes. Have the children sign their notes. Children may write more notes if there is time. Encourage the children to deliver their notes.

Give the children the notes you wrote for them. You may wish to read each one aloud. Close with prayer: *Thank you God for all these people who we remember. Thank you for the joy of remembering them all! Amen.*

Session Development

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

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



2 Considering Art

Leader preparation: Study the picture “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke. What do you see? What are the various images within the image? What kind of meanings or connections do these images have for you?

You may be interested in knowing La Duke’s intent in presenting the Guatemalan tradition of a procession of the faithful on All Saints’ Day, celebrated on November 1. This procession includes saints from the cemeteries, as Guatemalans remember those who have gone on before. There are Christian images and symbols represented in this artwork that connect to the broader Christian faith beyond the celebration of All Saints’ Day.

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

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

What do you see in this picture?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- props for a parade

Display “Guatemala Processions” by Betty La Duke, and invite the children to look at it and see what pictures they see within the picture. Engage the group in conversation about the picture using the following questions.

- I wonder what you see when you look at this picture. I see many pictures within the picture. What do you see?
- Imagine yourself in this picture. Where are you, or who would you be?
- How does this picture make you feel?
- What do any of the pictures remind you of?
- What church holidays or celebrations do any of these pictures remind you of?

Tell the children that the artist, Betty La Duke, painted this picture of a procession, a parade of sorts, that takes place in Guatemala, a country in Central America. Ask: *What kind of processions and parades have you seen?* Some suggestions might

be the choir walking in the sanctuary, bridesmaids and a bride walking down the aisle at a wedding, children waving palms and entering the sanctuary on Palm Sunday, a parade in town to celebrate a holiday or a special accomplishment, and so forth. Invite the children to look at the picture again, and ask them if there is anything they see now that they know it is a picture of a procession.

Invite the children to have a procession around your meeting space. Have them determine what type of procession it is and use any props you may have on hand to act it out.

③ Kum Ba Yah

Leader preparation: Many people are familiar with the African American spiritual “Kum Ba Yah,” which has been sung at church camps, retreats, and campfires for many years. It is a prayer song, one that invites God to “kum ba yah,” or “come by here.” There are many different versions and stylizing of the song, so when you teach it to your group, feel free to find a version that you are familiar with or fits your group. Watch the YouTube video “Kum Ba Yah’ guitarist with preschoolers” and decide if you want to use with your group. Decide what verses you will use. Whichever verses you choose, the song itself is a prayer, asking God to be with us.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- YouTube video “Kum Ba Yah’ guitarist with preschoolers”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vM4KJvc0D1c>
- (optional) guitar or guitarist
- rhythm instruments

Invite the children to sing a song that is also a prayer called “Kum Ba Yah.” Ask if anyone knows what the words “kum ba yah” mean. Explain, if necessary, that “kum ba yah” means “come by here” and is a prayer asking for God to be with us. Teach the children the song and invite them to sing along as they are comfortable. Sing the song several times. Give the children rhythm instruments and invite them to add the instruments to their singing.

Some verses to use are:

- Kum ba yah, my Lord
- Someone’s crying, Lord
- Someone’s praying, Lord
- Someone’s singing, Lord
- Someone’s laughing, Lord
- Come by here, my Lord

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 “I’m Sorry, Please Forgive Me” Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. The prophet Joel was given the job to tell God’s people that they had turned away from God, that they needed to turn back, or repent, for their wrongdoing, and that they needed to come back to God. These verses tell God’s people that God will be gracious, tender, kind, loving, and forgiving if they will return to God and say they are sorry. While young children may not understand all the parts of this Bible passage, they will understand what it means to misbehave or disobey and what it means to apologize and be forgiven. Young children will understand simple words of apology, such as “I’m sorry,” and simple gestures of forgiveness, such as a pat on the back or a hug. In this activity the children have the opportunity to act out scenarios about making mistakes, apologizing, and receiving forgiveness. Print the attachment and cut it into strips. You will need to guide the children in the skits, especially the nonreaders.

Be prepared to guide the flow of the skits and close each one with some aspect of forgiveness, such as hugs and touches that help people feel love and acceptance.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Forgive Me Skits,” Attachment: Activity 4

Have the children sit in a circle, and then read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 to them. Tell the children that Joel had a job as a prophet—he called God’s people back to God because they had turned away and were misbehaving. Help the children see that we all mess up, misbehave, and act wrong at times. Explain that when we act in those ways, we hurt not only those around us but also God. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- Tell me about a time when you messed up or misbehaved.
- How did that make you feel?
- How do you think others felt, if another person was involved?
- How do you think God feels when you mess up or misbehave?
- What do you need to do to fix things or make things better when you have messed up or misbehaved?
- How do you feel when you have said that you’re sorry and another person has forgiven you?

Invite the children to act out some skits about times when people might mess up or misbehave, need to say, “I’m sorry,” and be forgiven. Have the children take turns picking a skit. Read the skit aloud and ask for volunteers to act out the skit. Guide the children as necessary as they act out the skits. After the skits, assure the children of God’s forgiveness when we tell God that we are sorry when we have messed up or misbehaved. Invite the children to repeat each line after you as you lead them in a prayer of confession.

*God, we all mess up sometimes
I know sometimes I misbehave
and do what I’m not supposed to do.
I know sometimes I say things
that are not kind.*

*God, I am sorry, please forgive me.
Help me to forgive others too,
just like you do. Amen.*

5 Tibetan Monks

Leader preparation: Study the picture “[Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels](#)” by Landor. Read about prayer wheels at [Prayer Wheels](#) or [Prayer Wheel](#) information, if necessary, for your understanding of the tradition of prayer wheels. Watch the YouTube video “[Prayer Wheel](#)” and a few minutes of the video “[Chanting](#).” You will use the “[Chanting](#)” video as background music while the children look at the poster.

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>
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- YouTube video “Prayer Wheel”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1Y1nwbNMLU&feature=related>
- YouTube video “Chanting”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG_INuNUVd4&feature=related

Display the picture “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor, and invite the children to look at the picture for a few minutes while you play the YouTube video “Chanting” in the background. Ask the group to tell how the picture makes them feel. Ask who they think the people are and what they are doing. Explain that they are Tibetan monks offering up prayers and give as much of the background information as you feel they will be interested in. Show them YouTube video “Prayer Wheel.” Explain that the video shows how the prayer wheels are never to stop turning, which means the prayers never stop. Tell them that in our Christian tradition Paul writes about praying without ceasing. This would be like the wheels never stopping. Invite any other comments from the children.

Close with the following prayer: *Thank you, God, that prayer is part of many faith traditions and countries. Help us respect and learn from other people’s prayer and faith traditions. Amen.*

6 Hug and Pray for the World

Leader preparation: Find out what missions your church or denomination supports on local, national, and global levels. Collect brochures or pictures, or locate websites that will help explain them to your group. Jot down a sentence or two about each mission. If possible, try to have as many different missions as children in your group. Obtain a large world map. You may want to locate the states and countries the mission sites you have chosen ahead of time so that you can find them easily. Each child could then be handed a picture or brochure to represent that mission site.

Supplies:

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- globe pillow or beach ball globe (available at many educational stores or search the Internet)
- large world map
- information you gather on local, national, and global missions
- picture or brochure for each mission site, one for each child
- tape

Talk with your group about the different missions your congregation and denomination support. Use the brochures, pictures, or websites. Help the children locate the states or countries of these mission sites on the globe and/or map. Give each child the picture or brochure for the mission sites, and help the children attach them to the map. If you have a globe pillow or ball, have each child take turns hugging the globe and saying, "I send my hugs and prayers to [name of mission]." Invite the rest of the children to respond, "Amen." If you do not have a globe pillow or ball, have the children join hands and circle around the world map. Have each child take turns saying the same phrase as above with the children responding, "Amen."

Sending & Serving Activities



7 **Benediction or Sending Forth Prayers (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 1:2. This simple sentence is an example of a sending forth prayer or a benediction. "Benediction" means "good words," and a benediction sends us forth with a blessing into the world for service. Use the benedictions on the attachment, or find some of your own benedictions in hymnals, worship books, or other worship resources. The children will create a group benediction. You may want to use this to end your session times together, or inquire to see if the children could lead it at the conclusion of a worship service.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Benedictions," Attachment: Activity 7
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Read Philippians 1:2 to the children. Tell the children this verse is a special kind of prayer; it is a blessing. Explain that in the church we call the prayer or blessing at the end of the worship service a benediction, which means "good words." A benediction sends people forth with God's blessing to serve. Share a few examples of benedictions, either from the attachment or from your hymnal or other worship resources. Tell the children that you are going to work together to create a benediction to send your group or your congregation out to serve. Invite them to share words or ideas that would be "good words" God would say or bless people with as they leave. Write their suggestions on the newsprint or whiteboard. Invite them to share words or ideas about sending people out to serve God in the world. Write these ideas as well. Formulate the words and ideas the children have shared into several sentences. A benediction does not have to be long! If motions seem appropriate, invite the children to think of hand motions or body movement to go with the words of the benediction. Repeat your benediction together several times.



8 Rainbow Prayer Bead Bracelet

Leader preparation: Use the directions below to make a sample bracelet so that you are familiar with the technique. Decide if the children will make one bracelet for themselves or more to give away. Obtain the necessary number of beads. Print enough copies of the attachment as needed, and cut apart the cards.

Supplies:

- plastic beads with large holes in rainbow colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, dark blue or navy, and purple
- plastic cording
- scissors
- “Rainbow Prayer Bead Prayers,” Attachment: Activity 8

Tell the children that there are many ways to pray. Explain that sliding beads along a string or touching beads as you pray is one way that people of many faith backgrounds have used for hundreds of years. Tell them that they are going to make a prayer bead bracelet for themselves and one to give away (if you have chosen to do so). Show the children the sample bracelet you made, and guide them in making their own bracelets using the following directions.

- Cut the plastic cord the length of one’s wrist plus 2 inches. Tie a knot at one end large enough so the beads don’t slip past it. You may need to assist younger children.
- String the seven beads in the following order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, dark blue or navy, and purple.
- Tie a knot at the other end.

Give the children a copy of the “Rainbow Prayer Bead Prayers.” Try some of the prayer suggestions with the children.

9 Send Us Forth

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 1:3–5. This scripture is a prayer of thankfulness and blessing. When verse 5 is included, it is a sending forth. In keeping with the idea of serving and sending, your group will create a banner to hang at the back of your church’s worship space or fellowship space to send everyone, adults and children, forth to serve. On a large sheet of craft paper, print the following sentences in large outline letters, so the children may color in the letters: “You are now entering God’s mission field. Your hands are God’s hands.” Leave room for the children’s hand prints around the banner.

Supplies:

- Bible
- large sheet of prepared banner or craft paper
- markers or crayons
- washable tempera paints in a variety of colors
- paint brushes
- paint smocks
- soap and water or hand wipes
- tape

Read Philippians 1:3–5 to the children. Ask the children what they hear in this passage. Explain, if necessary, that this passage guides us to be thankful for others, and to be joyful. Verse 5 encourages us to spread the Good News of God and Jesus to others. Invite the children to make a banner to remind people in their congregation that they are going out to do God’s work. Show the children the

banner you prepared, and read the words you printed on it. Invite them to color in the letters. After the letters are colored, invite the children to make a hand print on the banner. Put paint smocks on the children, and have them choose a paint color. After you paint the children's palms, have them press their painted hand onto the banner. You may want to press their hand down gently to connect their hand with the paper for a good print. Have the children wash their hands or wipe them with a hand wipe. If possible, have the children help hang the banner.

Reflect

What "ah-ha!" moments did you experience in this session? In what ways did the young children in your care demonstrate that they were eager and open to learn about prayer and tradition in other places in the world? How has your view of yourself, others, and the world changed through engagement in this Exploration? Consider the foundation you are creating for these young children to build their faith upon. How might it mold their future?

Attachment: Activity 1

I THANK GOD
FOR YOU

"I thank my God every time I remember you."
Philippians 1:3

"I thank my God every time I remember you."
Philippians 1:3

Attachment: Activity 4

Forgive Me Skits

1. A group of three friends are playing ball together. One friend wants to play ball with only one of the other friends. The third friend feels left out and is sad. Who is not being kind? What should that person do? How can the third friend show forgiveness?
2. Parents told their child to stay in their yard, but the child didn't listen and went to play at a neighbor's house. Who disobeyed? What does the child need to do or say? What do the parents do or say?
3. A child's older brother and sister have cell phones. The child wants a cell phone, is angry his parents won't get him one, and has a tantrum. Who is misbehaving? What does the child need to do or say? What do the older brother or sister do or say? What do the parents do or say?
4. A group of friends are playing together, and one child does not want to share toys with the other friends. What do the friends do or say? What does the child need to do or say? How do the friends react?
5. A brother and sister are playing with a ball inside the house. The ball knocks over their Mom's favorite lamp, and it breaks. Mom doesn't see this happen. What will they do now? What will they do or say when Mom comes in the room? What will Mom do or say?
6. A group of children are playing on the playground. They are not including one child in their game. The child is sad and sits off alone. A teacher walks over to the group and asks what happened to the child who is alone. What do the children in the group say or do? What does the teacher say or do? What does the child who was sad say or do?
7. A father is tired after a long day at work. His children are running around the house being loud and noisy. The father loses his temper, yells at his children, and sends them to their rooms. What do the children say or do? What does the father say or do? Do both the father and the children need to say they are sorry and offer forgiveness?
8. A teacher has asked children not to talk during rest time. The teacher hears the voice of a child, but makes a mistake about which child was talking and places another child in time-out. The child being placed in time-out tries to explain, but the teacher doesn't listen. Who needs to say that they are sorry to whom? Who offers forgiveness?

Attachment: Activity 7

Benedictions

Go in peace to serve the Lord.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

NUMBERS 6:24–26

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
So that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ROMANS 15:13

May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

TRADITIONAL GAELIC PRAYER

Grant, O Lord,
That what has been said with our lips we may believe in our hearts,
And that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

JOHN HUNTER, SCOTLAND

May the great Ruler of all high places,
God of many names,
Touch you with a wind that keeps you strong,
For all the days to come. Amen.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, *NEW CENTURY HYMNAL AND BOOK OF WORSHIP*

Through the days to come, in every time of year or climate, may you know the luminous
goodness of God, creator of all things, all people. Amen.

JUDY NEWTON, JAPAN

A Litany Benediction

Leader: We have worshiped God together;
People: Now we go our separate ways.
Leader: May the spirit that has blessed us here
People: Be your spirit in each day that comes!
All: Amen.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, *BOOK OF WORSHIP*

May the warm winds of heaven
blow softly upon you,
And may the Great Spirit
make Sunrise in your heart.

CHEROKEE BLESSING

Attachment: Activity 8

Rainbow Prayer Bead Prayers

- List 7 things you are grateful for and thank God for each of them.
- Pray for 7 friends or family members.
- Pray for 7 places important to you or for 7 countries in the world.
- Pray the colors of the rainbow, choosing one thing that is the color of each of the beads (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet).
- Slide the beads through your fingers and let your heart, mind, and soul rest and relax!

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Praying and Making Ritual



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

The concepts of future and vision are a challenge with young children. Future and vision are abstract ideas, whereas young children operate on a very concrete level. For them dealing with future and vision is the same as now, because their understanding of time is very concrete. Time needs to be managed and measured in a tangible way, such as marking off the days on a calendar when looking forward to a special event or day. Perhaps one way young children grasp the future and vision is by imagining what they want to be when they grow up. The creative use of the imagination of the young child may provide helpful in their faith and prayer life. For example, have the child imagine the prayer result when making a prayer request: What would it look like if Mr. Jones got the job that we've been praying about, or if Ms. Smith's broken leg were healed and mended? Finally, keep in mind when working with these young people that they are the future and vision of our world. How they practice their faith will impact the future and vision of our faith communities.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



Leader Preparation

Be willing to open yourself to new ways to pray and practice ritual. It is important to tap into your own imagination and that of the young children in your care as a tool to experience God's love and faithfulness in our prayer life and faith practices. Blessing is a major theme in this Exploration, so take time to consider what blessing means to you, and how it has been practiced in your own faith life. Read through the activities to be sure proper preparations are made.

Prayer: O God, of the past, present, and future, be ever present with me now as I am your instrument in your molding and unfolding of the young people entrusted to me for their faith formation, that together we may positively impact the future and vision of our world. Amen.

Session Development

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

1 Praise to Our God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Samuel 7:18–29. David is giving praise to God for all God's blessings upon David and his house and kingdom. You will be teaching the children the praise song "Hallelu." You can teach this song without accompaniment, or you can have guitar accompaniment. If you are unfamiliar with this song, watch the YouTube videos to pick up the tune and actions that go with the song. You may also choose to show the videos to the children and have them sing along.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Hallelu," Attachment: Activity 1
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- (optional) digital projector
- (optional) YouTube video "Preschoolers sing 'Hallelu'"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QzHePB6Bjo&feature=related>
- (optional) YouTube video "School children in India sing 'Hallelu'"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag519u4h4eU&feature=related>
- (optional) guitar accompanist

Read 2 Samuel 7:22–26 to the children. Ask the children what they hear David saying in this passage. Tell them, if necessary, that this is one of many times when King David gave praise to God. Tell them that one way they can praise God is through song. Teach the children the song "Hallelu" and the stand up/sit down movements that go with the song. Show the YouTube videos, if you choose, and invite the children to sing along. After your group has sung the song a few times, invite them to share their own praises and joys with the group. Conclude with singing the song one more time as a way of praising God for all our praises!



2 Prayers of Praise Inspired by Creation

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube video "Creation Calls." What does God have to say to you through this music and imagery? Be prepared to share your thoughts with the children. Obtain the poster "No-Traveller's Borne" by Jess. On a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard, write the following simple outline of a prayer of praise with blanks to fill in:

Oh God, you are _____.
 When I see the _____ you have made, I feel _____.
 Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you, and you are _____.

You will be inviting the children to help you fill in the blanks to create a group prayer to say together at the end of the session.

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

Supplies:

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

Show the YouTube video “Creation Calls,” and then ask the children the following questions.

- What did you see in this video that made you think or say “Wow”?
- What was your favorite picture in the video?
- What is the most amazing thing you have ever seen in nature?

Invite the children to look at “No-Traveler’s Borne,” and talk about what they see.

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

Tell the children that God created everything—the moon and sun, stars and planets, land and air, animals, plants, and people. Gather the children around the prepared “Praise Prayer” newsprint or whiteboard. Read the prayer to the children, saying “blank” when there is a blank space. Tell the children that they are going to fill in the blanks of the prayer to praise God. Invite them to suggest words to fill in the blanks in the prayer. Write all their suggestions on the newsprint or whiteboard so you can pray the prayer again and again using different words.

If there is time, give the children paper and crayons and invite the children to draw pictures to go with their praise prayer. Suggest that they could draw something in nature that they really like, or something they saw in the video or the poster. Have the children attach their drawing prayers to the written prayer on the newsprint or whiteboard. Pray the prayer, inviting the children to say the words with you as they are able.

3 **Being Quiet: *The Quiet Book***

Leader preparation: Obtain *The Quiet Book* by Deborah Underwood (Houghton Mifflin, 2010). This book is about many kinds of quiet. Read this book and consider the idea of quiet. Quiet is part of many faith traditions and faith practices. *The Quiet Book*, although not necessarily a faith-based book, can be a helpful tool to talk about quiet with your group of children.

Supplies:

- *The Quiet Book* by Deborah Underwood (Houghton Mifflin, 2010)
- floor pillows and a quiet, comfortable place to enjoy a book

Gather the children in a quiet, comfortable space to read. Lower your voice to a whisper and encourage them to be very, very quiet as you read *The Quiet Book* to them. After reading the book, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- What kinds of quiet did you hear about in the book?
- When do you like to be quiet?
- What do you need to be quiet?
- How does quiet make you feel?

Tell the children that sometimes God speaks to us in very quiet moments. Tell them the story of Elijah, a man in the Bible who wanted to hear God. He thought God was loud and powerful and could be heard in the earthquake or the thunder or the storm. What Elijah found out was that God was also in the very, very quiet spaces. The Bible calls it the “still small voice of God.”

Invite the children to try being very, very quiet and listen for the still small voice of God speaking to them deep down in their hearts. Encourage them to be very still and not move. Suggest that they may want to lie down or close their eyes. If some children are having a hard time being quiet, try a gentle hush or a calm hand on their shoulder. Try keeping the quiet for several minutes or until you think there has been enough quiet for the children. Ask the children how listening for the still, small voice of God felt.

Close with a prayer: *God, we thank you for quiet. We thank you that in the quiet you can speak to us in our hearts and minds. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Imagination Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Young children are good at using their imaginations in a variety of ways. This activity will draw on their imagination to help them with prayer. Read Philemon 1:1–9. While Paul was in prison, he wrote this letter to his friend and disciple, Philemon, regarding the runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul had to rely on his imagination to envision how his letter and Onesimus would be received. He hopes that his words will have a good result and that Philemon will receive Onesimus with joy and blessing. This Bible story will be a guide as you lead the children in imagination prayers. In imagination prayers, the children will use their imaginations to imagine the result of a prayer request. In an imagination prayer, the children may imagine the sick person is well and the hungry person gets food, and so forth.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Gather the children around you in a comfortable place and engage them in a conversation about their imaginations.

- Who likes to use their imagination?
- What do you like to imagine?

Explain to the children that sometimes they can use their imaginations to think of what might happen. Suggest that the children imagine the following scene: *Your mom or dad has been away on a trip. They come home. What happens next?* Invite the children to share what they imagine will happen.

Tell the children the story of Paul and his letter to his friend Philemon. Onesimus was Philemon's servant and he had run away. Paul wrote to encourage Philemon to welcome Onesimus back home with joy and blessing. Ask the children what they think Paul imagined would happen with Philemon and Onesimus.

Tell the children that they are going to try some imagination prayers, imagining what will happen as a result of their prayers. Invite the children to use their imagination as they make a prayer request. Ask the children for some prayer requests. Write them on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask the children to imagine what will happen when they pray for one of the items on the list. Some examples may be:

- A child wants to pray for a job for her dad. What could happen? Can they imagine this dad getting a job and his family being less worried and resting in God's care?
- A child wants to pray for a test at school. What could happen? Can they imagine getting a good night's sleep so they are rested? Can they imagine doing well on the test and resting in God's care?

Guide the children with words such as: "God, I pray for . . . And I imagine when that happens, it will look like . . ."



5 Christ Among the Children

Leader preparation: Obtain the poster "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Noble. Spend time prayerfully looking at the picture. Does it speak to you or move you in some special way? How is it different or similar from any other pictures you may have seen of Jesus with the children? By hugging and touching the children, Jesus would have been bestowing blessings upon them, which was a common practice for rabbis or teachers in biblical times. Sharing words of blessing, remembrances, and prayers was done often between leaders and their disciples.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Noble
<http://www.ucc.org/the-pilgrim-press/pdfs/ITW-Poster-Set-1.pdf>

Gather the children around "Christ Among the Children." Invite them to sit quietly for a few minutes while looking at it. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you see in this picture?
- Who do you think these people are in the picture?
- What do you think is going on?
- Imagine yourself in this scene. Where are you?
- What would that feel like to be there?

Tell the children that the picture is called "Christ Among the Children." Tell them there are several times in the Bible that mention Jesus being with children or children being brought to Jesus. Explain that the tradition in Bible times was to bring the

children to rabbis, or teachers, for blessings. Blessings often invited a special touch or hug. This was an outward way, or a gesture, to say that God is with you, God loves you, and God welcomes you no matter what.

Invite the children to do a role-play, taking turns being Jesus who blesses and the children who are blessed. Guide them to place a hand on the shoulder or arm of the other children and say, "May God bless you!" Conclude by placing your hands, one child at a time, on the heads of the children and saying, "May Jesus Christ bless and be with you in all that you do."

⑥ The Boom, Boom Prayer

Leader preparation: In both Bible Focus Passages for this Exploration, there are aspects of blessing, whether it is for the royal household or for people who are followers of Christ. The most basic form and oftentimes earliest form of blessing a child learns is the blessing for a meal. In offering a blessing for the food, we are blessing the food for our body's use, as well blessing and thanking God for providing it for us. The "Boom Boom Prayer" is a simple blessing song with motions. Watch the YouTube video "Boom Boom Prayer" to familiarize yourself with it so you can teach it to the children.

Supplies:

- snack
- computer with Internet access
- YouTube video "Boom Boom Prayer"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5oQDv-q3-c>

Invite the children to learn a table prayer with motions. Sing the prayer once doing the motions. Then invite the children to repeat each line with the motions after you. Sing the song again all the way through encouraging the children to sing with you. Enjoy a snack together.

Boom Boom Prayer

(words and motions)

We thank you for the world so sweet, Boom Boom! *(Put one fisted hand on top of the other fisted hand; tap them together while singing the boom, boom.)*

We thank you for the food we eat, Yum Yum! *(Rub your tummy with your hand when sing yum, yum.)*

We thank you for the birds that sing, Tra-la-la! *(Hold both hands up in the air, pretending to be birds' mouths, and make them sing the words with you.)*

We thank you God for everything.

Boom Boom! *(Put one fisted hand on top of the other fisted hand; tap them together while singing the boom, boom.)*

Yum Yum! *(Rub your tummy with your hand when sing yum, yum.)*

Tra-la-la *(Hold both hands up in the air, pretending to be birds' mouths, and make them sing the words with you.)*

Amen! *(Clap your hands together as you sing Amen.)*

Sending & Serving Activities

**7 Learning a Modern Day Lord's Prayer (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Below is a contemporary version of the Lord's Prayer. Reflect on the version of the Lord's Prayer that you most often use or the one used by your church. Sometimes it is helpful to read or hear different versions of a traditional prayer or scripture because we may discover new meanings. Since young children are just learning the Lord's Prayer, most likely in the form that is used in your congregation, you don't want to confuse them with a "different" Lord's Prayer. You will be teaching them a prayer and having them draw pictures to illustrate the prayer. Write each line of the prayer below on a sheet of white paper, except "Amen." Make multiple copies of some of the lines, if necessary, so that each child may have a paper to illustrate.

Supplies:

- prepared paper with a line for each child from "A Modern Lord's Prayer"
- crayons or markers

Tell the children that you are going to teach them a prayer. Invite them to repeat each line after you. Go through the prayer a couple times. Give each child a piece of paper prepared with a line from the prayer. Read the lines to them, if necessary, and invite them to draw a picture illustrating that line of the prayer. When the children have finished drawing, say the prayer again and have the children hold up the drawings as their line is said. You may want to display the drawings, in prayer order, in your meeting space or church.

A Modern Lord's Prayer

Loving God, Parent and Friend,
Always with us, from beginning to end.
Help everyone to follow your way.
Give us the food we need each day.
Forgive us when we hurt one another,
Teach us to care for one another.
Lead us away from things that are wrong,
Help us make others feel they belong.
Amen.

(BASED ON LUKE 11:1-4 FROM *BIBLE QUEST CURRICULUM 2005*)

**8 Love You Forever**

Leader preparation: Obtain the book *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch (Firefly Books, 2003). This is a story of how a little boy goes through the stages of childhood and becomes a man, but it is also about the enduring nature of parents' love and how it crosses generations. The book contains a recurring song, which is in essence a blessing given from the parent to the child. The blessing song is "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living, my baby you'll be." It is not unlike the type of blessing God has for God's people, and especially God's children. No matter what happens, God will always love us forever and like us always, and always and eternally be our parent, and we will be God's chil-

dren. Read the book aloud to yourself as a way of preparing for reading it to your group of children. How did you feel about the story? How did you connect with the story? Prepare a blessing basket full of slips of paper containing short affirmative blessings to share and bestow upon the children in your group. Print the attachment “Blessings,” and cut apart the strips. You may add other blessing strips if you like. Make enough blessing strips for so that each child receives a blessing.

Supplies:

- *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch (Firefly books, 2003)
- “Blessings,” Attachment: Activity 8 (one strip for each child)
- basket

Invite the children to gather around you and sit comfortably so they can hear you and see the pictures of the book. Tell the children that throughout the Bible we are told of God’s love for God’s people, for us, and God’s blessings on us. Explain that blessings are a type of prayer and a special ritual. Tell the children that you are going to read them a story about a special blessing and ritual practiced in a family. Read *Love You Forever* to the children. After the story, ask the children the following questions.

- How did the story make you feel?
- What was your favorite part?
- What parts of the story seemed like your family or things that happen at your house?
- Tell me about blessings, prayers, rituals, or traditions that you celebrate with your family.
- What do you do in your family that is kind of like the song/blessing in the story? (Bedtime prayers and stories might be examples.)

After the children have had opportunity to share about their special rituals, tell them you would like to share with them a ritual called the blessing basket. Show the children the basket with the blessing strips in it. Invite the children to draw out blessings. Read the blessings to the children. You may choose to touch their heads or shoulders or do an open-arm hug while reading the words of blessing. Continue the process until all the children have been blessed. End by saying, “Thank you God for blessing all of us!”



9 God Bless Our Home

Leader preparation: Read 2 Samuel 7:25–29 with special attention to verse 29. King David spoke about God blessing his house. In this activity the children will make a plaque for their home that says “God Bless This House.” Make copies of the template on the attachment and cut out the circles.

Supplies:

- Bible
- disposable plate, with at least a 4½-inch center, for each child
- “God Bless This House Template,” Attachment: Activity 9
- permanent markers
- crayons and markers
- glue sticks
- embellishments, such as sequins, glitter glue, stickers, rick rack, and buttons
- masking tape
- yarn
- scissors

Read 2 Samuel 7:25–29 to the children. Ask them what David is talking to God about. Explain, if necessary, that David is asking God to bless his house, his family, and his future. Tell them that sometimes houses are blessed today with a special blessing or dedication service. Invite the children to make a plaque to put in their home that says “God Bless This Home” as a reminder to ask God’s blessings on their homes and families.

Give the children plates and instruct the children who would like to write on their plates to print “God Bless This House” using permanent markers. Give the children who would rather have a template a prepared copy of the template from the attachment, and have them glue the circles to the center of their dinner plates. Invite the children to decorate their plates with crayons, markers, and any embellishments you have provided. Give each child a piece of yarn and have them tape each end to the back of the plate to make a hanger. Encourage the children to hang their plates in their homes to remind them to ask for God’s blessings on their home and family each day and to recognize that God does bless them.

Reflect

In what new ways have you experienced prayers, blessings, and rituals? How do you think practicing some of these types of prayers and rituals will affect the future and vision of the young children in your care? Prayerfully consider how you have molded their future and impacted their vision and give thanks to God!

Attachment: Activity 8

Blessings

You are wonderfully made by God.

God loves you forever.

God likes you for always.

God thinks you are awesome.

You are God's child.

You are a blessing.

God made you special.

Attachment: Activity 1

god
Bless
This
house

god
Bless
This
house