

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

What's to be discovered by this group might be best answered by asking, "What's in it for me?" Youth in this age group are learning more about their personal identity and trying to break out on their own. This is a transition time from dependence on family to testing the waters of independence, while still needing assistance in transportation and other basic needs. Ask these youth a question, and they will challenge you with silence or a surprisingly complicated answer. It's best to be prepared for a multilayered conversation. This may be the first time these youth have faith questions involving doubt and belief. Pat answers won't cut it here, but real discussion will go a long way toward faith building.

### About this Exploration

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

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

## Leader Preparation

Take seven rocks (or something similar) in your hands. Feel the weight of them as you make them move in your hands. Notice the texture. Remember that you are holding part of God’s creation. The Bible says the rocks will sing God’s praises if no one else is able. Imagine what these rocks would say, given the chance to praise God. Keep the rocks close at hand as you look through the scriptures. Each time the story causes you to wonder, touch the rocks and imagine God helping you understand. Since, most likely, these rocks won’t speak today, the job of testimony and witness falls to you and those with whom you share this story. Consider carrying one or more of these rocks with you when you are with the youth as a reminder that you are telling God’s story together. Hold all the rocks again as you pray.

*Prayer: God, you fill each of us with the words and wisdom to tell your story. Let the simple memory of a rock lead me to know I can share your story with those who are ready to hear. Help me share my own story as a way of allowing you to be seen in my thoughts, words, and actions. Prepare the hearts of those who will hear my words. Be present as we learn together. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 A Fist Full of Findings (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** There are lots of ways to hold onto memories. This activity asks youth to think about God’s involvement in the world and to place that memory literally at the tips of their fingers. What things do you think about when you consider God’s involvement in the world? Take a minute to consider God’s daily activities in this world. Link your hands like you’re going to give someone a boost. Imagine what you could put in your hands as a reminder that God is with you always. Ask God to fill your hands with hints and suggestions of the many ways life is filled with God moments.

**Supplies:** None

Ask youth to pair up for this activity. The partner wearing the most blue will start. The first person will clasp his or her hands together with fingers interlocked, but not in the usual way—it doesn’t matter exactly how the fingers are together, just that it’s in a different way. The first youth should close his or her eyes. The second youth should then tap one finger in the other’s hand. When the first youth feels the tap, she or he has 30 seconds to think of one thing that God created that she or he has seen or experienced in some way. The youth should remember what finger this memory goes with so that when the other youth touches that finger again, the first youth can repeat what was said before. Have the partners keep going until ten fingers have been touched and then switch roles so each youth gets a chance to name ten things God created.

When all pairs have finished, gather the youth and have them all interlock their fingers again. Ask for volunteers to name the most interesting or the funniest or the strangest thing they heard. Then ask youth to imagine what it would be like to discover each new thing for the first time. Remind them that part of God’s story is the discovery of all that God has done. Guide them through these questions.

- What do you think it’s like for someone to meet you for the first time?
- What would someone notice about you at the first sight of you or with the first words you speak?
- What would it be like to realize you are seeing God for the first time?
- Part of the joy in our lives is discovering God in us. How does that change the way you react the first time you meet someone?
- How does paying attention to God within us help us to see God in others?

Remind them that being aware of God’s creation and sharing it with others is a form of testimony.

### 2 I Remember It Well

**Leader preparation:** Much of what we know about God comes from stories. In this activity, participants have a chance to tell stories from their own lives and then think about where God might be in each story. It will be helpful to have a memorable story from your own life to tell. Think of an instance when you had a great time with your family or friends. It could be during a holiday or a special vacation or just last weekend. Then, as you will ask participants, imagine how God might celebrate with you when you are having fun with family and friends.

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

#### Supplies:

- paper and pens, pencils, or markers

Ask the participants to remember a time when they were with friends or family and they had a great time. Give them a minute to think about the experience. Encourage them to remember all the details—the who, what, when, and where. Ask them to consider why they remember this particular time. *What made it memorable? Was it the people or the place or something else?* When everyone has a clear idea of an event, ask them to write it down on the paper. They can write words that describe the event or draw a picture. They might just make a few notes that help them remember. Tell participants that they might have a chance to share this story with the group.

When everyone is done, ask a few participants to share a story. Encourage the rest of the group to listen carefully. Remind them that everyone has a story of her or his own, and each has personal reasons for the story’s being important. Have the following questions ready when a few participants have told their stories.

- Why is it so fun to tell stories?
- How do stories help us remember things?
- If I ask you to tell me about something from the Bible, what do you remember—facts and laws or stories?
- Why do you think Jesus told so many stories?
- Where is God in our stories?
- How can each of us use our own story to tell God’s story?

Explain that the more we practice telling our own stories, the more comfortable we are in sharing these stories.

### ③ Discovering My Inner Animal

**Leader preparation:** Youth, and anyone really, need a variety of ways to uncover and share their uniqueness. Take a minute to consider the moments in your life when you learned something new about yourself. What did it feel like the first time you realized you had a talent for something? How does it make you feel when someone recognizes your abilities? For this activity, help youth feel free to share anything they find unique in their life. Remind them that God made them and loves them just as they are.

#### Supplies:

- a variety of stuffed animals or pictures of animals

Gather youth in a circle and make a pile of stuffed animals in the middle. Stack them so the participants can see most of them. Give the youth time to study the animals carefully. Ask them to decide which animal represents them and why. Starting with a volunteer, have youth tell which animal represents him or her and why. If none of the stuffed animals is a fitting representation, allow a youth to make a different choice. Perhaps he or she could write the name or draw a picture of that animal on a piece of paper and add it to the pile. Make sure every youth has a chance to participate, and be accepting of all sorts of answers. When everyone has had a turn, work through some questions with the group.

- What did you discover about yourself or someone else through this activity?
- How does knowing something about yourself help you know something about God who created you?
- What do you think it's like for God to continually discover the hidden surprises of people like you?
- What animal would represent God? Why?
- How does this relate to the faith practice of testimony?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Read between the Lines (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One of the great things about the Bible is its ability to be understood differently depending on who is reading it or on when someone is reading it or on where someone is. The Bible often creates more questions than answers, but it is in that questioning that faith is strengthened. Read Genesis 24:34–67 and Acts 16:16–34. Be ready to help youth make a choice between these scriptures. You'll be asking them to read between the lines in order to rewrite the scriptures in their own language. Take time to imagine what you might do as a way of being ready for the kinds of questions the youth might ask.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- pens, pencils, and paper

Pass out Bibles and ask youth to read Genesis 24:34–67 and Acts 16:16–34. Before they read, tell them they are going to choose one of these passages to rewrite or retell in their own way, such as rewriting the passage in a contemporary setting. After they've read the scriptures, help each participant make a choice. Let the youth know they will be sharing with the group when everyone has had time to create a new version of the scripture passage. Pray for the Spirit's guidance as they engage with God's story to discover new meaning. After everyone has had a chance to share, ask some questions.

- What is it like to think about God's word this way?
- What did you learn in this story that you might not have otherwise?
- What would it be like if you considered everything you wrote to be a message from God?

Ask youth to make a plan to try this again on their own sometime. Maybe they can involve a friend or parent. Remind youth that sharing God's word is a calling for all believers. This kind of activity is just one way they can help others know God.

### 5 Asking the Right Way

**Leader preparation:** Good questions lead to good conversation. Good conversation can create an opportunity to share the Good News. By practicing asking questions, it can be easier to ask a more serious question later. In this activity, asking and answering questions will lead to a discussion of finding good faithful questions about God's story in the lives of others. Create a "story stick" with something like a ruler or yardstick wrapped with colorful ribbon or material. (Depending on your group, you could do this as part of your activity.) Be as creative as you have time to decorate. Think of some simple questions you could ask someone you didn't know, such as: Where do you live? What kind of music do you like?

**Supplies:**

- a ruler or yardstick
- ribbon, streamers, or colorful fabric
- tape

Take a minute to explain the concept of a "story stick." *We'll call the story stick a symbol of God's presence. Only the person who holds the stick will talk, but no one will be forced to speak.* Tell participants that this will be a question-and-answer story. First, the person with the stick will ask a question, such as: "What is a food that you like?" or "Where were you born?" Then the stick is given to the next person, who answers the question before asking another question. Remind participants that they can say "pass" if they want, but encourage them to think of some answer to the question if they can. No personal or intrusive questions are allowed. Keep watch to make sure everyone has a chance, and include yourself in the activity. At times, you might need to help with questions. Spend as much time on this as possible with the "story stick" activity, but leave time to ask some of these questions at the end:

- Why is it helpful to know how to ask questions?
- What did you learn today that you didn't know before?
- What would happen if you asked a more serious question, such as "Have you ever heard of Jesus?"
- How could you help someone know about God through questions?

Wrap up this activity by encouraging participants to ask some faithful questions this week, including something like: What is God doing in the middle of my day? What would God like me to be doing on Thursday?

### 6 Piecing Together God's Love

**Leader preparation:** Make sure you practice making an origami box so you can help youth during the session. Remember that a paper folding activity is a great time to talk to youth while their hands are busy. They might be more willing to talk while they are distracted. Have questions ready, so you can ask them while you are helping them.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- markers
- scissors
- instructions for making a paper box,  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Fold-a-Paper-Box>

Pose an opening question: *Who has worked a puzzle and ended up with a piece or two missing? What's that like?* Remind youth that God sent Jesus as a way of completing the puzzle of how God loves us. Really, though, there could be one more piece—us. When we share the story of God with someone else, we complete the puzzle for that person. We give the person a chance to know Jesus. Have the youth take the time to decorate the paper for an origami box. When they have created unique, colorful paper, walk youth through the steps to make a paper box. When each youth finishes a box, ask a couple questions.

- What gifts do you think God gives the world?
- What kind of things does God use to help people know about Jesus?

Have youth draw a picture or write a list of words describing things God uses. When the youth finished, have them cut the paper up into a homemade puzzle and store it in the box. Tell youth this puzzle will serve as a reminder that God encourages them to share the story of Jesus. Maybe they can put the puzzle together with a friend sometime soon.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Back-to-the-Bible Relay (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Have some Bibles available. If you're concerned about dropping Bibles on the floor, you can substitute other books. Youth love a good relay. Remind them in the activity that the Bible talks about running a good race. It's not really about a sport, though. Rather, it's about racing around at high speed sharing God's stories.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles (or other large books)
- relay course

Create teams appropriate to the size of your group. Each team will need one Bible. Show the youth the course for the relay. Explain that when you say "Go," the first two youth on each team will hold the Bible between their two bodies as they stand back to back. They have to keep the book there while they move quickly through the course. The next pair takes its turn when the first pair returns to the starting line, and this process continues until everyone has gone. The first team that finishes wins. Consider adding penalties for dropping the book. If you have extra time, try the relay again in different-sized groups or by taking a different course. Leave time to ask a few questions at the end.

- What would you do if I asked you to run this race in your home neighborhood?
- What if you could give away Bibles to anyone who tried this relay? How do you think people would react?
- What other creative ways are there to spread God's word?

Invite the youth to carry their Bible with them for a day to see what people say. If they already do that, have them go a day without carrying it to see what happens. Thank God for the word that creates hope.

### 8 God-and-Me Storybook

**Leader preparation:** Look at the website <http://www.pocketmod.com> for directions about how to fold the paper for this activity. You can print out a sample if you want. You'll probably want to practice at least once if you have time.

**Supplies:**

- one piece of copy paper for each participant
- colored pens or pencils
- scissors
- folding instructions from <http://www.pocketmod.com>

Carefully lead the youth through the folding and cutting process to make their God-and-Me Storybook. After completing all the folding and cutting, participants should decorate the front cover of the booklet with the colored pens or pencils. Also have them label, in small letters, each page with a day of the week, starting with Monday and ending with Sunday (on the back cover). Then have them decorate a thin border on each page.

When youth have finished making the booklet, talk together about finding time for God each day. It's something that often is suggested, but this time there's a twist. Ask participants to consider a time daily when remembering that each is God's representative on this earth. Hold up a Bible, and remind participants that the only way anyone knows about God is because of the stories that have been told for thousands of years. *What would happen, each day, if you took time out to remember that those around you might see God by seeing you? What will you be doing on Tuesday that shows someone something about God? What things do you do each week that could make another person wonder what God means to you?* Invite participants to write at least one thing in the booklet each day in the coming week. Ask them to keep their God-and-Me Storybook with them at all times for at least one week, and ask them to make a commitment to talk every day about the experience of being God's spokesperson.

### 9 Popping Good News

**Leader preparation:** Practice making the pop-up card youth will make in this activity. It's not hard, but it will be easier if you try it a couple times. Just singing a hymn might not go over that well with this age group, depending on your youth. Sometimes, though, all it takes is a little activity to enable youth to engage in a hymn in a new way. Take a look at the hymn "You Are Salt for the Earth, O Lord." Note some things you might use if you were making a card. You could even make your practice cards with the real words or pictures you find. Have a way to provide music for this hymn so youth can get a chance to hear it and maybe even sing along. Don't be afraid to ask for a volunteer to help you if singing isn't your thing.

**Supplies:**

- song: "You Are Salt for the Earth, O Lord," <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt>
- paper
- markers
- tape or glue
- directions for making a pop-up card, <http://www.tinyurl.com/4lm7k99>

Ask youth to listen to the hymn. Consider playing it once while everyone closes their eyes. The second time you play the hymn, have the youth look at the words.

You might read it out loud together. If you can, shout some of the lines and whisper others. Have fun enjoying this great hymn, and then ask the youth to close their eyes as you pose some questions. *What do you see when you listen to this hymn? Look at the words. What pictures are present in the words? If you had to show someone this hymn without the music or singing, how would you act it out or draw it?*

Lead youth through the steps for making a pop-up card. As they work, ask them to think about ways they could use a card to tell someone about God. Help youth use words and pictures to describe a God who loves everyone and is interested in all life. When finished, invite each participant to send the card to someone he or she cares about in the community.

### Reflect

Discovering God's story seems like easy work, but with youth this age, it can sometimes be more questions than answers. How did the questions work in this Exploration? Were youth able to connect God's love for them with the challenge to share that love with others? What captured their attention and kept it? When did you feel like you were struggling? What questions do you still have now that this Exploration is completed? Spend time listing your own highs and lows from this Exploration. Thank God for what worked well, and then thank God for the lessons learned during the difficult moments. Make notes to remind you what to do differently next time.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Youth love a good story, but at this age a good story must include honest, real-life questions. The Bible offers lots of entertaining stories to inspire youth to think about what faith means for them. Ask them to explain faith to others, though, and they might run the other way. Youth in this age group offer testimony best through actions. Keep them moving and having fun, and they'll learn fast and remember it forever. Provide them with a relationship with someone who thinks the stories and testimony are important, and you'll have the beginnings of a lifetime of faith.

### About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 9:30–37**  
**Philippians 2:1–13**

## Leader Preparation

Set aside time to enjoy a quiet moment with God. Light a candle, or sit where you have a beautiful view. Choose a comfortable chair, or lie on the floor. Imagine God waiting patiently for you to take this time together. Have these words from Psalm 116 in your head: “O Lord, I pray, save my life.” If you need to, write them down. Repeat the line slowly as you take a deep breath. Exhale as you say, “Amen. Thank you, God.” Repeat this again and again, allowing the rest of your thoughts to be set aside by this quiet time with God. Know that God will give you the words and actions necessary to help the youth understand this Exploration and the ways they can share God’s good news with others. When you’ve found peace, say this prayer aloud as a closing to this quiet time.

*Prayer: God, join me as I explore your scriptures with your children. Help me be at peace that this is a shared activity. We learn together. Send your Spirit as our guide. I offer my time to you. Amen.*

## Session Development

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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Two Eyes! (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read John 9:1–41. The story for this activity is long. Consider reviewing the story to mark the highlight moments. If the youth can handle the whole story, however, go for it. It’s a great story. Pay attention to the actors in the story. Who’s asking the questions? Who’s not answering? John gives us a clear picture of Jesus as a challenger to the status quo. This might apply to the modern challenge to youth to share the story of Jesus to people who might not want to hear it. Be prepared to help youth think through ways to share stories of God without fear.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) video recorder

Invite the youth to open their Bibles to John 9. Bring this long story to life with a sort of Readers Theatre. Throughout the activity, remind youth that knowing Bible stories makes it easier to talk about faith with friends and even with strangers. Encourage the youth to build their mental library of remembered Bible stories.

Have the participants take a quick look through the story to figure out who all the characters are, and have youth name the characters as you list them on newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask for volunteers to read aloud the different parts. Then ask for different youth to read the parts. Explain that while the readers read, actors will act the story out silently. Take time to make sure everyone knows their parts and where they will enter and exit. Have youth read and act through the whole story. Consider video recording the performance for use another time or bringing in other youth to watch.

When finished, form a circle, and talk about the story and its connection to sharing God’s word. *Why is this story in the Bible? What does the blind man tell us about how God works? Who do you think the blind man told about what happened to him? What would you do if Jesus came along and cured your lifelong illness? Who would you tell about it? How can we tell people about God in ordinary things?*

### 2 Talking Volumes

**Leader preparation:** If possible, take this activity outside, into a gym, or to any place where the youth can be loud and crazy. This activity enables participants to create a strong memory of Psalm 116. Remember, they might not be able to recite the psalm word for word later, but the mind is canny enough to store it and have it ready when the youth might need it another time. So, have the most fun you can have in making this activity memorable. For this activity, you can either use Bibles or a copy of the psalm cut into strips by verse.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- (optional) strips of paper with one verse of Psalm 116 on each

Have each youth look through Psalm 116 quickly and silently. Tell the participants that they are going to have a chance to be loud, quiet, silly, or serious as they decide how to recite this psalm out loud. Assign each youth or group of

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

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

youth a line from the psalm. Ask them to take a minute to think of what kind of voice they want to use when they speak the lines. Make sure they understand they can be silly, loud, creative, quiet, or whatever works for them. When ready, join in the fun and recite the psalm in this crazy way. It may be helpful to include movement to allow youth the chance to be less inhibited. When the group has read through it at least one time this way, talk through the activity with the following questions.

- Imagine God listening to how much fun we're having with this psalm. How do you think God might be reacting?
- What do you hear differently in this psalm when you say it this way?
- What are some other ways we could recite the psalms?
- What are some other ways we could remember what is in this psalm?
- Identify three things you like about this psalm.
- How can you make a plan to tell someone else about what you've learned in this psalm today?

Thank the youth for their energy and excitement, and encourage them to try this activity with other psalms.



### 3 Kingspotting

**Leader preparation:** Determine how you will display the artwork “The Adoration of Kings” for this activity. You might want to find a way to project it. Try to spend time with this piece of art on your own before leading this activity. Gather up your own impressions of what interests you when you look at this artwork. Pay attention to whatever Bible stories (or others) come to mind as you observe. Ask God to inspire you with thoughts about the painting that might be helpful to youth. Look online for any comments you might find from others about this work of art.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder (Flemish, 1568–1625) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr>

Gather youth in a place where everyone can see the painting. Give them some opening encouragement about what it means to appreciate a work of art. *Art is an experience. There is no right or wrong way to enjoy this painting. Most importantly, asking questions and making comments about the artwork makes the whole experience more fun.*

Ask youth to close their eyes for a minute and think about everything they know about the story of Jesus' birth and first years of life. Ask youth to imagine the pictures that our culture has given them about Jesus in the manger and the kings who visited him at a house (not the manger) after he was born. Point out that no photos or videos were taken. No artists sat and sketched the scene. All that we know has been passed down in words and, only much later, put in picture form of any sort. Now ask youth to quietly look at the painting. Make sure they look at all parts of the painting from top to bottom and corner to corner. Invite them to get really close and try to pick out the most interesting details. Then encourage them to let their focus go soft and just take in the whole painting. While they look, ask them to think about these questions:

- Who was Jesus, really?
- How did his birth make such a big difference in the world?
- What do you think the crowd thinks is happening in the painting? What are the people thinking when the kings bring gifts for this unknown baby?
- What did people tell their friends after this day?
- What would you tell your friends if you had been there?

Read aloud Matthew 2:1–12 as youth look at the painting. When finished, allow time for silence and thoughtfulness. Help youth come up with some feeling words about the painting. *Does it feel exciting? Scary? Like a party or a funeral procession?* Take as much time as you can just enjoying the work of art. If you have more time, talk about other ways this painting could have been done. Think of different materials that could be used, different colors, and different techniques. Let youth imagine how they would make this painting and, most importantly, what they would hope people would see in these alternative versions.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Thanksgiving Sacrifice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Psalm 116 is a song of thanksgiving for one who has been released from affliction. Verse 17 states, “I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.” Think about what a Thanksgiving sacrifice might be. What might a person sacrifice in thanksgiving for God’s love and healing?

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Read aloud Psalm 116, and focus the group’s attention on verse 17. Have the group think of what a thanksgiving sacrifice might be. *Looking over the psalm, and think of people you know who could use healing in their lives. Is there a family who has lost a loved one, or someone who has cancer or some other illness? What about people you may not know personally, such as children at a pediatric hospital or those who need to use a food bank or homeless shelter? After you spend time sharing thoughts, come up with one thing you can do as a group to reach out to someone in need of God’s healing. Notice how reading scripture led you to think of this person (or these persons) and how reaching out is your way of witnessing to the work of that scripture in your lives.*

### 5 Alive and Baptized

**Leader preparation:** One way to share God’s story is through art. Over the centuries since Jesus walked the earth, artists have tried to tell the stories in all sorts of ways. This activity works with one of those ways. Take time with the artwork to make your own impressions. Be comfortable with your own feelings and thoughts about this piece of art.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- paper, pens, pencils
- artwork: “Baptism” by Hulis Mavruk <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm>

This activity uses a piece of flat artwork and attempts to make it as real as if the person viewing it was actually in the painting. Let youth know that this will be an exercise in imagination stretching. Decide if you want to display the painting in a place where all the youth can see it at the same time, or if you might want to incorporate some movement in the viewing by having youth pass by the painting several times as they do each part of this activity. Either way encourages active engagement with the work of art.

Have the youth fold and rip a sheet of paper into six separate pieces. Ask them to write each of the following senses on a torn piece: Touch, Smell, Hearing, Sight, Taste, and Make Your Own. Take a couple minutes to talk about the painting. Ask a few general questions:

- What is this painting about?
- Where does it seem to be happening?
- Who are the people?
- What year is it?

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Mark 1:9–11. Remind youth that Jesus was baptized so he could be just like us. He wanted to be close to God while he was on this earth, and he wanted to know that he was part of God’s world forever. Then have youth shuffle the pieces of paper. Tell them to choose a sense by choosing a piece of paper and then begin writing anything and everything they can think of involving that sense related to the painting. If a participant chooses Make Your Own, give him or her a suggestion, such as a sense of humor or a sense of style. Then let the young person come up with an idea of his or her own. Manage the time so youth can write something on each of the six pieces of paper, with time left for sharing with the group at the end. Open the conversation with these questions:

- How can you use all your senses to know God’s story?
- How can you affect the sense of other people in the same way so that they might be interested in the story, too?

Invite youth to use their senses from now on to experience God. Ask them to share this experience with one friend within the next week. If you have extra time, ask youth to share any baptism stories they know—their own or someone else’s.

### 6 A Full Plate to Give Away

**Leader preparation:** Sometimes you just need to get your hands dirty and let the youth have a little fun with some natural elements. In the best situation, you’ll be able to take youth outside, pick up natural things off the ground, and collect them on a plate. If not, you can use anything for this activity—toothpicks, paper, tissues, marbles. The point is to give the youth a tactile experience that will spark their memory in a way that will help them remember this God moment for a long time.

**Supplies:**

- paper plates, one per youth
- sticks, rocks, grass, or anything natural
- glue, tape

Give the youth the plates as they come in. Have them write on the plate the words “The stones would shout out. Luke 19:40.” Talk a little bit about what it would mean to be the first archeologist to visit a new discovery. The first scientists on

the scene pick their way through everything on the ground, which might be at least part of the origin of the expression “leaving no stone unturned.” Have each youth gather materials to fill the plate and then glue or tape the objects onto the place. As they work, read aloud Luke 19:37–40. Then ask a few questions:

- What’s Jesus really saying about talking and singing rocks?
- What would you do if the rocks started singing?
- What would someone who had never heard of God think of singing rocks?
- Jesus may be saying that God’s good news is so amazing that it can’t be held back. How do you see that where you spend your days?
- What can you do to help other people realize how great God is?

Give youth a chance to create their own special plate of natural praise, and offer them a chance to share it with the group. Remind the youth that they can do this activity with their family or friends as a way of thinking about God some other time.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Quick Trip (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity involves a longer reading with youth who may or may not have experienced a guided meditation. Consider preparing the room in a way that it creates a safe environment to relax and enjoy quiet time. If you can control the lights, you might want to dim them or turn some off. If it’s safe to use a candle or two, do so. Quiet music may also be helpful. Youth this age need to be reminded to set aside their silliness for a few minutes during this activity. You can acknowledge that doing this is sometimes hard, but ask them to participate as respectfully as they are able.

#### Supplies:

- a Bible for each youth
- (optional) candle
- (optional) meditative music

Have each youth hold a Bible and a pen while you read the following guided meditation.

Today we’re going to take a little journey together. It might be tempting to laugh or joke during this trip, but I hope you can take this trip quietly. Set aside any concerns for a couple minutes, and enjoy an imaginative trip with the Spirit as your guide.

First, get yourself comfortable with your Bible and your pen in your hands. You won’t actually be reading or writing. I just want you to feel these two important tools as we take this journey together. Now, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and hold it. Then let it out slowly. Repeat this: In. Hold it. Out slowly. Try to keep this breathing up the whole time we take this journey. Let your shoulders relax as we get ready to begin our journey.

Imagine God’s Spirit greeting you here, ready to show you the way on a quiet trip. God’s Spirit can take any form that works for you. It can be a

real person, or a light, or anything. Let your imagination come up with something special for you. It's quite possible that the Spirit really will join us as we take this trip. That's what Jesus promised us. We might as well believe it and try it out.

Since we are on an imaginary journey, we can do things we might not normally do. So we're going to follow the Spirit right into the Bible. We won't be just sneaking through the pages—we'll be entering the stories themselves. We don't have all day, so we might go pretty fast through some stories, but it doesn't have to feel fast. We can just relax as we watch the stories come to life.

See Adam and Eve. They're relaxing and enjoying fresh fruit. Look at all the animals. Pairs of every animal you can think of, from towering giraffes to tiny voles. Noah and his family are setting them free from the top of a mountain, smiling as they breathe fresh air for the first time in a long time. There's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They're standing in a fire, but they're not burning. What a great story that is. If you don't know it, you could read it sometime. We move quickly into a field with a bunch of youth around a campfire. Sheep are bleating quietly all around them. Suddenly, in the sky, there's the loud sound of singing. Perfect singing. Hosanna in the highest!

Look, just ahead is a messy animal barn with the brightest star you've ever seen hovering above it. A baby is crying, and so are his parents. It's a tender moment of the celebration of new life. Then, just as quickly, the baby is a man. It's Jesus. He's in the water being baptized by John. His whole body is pushed under the water, but when he comes up, the sky above is torn apart like a piece of material, and a beautiful bird slowly circles around and around until landing right on Jesus' shoulders.

From your perspective, the whole crowd is looking up as if the bird is their mother and they're about to be fed. Then a voice fills the sky, like the angels who sang before. "This is my son. I love him. Believe in him." The crowd breaks into a cheer, their faces full of smiles. They want to believe. They've been waiting for Jesus. They are excited about the future with Jesus as their guide. Watch with them as Jesus, smiling and ready to get to work, steps out of the water and begins his journey toward Jerusalem. A dirt road winds its way through the landscape. Jesus waves and strides away. He looks back from time to time and raises his arm again each time. He is smiling and hopeful.

As he disappears from view in the distance, notice that you are back in this room, breathing slowly and steadily. Feel the hope that comes from knowing some of the stories of the Bible. Grasp the importance of what God did for you by sending Jesus to walk this earth. In a minute, I'll ask you to open your eyes again and come back to this place, but before I do, imagine one more thing. Who could benefit from knowing this story? What's their situation? Do they need comfort? Are they lonely? Do they need to celebrate? Ask God to help them hear this story as you have. Pray that all who need to hear God's story will, and, if you are able, promise God that you will try to tell that story when you get a chance.

All right, I'm going to hope that you have someone in mind. You can say your goodbyes to the Spirit, for now. As I count back from five to one, you can open your eyes. Five, four, three, two, one.

If you still have time, ask youth what they do to relax, and find out how they can use relaxation to find special time with the Spirit.

### 8 The Old Switcheroo

**Leader preparation:** Several Bible stories incorporate analogies—things in the story can be what they are *and* stand for something different. The farmer sowing seeds is a good example. For this activity, you'll have a chance to ask youth to stretch their thinking about the story in John 9 of the man Jesus cured of blindness. Truth be told, the story is not one that includes an analogy, but that will help in this activity. By working with this story as if it were an analogy, they'll have fun learning a lot about the story.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Help the youth find John 9:1–41, and ask them to read the story quietly by themselves. Watch for those who might need help, and casually offer your assistance as all are reading. When everyone is done, work as a group to make a list on newsprint or a whiteboard of the important parts of the story. *Where does it take place? Who are the characters? What is the action?* Make sure you get a nice long list.

Then explain what an analogy is. Use a simple example, such as “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” from Psalm 119:105. God’s word isn’t an actual lamp or a light, and the path may not be an actual path on the ground. Once you’re sure youth understand that, the fun begins. Ask youth to look through John 9 again, using the list you made together as their guide. Have them choose something off the list and come up with a new analogy for that character or setting or action. Help them be as creative as possible. It’s not important that they be serious or insightful, even though you might be surprised when that happens. The important thing is for the youth to spend a lot more time with the story this way than they would otherwise.

For every analogy they come up with, ask them to explain it. As they do, remind them of what is happening in the real story. Keep doing this for as long as you have time. Remind youth that this kind of creative storytelling is similar to what missionaries do when they take stories of different cultures and try to make connections. Someday, they might have a chance to do this, and knowing this story from John 9 is just one place to start.

### 9 Look Again

**Leader preparation:** Sometimes we make things so complicated when explaining God’s story. Youth especially can get lost in detailed explanations when something shorter would serve the same purpose. This activity demonstrates the need sometimes to take a second look to gain a fresh perspective. When encouraging youth to share their faith with others, a complicated plan is less likely to succeed than the simple idea of living by example.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- printer paper
- colored markers or crayons
- scissors

Ask youth to make lines for writing on one side of a piece of printer paper. Help them find Psalm 116, and ask them to copy as much of it as they can fit on the lined side of the paper. Ask for a volunteer to read the psalm out loud while youth are writing.

When everyone is finished, have youth turn the paper over and draw the craziest picture they can imagine. Encourage them to use every color, make lots of lines and squiggles, and fill the whole side of the paper with their unique design. When they are done with that, explain they are now going to make their own puzzle. Ask youth to carefully cut the paper into as many puzzle pieces as they can, but to keep the pieces at least 1 inch by 1 inch. They don't have to make the pieces look exactly like puzzle pieces, but they shouldn't just make squares.

When everyone is done, have them mix up their pieces and pass the puzzle to the closest person to the left. Then have a race to see who can finish the puzzle the fastest. Try this a couple times, passing the puzzles to the left each time. Then, have the youth turn the puzzle pieces over and race again. The youth should discover it takes far less time to finish the puzzle with words and lines to use as a guide.

Talk about what happened when they changed their perspective. *The Bible asks us to share God's story with other people. If we think that means we have to tell them the whole story in the 66 books of the Bible, it might seem impossible. But if we just tell the story of Jesus as God's son who lived among us, it's much less intimidating.*

Ask youth for some good reasons to talk about Jesus. Be accepting of reasonable answers. Thank them for their responses, and encourage them to find ways to change perspective with their friends to make "Jesus talk" a regular part of their lives.

### Reflect

Thank God for the Spirit's presence in these activities. Ask God for guidance in evaluating the effectiveness of these materials. What did you feel really good about when you were doing these activities? Where did you get tripped up? Where did the youth get tripped up? Take a minute to breathe. With God's help, the seeds planted here will encourage youth to be faithful followers who share their stories as examples of faith.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Although youth might not admit their need for rules and guidelines, the disciplines of the faith fit right into their developmental needs at this time in their lives. Give this group a clear path to follow with straightforward activities to do along the way, and they'll make the most of their journey. It's important to allow the full freedom for these youth to express themselves, and they'll do it best when they know their limits. As they explore what it means to live out their faith, they need to know that trying all sorts of things is not the same as "anything goes." Help them see the benefit of faithful activity, based on spiritual practices that will help them build a stronger relationship with God.

### About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 8:27–38**

**Psalms 25:1–10**

## Leader Preparation

Consider your own spiritual practices as you prepare to lead youth through these discipleship activities. How have you practiced prayer and devotion in your life? What memorable encounters have you had with the stories of the Bible? How have you benefited from time with other like-minded, spiritual people? Give yourself credit for any time spent practicing your faith. Celebrate the process of your own growth as a spiritual person, and trust that God is with you, carefully assisting you on your faith journey. Find a quiet moment to focus on this practice of discipleship. Remember that the work of faith doesn't need to be tiring or a burden. On the contrary, practicing discipleship creates its own energy that can increase the more you try it. Touch your eyes, mouth, ears, hands, and feet as you say this prayer or something like it in your own words.

*Prayer: God, I offer my whole body, mind, and soul to you. Help me as I practice discipleship to enjoy daily encounters with you. Help me repeat those experiences that bring me closer. Send your Spirit to guide me through regular discovery of the Bible's message, and put people in my path who will share disciplined practice with me. As I offer leadership in this practice, help me trust your involvement in the process, and give me the peace to share my faithful growth as an example for others. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Do What You Need to Do (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** God calls each of us to acts of discipleship through the everyday people and events of our lives. It's not often these days that we receive a divine intervention in the form of a voice from the heavens or a pillar of clouds to follow. More likely, we find ourselves face-to-face with decisions that must be made on the spot. Do we offer assistance? Do we admit we know how to help? Do we offer our unique skills? Do we share our stories? This activity assumes God provides the situation. It's up to us to consider ways to involve ourselves.

**Supplies:** None

When considering God's call to action, youth should know they have the right to answer "Yes," "No," or "Maybe later." The Bible is filled with stories of those called by God and their varied answers. God doesn't call without wanting an answer, but the freedom to choose remains. Chances are good things will happen when the choice is made to answer God's call, but God will work through whatever decision is made. Use the following case studies to think about what it means to be called by God.

#### Case Study 1

On your way to the park one morning, you step on a nail that, amazingly, punctures your shoe but passes right between your big toe and the next one. There is a hole in the shoe, but your toes are fine. As you toss the nail into a nearby garbage bin, six youth from school dash by. They run fast, their feet slapping the sidewalk with the sound of their bare feet. You try to remember if you've ever seen these youth wearing shoes, but the most you can recall is some ragged sandals and flip-flops last spring. What if they had stepped on that nail? You remember your pastor talking about giving your extra to someone in need, and it reminds you of your "old" tennis shoes that you have at home, four pairs that you don't wear anymore, but they are still in okay shape. If this is God's way of calling you to action, what do you do? Why? What difference would it make either way?

#### Case Study 2

Every time you're asked to run an errand at night, you have to pass by the corner where a group of youth hang out, harassing everyone who walks by. They're not really harmful, but some people get nervous, including you, since the youth are older and you're not very big in the first place. You usually cross the street before you get to the corner, but tonight you aren't thinking about it. When you get there, the youth form a wall around you. They call you names and ask where you are going. You look straight ahead, but when a bee buzzes through the group you jump back. The bee stings a youth behind you. "Oh, man, I'm allergic," he says. In a matter of seconds, the sting is swelling, and dots are rising on his skin. You know about bee stings, because you are allergic, too. In fact, you have a needle in your purse that you carry all the time. The other youth get scared and run off. The stung youth sits down on the sidewalk, breathing hard as his air passage starts to close. "I don't have anything for it," the youth says, looking scared. You remember your pastor telling the story of Jesus healing someone who had been sick for a long time. If this is God

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

calling, what do you do? There’s no phone nearby. If you run back to your apartment, it might take too long. If you let him use your needle and it doesn’t work, will his family sue you? He’s just a bad youth who harasses other kids. What difference does it make for you to get involved?

Ask youth to think of other ways God might call us into service to others. *It would be nice if God always spoke clearly from the heavens with a big, booming voice, but that’s not what happens. How can we figure out when God is calling us? How can we decide what to do when God calls? Who might help us think about God’s call? With this new way of thinking about it, what things have happened so far in life that might be God’s calling and your action? Ask God for help in knowing when the call happens and how to accomplish it.*

### 2 Getting the Feel for It

**Leader preparation:** Providing youth with a sensory reminder might mean a higher percentage of youth actually remembering what they did in this activity. You could take this activity outside, or create your own sensory table. You’ll want to give youth a chance to choose some natural element (or at least something with some texture) that they can fit in their pocket and carry around for a week.

**Supplies:**

- (optional) if you can’t go outside, provide craft rocks, marbles, toothpicks, or any small object with some texture, three for each participant

Remind youth that sometimes God asked people in the Bible to do specific tasks. They might have to gather up a group of people and move to a new land or wait a certain length of time before receiving a blessing. The idea of waiting for God sometimes gets lost in the business of life. When we are caught up with friends and family and school and extra activities, we might need a reminder to take time to consider God’s presence.

Ask the youth to find three small objects they can hold in their hands and fit in a pocket. When everyone has three objects, stand in a circle and ask participants to place the objects in front of their toes. Tell the youth that you’re going to create a “machine” to sort out all these objects and get them to the right people. Then make a sound, add a movement, pick up an object, and hand it to someone in the circle. Tell youth they will need to do the same—make a sound, move in a machinelike way, pick up an object, and give it to the nearest person. Encourage them all to be part of a noisy, squeaky machine with no two sounds that are alike. Tell them that you’ll be changing the speed of the machine from time to time, and that they should try to keep things moving as best they can. Remind them that this is a God machine, so it works well—the objects are always carefully handled by the machine.

When ready, start the “machine.” Take as much time as you can. Mix up the fun by telling different parts of the machine to go faster and slower. If too many youth make the same or little movement, “repair” the machine by giving them a much more dramatic movement, like a jumping jack before picking up the object, or turning around three times. Be creative with your machine. Put it in reverse. Make it quieter or louder. Keep it moving until you finally have to turn it off for the day. When everyone stops, have them sit down and look at the objects they now have in front of them. Tell them the God machine has sorted the objects so that everyone has just the right ones. Ask youth to choose one of these objects and hold it in a hand. Remind them that God is with them in every moment in their lives, from the craziness of becoming a machine to the quiet of falling asleep. Then ask a few questions.

- Where was God on the day you were born?
- What do you think God does while you are sleeping?
- What are you doing at 10:00 on Tuesday mornings? If God is with you, how does that affect what you are doing?
- What things do you see each week that remind you of God?

Then tell them about the object each is holding. *We can trust that God works through all things for good. This week, we're going to ask God to remind us that we are never alone. As we carry this object, we're going to hope that it gets in the way once in a while. We're going to hope that it seems funny to have this thing in a pocket. We're going to use this ordinary object to have an extraordinary experience. We're going to hope that as we feel this object with us everywhere we go, we remember that God is always with us. We are called to remember God each day, and we know that we might need tools like the Bible and other believers to help us. But this week, we're just going to count on God's Spirit to be present each time this object gets in our way. As the object reminds us of God, we'll remind ourselves to take time for God as many times as we need it each day.*

Help the youth plan a reward for carrying the object for a week—a special treat for making it through seven days. Pray with them for a special encounter with God this week as they practice their faith in this silly but meaningful way.

### 3 Sing It Loud

**Leader preparation:** You'll be using a song for this activity, so if you're not musical, bring a recording or someone who can lead the singing for you. To make the connection with music and discipleship, you'll be asking youth to teach this song to someone else. Plan on spending a good chunk of time with the song so that all the youth know it and that nonmusical youth can think of ways to share the song.

**Supplies:**

- song: "Tú has venido a la orilla," (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla>

Gather youth together and read or sing the song together. Give a brief overview of the meaning. The first time through, don't give any direction other than singing the song as usual. When you've sung it once, ask the youth a few questions:

- What song can you sing from memory?
- How did you learn the song you mention?
- How did you memorize all the words?
- How many songs do you think you have in your memory?

Ask youth to turn to a partner and count the number of songs they remember together. After the group has taken some time doing this, get a few numbers from the group. Then talk together about the power of music. Remind them this song is powerful because it tells part of God's story. Remind youth that most people have some songs memorized. If nothing else, most people can sing "Happy Birthday." Music does something to the mind that makes it possible to remember all sorts of things.

Find out how many youth have heard the song they sang at the beginning. Remind them of the connection made in this song with telling God's story. Then lead the group in singing the song again, but this time ask the group to make some percussion with their bodies—slapping knees, stomping feet, clapping

hands. Encourage the youth to make a lot of noise that matches the music. Ask the group how the noise that comes from God can show others how much of a difference God makes in the world.

Now get the group to sing the song another time, this time while swaying back and forth or, if they're daring, while dancing. Ask the group to imagine what people would think if they saw them dance to a song like this. When finished, talk about the meaning of the song. *What's this song about? How could this song be helpful to someone? Who do you know that would like to sing this song? We share our faith, as God has asked us to, by sharing a song like this.*

Encourage youth to consider a person they could teach this song to, and sing the song at least once more. If you have more time, sing the song line by line, louder and softer, faster and slower. Have fun sharing a musical moment.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Pass It On (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This is a simple activity of perception using the senses. God calls us to live out our faith in community. We share a story with one person who passes it on to another. It's how we know anything about Jesus in the first place. Someone witnessed Jesus in action and made sure everyone knew about it. In this activity, a physical connection between the youth reminds them that God still lives when we pass the story on.

**Supplies:** None

Gather the youth together and ask them about the Bible. Have them name a Bible story. Then have them identify the characters and what happened to them. Find out where God is in the story. Ask youth how they know the story. Repeat this until the youth understand that the Bible stories they know had to come from real people somewhere. Remind them that these stories were not originally written down, so people just had to remember them and pass them along. Remember with them that it has been thousands of years since the earliest Bible stories, but people still share them, and people still pass them on.

Lead the group in a version of "Telephone," though in this game there will be no words. Have everyone except the first person close their eyes. That person decides how many fingers to use to send a message and then passes that message on to the next person in line. When the second person receives the message, she or he can open her or his eyes to pass the message on. For example, if the first person wants to send the message "four," he or she grabs the hand of the next person and touches it with four fingers. Then that person touches the hand of the next person and so on until the message reaches the end of the line.

Try this activity once or twice to see what happens. If it works well and the group communicates the same number all the way through the line, congratulate them and ask them how they did it. Talk about potential problems with communication, and give them a new challenge, like touching the fingers on the next person's head or foot. If that doesn't go well, ask for suggestions for how to make this communication work better. Eventually, provide the clue that if they would tap each finger individually each time, the message would more likely get through. This is the equivalent of everyone speaking the same language.

Remind the youth that God’s stories have come to us through many languages. The stories have been through a long line of communication, as in this game. Reflect on what potential problems come up as the line of communication became longer and longer and involved different cultures and languages. Tell the youth that the practice of learning the Bible’s stories is a life-long activity. Encourage youth to find ways to share a story with others and to listen to other people’s stories. As they think of passing on a Bible story, remind the youth to remember this game, and the importance of carefully speaking to the next person who needs to hear.

### 5 The Phrase that Pays

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 8:27–38 and come up with a list of action words about this story. You’ll be asking the youth to do this. Write out some other words on sticky notes for the youth to use to make sentences—such as “a,” “an,” “the,” “I,” “we,” “they,” “he,” “she,” and “it”—and place them on a wall. Remember that youth recall things in a variety of different ways. The more you can provide them with a combined physical and mental experience, the better they’ll remember. In this activity, they’ll have a chance to work together to create funny, nonsensical sentences. Be prepared to write down any profound ideas or funny phrases that pop out. You might be surprised at the results.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- sticky notes

Ask youth to read Mark 8:27–38 quietly. When everyone is finished, ask them to write some action words from the story using the following questions. *What are the verbs? Write them, one per sticky note. What is happening in the story? Write two-to-four-word phrases.* Then have every youth write a name on a sticky note. When everyone is done, have youth put all the sticky notes on the wall, next to your pre-written sticky notes. Then have youth line up on the other side of the room.

For this activity, youth will take turns running to the wall and rearranging as many sticky notes as they can into a sentence. They shouldn’t worry too much about the sense of the sentence, but they should do more than just shuffle the words. Depending on the size of your group, you might have to limit the time each youth takes to “write” a sentence. Keep watch on the time so that everyone gets a turn. Be ready to add words when youth get stuck. Celebrate each sentence, mix up the sticky notes, and start again. Play till everyone has had a turn, and then gather together to talk about the activity. Ask these or similar questions:

- What were some of your favorite phrases or sentences?
- How hard was this activity?
- What made it hard, or easy?
- What would have made it easier?
- What do you think it was like for the first writers of the Bible?
- Was their job harder or easier than what you just did?
- What made it harder or easier?
- What would it be like to write a Bible story today?
- What would make it simple?

If you have more time, make more sentences. Add more words if needed. Invite the youth to tell God’s story this week, through simple, fun, and funny sentences.

## 6 Power Psalms

**Leader preparation:** On the surface, this is a simple memorization activity, but please take into account the potential difficulties in learning styles of your group. As you offer possible ways to learn a Bible story, remember that not all youth can memorize, and some youth may have specific challenges that you may not know about. For those youth who seem to opt out, this may be the case. You might offer them a chance to do this activity in a more physical or alternative way. We memorize scripture for use when we need it. It's a good practice for self-discipline, but just memorizing for the sake of doing it isn't enough. You'll want either to give youth a clear reason or to do an activity that distracts them from the actual task of memorization. Most importantly, if you have fun, they will too.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- (optional) video recorder

Have youth find Psalm 150 in their Bible and then put down their Bibles so their hands are free. Shout through the psalm one time together clapping every time the word "praise" is used. End with applause. Issue an invitation to the group. Ask them to work together in pairs or on their own for five minutes. In that time they have to do two things. One, they need to memorize all or some of this psalm. Two, they have to do something to make the psalm more interesting, such as clapping on the word praise (though that has already been done). Encourage creativity. Invite the group to say it while running, dancing, or doing a secret handshake—whatever works. Give youth time to work this out. Move through the groups and encourage them to be sillier, bigger, and noisier. Help them be creative with God's best words. Make sure everyone finds a way to express the psalm in their own way.

When everyone is done, have each person or pair share with the group. Consider using a video recorder and watching at the end to enjoy the craziness and the possible profound insights. Make sure everyone has a chance to share. If you have more time, talk about what it means to move and do things while trying to learn something. Remind youth that practicing a psalm like this is more about spending time with God than it is about getting it just right. *What message did you get from God today? God is here and worth praising.* Tell them how much you enjoy their high spirits as they get the most out of God's word. Remind them that the more fun they have with something, even the Bible, the easier it is to want to share it with someone else.

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 My To Do List (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Discipleship is sometimes thought of negatively as a list of things we have to do in order to be good followers. There's some truth to that, but the assumption that these things are boring, tedious, or downright painful doesn't have to be true. In this activity, you'll ask youth to think about faithful ways to encounter God on a daily basis and how to turn those ideas into a fun, workable plan.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- markers

Find out if any of the youth in your group use a planner or make lists. If no one does, ask if they ever have a list of chores or have seen a parent or teacher making a list of things to do. Talk about the benefits of having a list. Then give each youth a piece of paper and a marker. *Think about this whole world we live in. In fact, think about the whole universe. God is somehow in charge of all that. Today we're going to make a list of things God needs us to do. You can put anything on the list, but it has to be real. So, you can include something like "Send mosquito nets to places where they can save people from malaria," but you can't include "Hide a spaceship under my bed."* Have fun with the list. Be serious, but don't be afraid to include fun stuff.

When youth have a nice list, talk about the ways any of the activities could be done by people. If we are God's hands and feet, some or all of these things must be done by us. Make the connection with the youth that God's list is our list. Then rewrite the list with the title "My To Do List."



### ③ Perspective Tales (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Spend time with the painting "Hopi Virgin Mother" before doing this activity. Consider the picture through the eyes of your youth. How do you think differently about this picture as a leader than you might as one of the youth in your group? What does it mean to you to see Jesus' mother this way? If you had to describe this picture to someone over the phone, what things would stand out the most?

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: "Hopi Virgin Mother" by John Giuliani  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr>
- paper
- crayons or markers

Have them prepare a space where they can draw on a piece of paper. Tell them they are all going to be artists, but no one is going to worry about being good artists. Encourage them to celebrate their artistic talent no matter if they have any or not. Choose a volunteer, and show him or her the painting. Make sure no one else can see it. Ask the volunteer to carefully tell the rest of the group how to draw this painting. Have the volunteer take her or his time and describe the picture with as much detail as possible. The youth should avoid looking at what the others are drawing and concentrate on describing the picture on their own. Don't let the youth ask questions. They just have to draw what they are told. When everyone's done, have them share their pictures with the rest of the group.

When everyone has shared, have the volunteer show the actual painting. Invite youth to savor the moment in the painting. Talk about how people count on artists to create pictures that inspire. Wonder with the youth how God might be at work in this painting. There may be both serious messages and humorous asides. Either way, we see God's hand in action. Then reassure the group that spending time with this artwork is spending time with God. As disciples, the time taken with God nurtures faith and helps it mature. Take whatever remaining time there is to talk about art in general and how God speaks through all sorts of media.

### 9 Mine Map

**Leader preparation:** You might want to consider getting some really big paper for this activity. The bigger the better. Youth learn through all their senses, and our tendency is to want to fill them with information instead of drawing it out from them, sometimes making learning difficult. Give yourself permission to let youth be creative and unclear in this activity, trusting that God works in amazing ways to be in a better relationship with all of us.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- large sheets of paper
- markers

Find a space where each youth can draw a huge picture of him- or herself on a piece of paper. *If you can trace around your whole body, that would be best, but do whatever works in your space.* When everyone has a body outline, ask youth to close their eyes and listen carefully each time you read Psalm 25:1–10. Before you read, ask the youth to listen for a color. Read verse 1 and stop. *What color do you see? Add that color somewhere on your body outline.* Continue this process until you've read through the psalm.

If not every outline is filled in, consider reading the psalm again, this time with a little interpretation. Ask youth to think of both colors and shapes as they add that to their drawings. If some outlines still need filling out, read the psalm one last time. This time ask youth to think of nothing but God's light shining. They can add whatever they want to their picture now. If there is white space remaining now, it's the light of God.

Ask youth to consider the word of God as this color and light within them. Remind them that God's light shines when they share their story of faith with others or when they take time to hear someone's faith story. Help youth see that by coloring and reading, listening and enjoying, they practice our faith as disciples.

## Reflect

After all is said and done, you know the youth in your group best of all. What have you witnessed in this set of activities that has been good for them? In what ways have your youth benefited from these activities? What came together and created a meaningful time together? What fell flat? Where did you feel like things just didn't go as well? How could it be better? What changes would be most helpful? Thanks be to God for this chance to practice discipleship together.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Tradition for youth means holidays and first days of school. To go deeper means to help youth see the whole story of their lives and find ways to connect that story with the whole story of faith. It's not helpful to spend a lot of time trying to make sense of how long ago the Bible stories happened, but it helps to know the sequence and the chronology. Youth will absorb the stories as they understand the progression of God's activity through history. They'll understand that best as they enjoy reliving the Bible's stories and messages. Give them stories, geography, and fun characters, and they'll be eager participants.

### About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Isaiah 52:7-10**  
**2 Peter 1:16-21**

## Leader Preparation

In the musical “Fiddler on the Roof,” Tevye, a father of five daughters, attempts to maintain his family and Jewish religious traditions while outside influences encroach upon their lives. He has a personal relationship with God with whom he talks frequently and in whom he confides all. Enjoy a Tevye moment as you prepare for these activities. Have a quiet chat with God. Don’t be afraid to ask for exactly what you need. And when you consider the traditions of the faith, remember that many of them are done because “it’s a tradition.” Allow the Spirit to fill you with energy and excitement to examine ways to practice a traditional faith in a new way. Know that God will give you new insights and a fresh perspective as you allow the Spirit to speak through you.

*Prayer: As the Bible reminds me how the past has shaped the present, help me to carry forth the tradition of the church in my teaching. Help me know that you are with me as I lead, and help me trust that what needs to be gleaned will be inspired by you. Help the youth know that they are part of a grand tradition, which means they can grow in faith because many have carried the lessons forward until now. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Musical Birthdays (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Celebrating a birthday is a way of celebrating the gift of life given by God. Through a simple childhood game youth will be invited to share something significant about a birthday and how they celebrate it. Each will share a family tradition while the group celebrates his or her birth.

**Supplies:** None

Tell the group that they are going to play a silly children’s game. Let them know you know it’s silly and simple, but that you want them to have a second chance to play this old game just like little kids do, but with a twist. Set up the group for musical chairs. For the music, have the youth sing “Happy Birthday” until you say stop. The person who remains standing tells something about how his or her birthday has been celebrated (or how he or she would like to celebrate it). Remind the group that many families have some sort of tradition for birthdays, but not all. It’s okay if they don’t. Encourage them to think about how other special days are celebrated. Guide them to talk about traditional celebrations of holy days like Christmas and Easter. Think together about how these days started and how they have changed. Help them imagine how traditions will develop in their own lives.

Play the game until everyone has at least one chance to talk about her or his traditions. End this activity by reminding the youth that by sharing birthday stories, especially the one about Jesus, others will know something about how God is involved in their lives.

### 2 Parade

**Leader preparation:** If you don’t know the song in this activity, have a recording handy or bring in someone to lead the singing. This song leads naturally into a spiritual dance that can get better and better as you allow youth the time to drop their guards and let loose. Be prepared to sing or listen to this song long enough for all the youth to join in. Remember, as you model uninhibited praise through this activity, youth will follow.

**Supplies:**

- song: “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb>
- (optional) rhythm instruments

Invite the youth to let loose and dance. This hymn is their chance to show their stuff. Combine a parade around the room with a circle dance where youth take turns showing off their best moves in the middle of the circle while singing this hymn. Invite the Spirit to make its presence known in the middle of this jubilant praise. We call on the Spirit to join us as we sing and dance and sing God’s praises. Dancing in praise is part of many faith traditions. In the end, attempt to exhaust the group and finish with a flourish.

Let youth know that God is in their midst, sharing in the fun of singing, dancing, and praising together. *As Miriam led the dance of the Israelites to thank God, we dance to appreciate all God has given us today. If you can take this dance to a place where others can see it, don’t miss the chance to share the joy.* Remind youth that their actions in dancing and singing the praises of God are examples to others. Encourage youth

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

to let others see their excitement at knowing God’s stories and living them out. Help them know that their actions like this are a testimony to God’s ongoing involvement in the world.

### ③ Even the Junk Will Sing My Praises

**Leader preparation:** Grab a pile of paper, the recycling bin, some books, or whatever’s handy for this activity. The point of this activity is to show youth how God’s created world can always be made more beautiful when we use what is here for good. Have an open mind to the creative expression of youth in this activity. Allow the freedom in yourself and in the youth to let the Spirit soar through your group and create some beauty.

**Supplies:**

- a pile of stuff—paper, recycling, any old junk
- (optional) video clip “Trashing the Camp” <http://www.tinyurl.com/4jpeppl>

Youth might remember the “Trashing the Camp” song from the movie *Tarzan*. This activity is a bit like that. Drop a pile of stuff in the middle of the group, and ask youth to find something from the pile that can make music. *Try tearing paper or snapping it in and out quickly to make a pop. Or bang on a piece of cardboard or a soda can. Flicked fingers on paper make a surprisingly satisfying sound.*

If you know which youth have the best rhythm, have them start by snapping out a beat. Direct the music by adding in one person at a time. Tell youth that you’re going to trust the Spirit to help them make a joyful noise, and then just turn them loose. Let the music go until its natural conclusion. If you need to direct an ending, do so only because time is running out. Then thank God for the music.

Reflect on the fact that music is one of the most powerful ways to have a shared experience. Millions of people around the world know much the same words and music to many songs. Encourage youth to imagine what might happen if they shared a song with as many people as possible about the relationship they have with God. If you have extra time, remind youth that God said the rocks would sing praises. *How does it feel to have junk sing those praises too?*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Whose Tradition? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Often when we talk of the church, we talk about tradition. The two words are almost synonymous to the point where we think everything we have done historically in the church is the way everyone should do it. Think about weddings. Many couples, when asked why they want to get married in the church, say, “It’s tradition,” even though neither one of them are affiliated with the church. Help explore with the youth what they mean by “tradition” and what makes our Christian tradition unique.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the youth what comes to mind when they hear the word “tradition.” Talk about their own family traditions, what do they do for birthdays, Christmas, Easter, or other holidays. If one family has a unique tradition, talk to the group about whether it is appropriate to assume all others in the room have that same tradition. *What are some traditions we have as Christians? Is it appropriate to assume people from other faith traditions hold these traditions, or is it what makes us unique? In December many religious traditions have a major holiday, but is it okay if the tree in the town square is a “holiday tree” while the tree in our homes is referred to as a “Christmas tree”? Why or why not?* Invite the youth to really wrestle with this issue and to think about how society at large and Christianity often collide about what it means to carrying out traditions.

There are no easy answers for this activity, just an opportunity to start thinking more deeply about what is important to us and how that translates into the world around us. *When we talk about testimony, what is the goal? Who is our audience? What do we want them to hear?*

### 5 Israelquest

**Leader preparation:** Find a Holy Land map to show to the whole group. Be prepared to help them find Jerusalem, Assyria, Egypt, and any significant mountains on the map. Sometimes Bibles themselves include maps. Youth love a good seek-and-find puzzle. The words of hope in Isaiah were first spoken to a people in a particular place in the world. It’s helpful to see the world of the Bible where the events actually took place.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- Holy Land map (or Bibles with maps)
- paper
- markers

Read Isaiah 52:1–10 aloud. Note the names of places or geographical features. Give youth a minute to think of what they know about those parts of the world or about a place that has mountains. Ask youth to work together using a map to find the places mentioned in this scripture passage. As they locate each place, remind them to notice where it is in comparison to where they are right now. *What are the differences in climate, in topography, in culture?*

After finding all the places, have youth create their own map while a volunteer reads Isaiah 52:1–10 again. *What is God trying to say to the people in that place? What does that mean for us now? How does this apply to where we live? What is God’s message for us here?*

Talk about the life-long challenge of connecting the Bible’s stories to our own. It’s our privilege to spend time with those stories to make them our own. And, by making the stories personal, it becomes easier to share the stories with someone else. Remind youth that opportunities will arise when someone asks them what they believe. Tell the youth how different it will be to share God’s story if they already have some stories in mind. Invite youth to keep maps of their own stories just in case someone needs to know their stories some day.



## 6 Pick Your Own Journey

**Leader preparation:** Spend time with the artwork “The Sower.” Ask yourself some questions about what you see and feel when you really take in the painting. What is happening in this story? Who is this person? How is he feeling today? What kind of day is it? What’s the weather like? What emotions do you feel in this painting? What emotions would your grandparents feel? What about a young person? Where is this happening? You’ll be asking youth these same questions, so it will be helpful to have thought through some of the answers.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR2>
- paper and pencils or pen

Ask the group if they remember reading a book in which after reading a few pages the story gives you a choice. Turn to page 7 and the story goes one way. Turn to page 19 and it goes in a completely different direction. Tell the youth that you are going to lead them through a pick-your-own journey activity using a piece of art. Tell the group that you’ll be spending time asking questions about the art and creating a story based on what they see. Give youth who like to write the chance to write their own stories later. Ask them just to write words or phrases as you ask questions, and be ready to talk through one story together.

Show the group Van Gogh’s painting. Tell them it is called “The Sower.” Remind youth that a “sower” is a person who plants seeds. Ask them to jot down any ideas they have as they look at the painting and you ask them some questions.

- What is he planting?
- Who is he?
- How does he feel about his job?
- What was he doing before he started working today?
- Where did he sleep last night?
- Is he a worker, or is this his farm?
- How long has he been working?
- What’s the weather like?
- Did he pick these clothes just for today, or does he wear them every day?
- What sounds does he hear? What smells?
- What do the seeds feel like in his hand?
- What’s he thinking about? Is he daydreaming?
- Does he work alone, or are there other workers somewhere nearby? How long will he work today?
- Where will he go after work?
- Is he hungry? thirsty?
- Does he wish he had an iPod?
- What’s his family like?
- What does he dream about?
- What are his hopes?
- When he prays, what does he ask for?
- Where is God in this painting?
- What does God think of the sower?
- Is God the sower? Then what?
- Where are you in the painting?
- What feelings do you have looking at this painting?

- What would you tell someone about this painting?
- Who do you think of when you look at this painting?
- What will you remember?

Take a minute to go quickly back through some of these questions by going around the group and asking for their answers. Accept all reasonable responses and thank the youth for thinking through this activity. Encourage the writers to create their own stories with the information they've written. They can share it with someone or save it to look at later. It is this sharing that God has called each person to do.

Remind youth that God still speaks and that they can listen through this painting to see if there is a further message. Remind the group that God is offering the continued gift of thinking faithfully. Remind them to be open to whatever message God may plant in them this week.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Back to the Future (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The Bible prophets didn't predict the future. They just spoke strong words about what might happen if people continued to live life the same as always. One way to think of that is to remember that God speaks to us today—as we gather in this moment—and encourages us to imagine a future where a Godly life really is possible. In this activity, you'll take youth on a journey from your time together today to a time in the future when people put God completely in charge of life. It's a nice thing to imagine, and it's the ultimate hope for believers.

**Supplies:** None

Use this guided imagery with the group.

Today is God's day. Today is also your day. What happens if you put those two things together? Today, God is with you. Knowing God is with you affects the way you live this day. What if all people trusted God to lead them through every moment of every day? How would your life be different? How would your home life be different? How would this community be different? How would the world be different?

Let's take a little trip together. Get yourself buckled in and comfortable for this quick little trip. There is only one rule on this trip. You must imagine that starting right now, you—and all the others like you in the world—trust God with all your decisions, actions, and beliefs. In other words, a Godly world begins today. What will be the resulting changes? Imagine one year from now. That's not that long, really. A year from today, after everyone has continually trusted God every moment of every day, how is the world different? All right, let's try three years. How old are you now? Your own world is dramatically changed, but how does the fact that God is completely trusted and in charge make things different? Five years from now? Ten years from now? Sixty-five years from now?

Have fun thinking about this. Even if it's hard to believe it could happen, God has promised that all things are possible, and Jesus said the kingdom is at hand. It's what we believe as Christians and what we hope for.

As we imagine it, and as we encourage others to imagine it, the possibility of it becoming reality is more likely.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on ways to share God with others. Ask youth for ideas on talking about God in different places (school, home, the playground). Remind them that Jesus sent the disciples in pairs. Ask the group what it would mean to go out two-by-two to share God's stories.

### 8 God Is A-Maze-ing

**Leader preparation:** Have fun creating a maze with the youth as you talk through 2 Peter 1:16–21. Youth respond well to activities that keep their hands busy while talking at the same time. It's probably best not to multitask completely, but youth will take breaks to answer your questions while they work on their mazes and you lead them through the discussion.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- graph paper (or youth could fill a piece of paper with lines of dots)
- pencils and erasers

Read and discuss 2 Peter 1:16–21 while each youth uses dot paper to create a maze. Have them put some kind of representation of Paul writing a letter at the beginning, and then the letter with the people at the end. Remind participants to think through their path carefully. Have plenty of erasers on hand to make corrections. It's usually easier to create the correct path first, and then fill in the false paths after.

While youth are working, talk about Paul's way of explaining God's message to the first followers of Jesus. Tell them that like solving a maze, the letters took a while to get from Paul to the people. They were presented to the people, who probably didn't read or write at all. Remind youth that sometimes they might need help in solving a maze. Tell them that people continue to try to "solve" or understand Paul's letters today. *We shouldn't be surprised the letters are sometimes hard to understand. They were written in another language, by an extremely smart man from a different time and place. That's why we get help thinking about what these letters mean to us today. Then there is the bonus of being able to talk with others about the letters.*

Encourage the group to share their knowledge of Paul's letters with someone else in the same way they might talk about what they learned in school. Remind them that this is how God's word is spread from one person to another. Thank the youth in advance for doing God's work in this easy way. If there's time, have youth try out one another's mazes.



### 9 LutherTube

**Leader preparation:** Martin Luther used the most up-to-date technology to get the word out about his concerns for the church. Help youth understand how the printing press made it possible for Luther to communicate his ideas to a lot of people in a relatively short amount of time. This gave his ideas a chance to be read by lots of people without being filtered by church officials who might have thought he was a bit off. Luther didn't want to start a new church. He just wanted to make it clear that the relationship between God and the person needing God is the most important part of faith. If Luther were around today, he'd be all over sites like YouTube.

### Supplies:

- “Martin Luther,” Attachment: Activity 9
- paper and pens or pencils
- (optional) video camera

Together read the story about Martin Luther on the attachment. See if the group can guess what happened. Tell them that after the storm ended, Luther served the church the rest of his life. But what he’s remembered most for is his belief that Christians can’t earn their way into heaven. The gift of eternal life is free. Ask the group what might be different if Luther were around today. Remind them that part of Luther’s success was everything he wrote and published. If he could have tweeted, he probably would have.

Lead the group in thinking about how to spread God’s word now. Take a couple minutes to think about Luther’s story. *What would it look like on YouTube?* You’d have to include humor, and, like many YouTube videos, a cat could help make people watch. Imagine this story as a four-minute video clip. Describe it as you remember this great person of the church who gave us a new way to think about faith. If you have the chance, make this video and post it on the Web for the whole world to see. It might just go viral and change people’s lives.

## Reflect

Thanks be to God for another chance to be a part of the Christian tradition that shares the faith with the next generation. As you conclude your time with this exploration, please take time to make some notes about what worked and what didn’t. Take a few minutes to highlight changes you will make next time you use this material. If you have suggestions for improvement, add those. If you need to cut some things out, make sure you leave yourself a reminder why an activity didn’t work or how to do it differently. Say a prayer of thanks for the youth who participated in these activities. Ask God to care for the seeds that you have planted, that through these practices faith may grow.

Attachment: Activity 9

## Martin Luther

Martin Luther grew up in Germany. Like lots of youth, he struggled to come up with a plan for his future. And, like many youth, he first took a path that his parents thought best. He began to study to become a lawyer. Right from the start, it wasn't clear that this was the correct choice.

Luther wrestled with this decision. He enjoyed the study, but he had difficulty believing he was worthy of his choice of professions. He suffered from this personal struggle his whole life.

One day while traveling on foot, Luther was caught in a severe thunderstorm, the kind that rattles the walls and sounds like explosions are bursting nearby. Luther did something that he might later have said wasn't the best choice. He made a bargain with God. "Save me," Luther prayed, "and I will serve your church from now on."

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Don't miss out on the wonderful opportunities to introduce this age group to mission. Given the chance to serve, these youth will offer their time and talents (and maybe their parent's money) with a joy that can be an example to many. Politics and issues don't get between these youth and their desire to serve. A hungry child in Iraq is the same as a hungry child in Detroit—both need to be fed and clothed. Show these youth the way, and they will provide loving, compassionate examples of a life of mission.

### About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Matthew 5:13–20**  
**Romans 8:31–39**

## Leader Preparation

When you take time to look beyond yourself, God fills you with the love and compassion of the Holy Spirit as your guide to mission work. It probably doesn't take long for you to imagine people in need that you would like to help. Often you feel powerless or guilty that you can't do more, but don't despair. God is good. Instead of all of society's problems, imagine one person in need. Think of everything about that person—look, smell, voice, hands, and feet. Look at the face and see a smile. That smile is what comes from knowing you are thinking about him or her. That person is happy to know that one person can reach out to help another. And as you offer whatever assistance you can—a donation, a letter, a ride—notice your own smile. That smile is what comes from knowing that you have just received a blessing from the one you helped. He or she is living out a mission to you while you offer your gift. It's how God works. We give and receive, and we receive and give. We share God's mission, and in sharing we find hope. Feel that hope as you share mission moments with youth through these activities.

*Prayer: God, hear me as I admit my need for the gifts of others in mission to me. As I reach out to them, they reach out to me. Help me accept these others with kindness and humility. Let me let them love me as you love me. Help me be served as I serve. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Holy Map (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Sometimes youth are surprised to think of mission as anything but some person in another country teaching Bible stories to indigent people. Mission is so much more. In this activity, you'll encourage youth to think and act locally in mission. You'll invite them to think about a broader idea of mission to include their friends and neighbors, not some distant people. Have fun bringing the idea of mission home to the surrounding neighborhood.

**Supplies:**

- one large piece of plain paper
- markers

Ask youth to gather around the large piece of paper. Reach in and draw a cross on a building in the center of the paper. *This is our church, and it's a mile from the church to the edges of this piece of paper. Everybody take a marker and start drawing everything around the church in that one square mile. If you're in a remote area, adjust the distance accordingly. Fill in as much detail as possible. Consider all the places where people gather—stores, parks, houses, schools, churches. Don't forget to add in the natural elements and the roads and utilities. It doesn't matter if the picture looks real—we just need to know what is there. Write words if you can't draw something, such as a cell phone tower.*

Allow youth time to fill out this entire piece of paper. Make sure no square inch is uncovered. Let youth draw over the tops of things as new ideas come up. When finished, take a step back and appreciate all the effort. Then, take a few minutes to imagine God's call to address the needs of everyone and everything in this area. *If God is the God of all, what help does God need in this area? Consider the people, the environment, the government, and the animals.* Make a list of as many things as possible, and help the youth realize they've just identified one needy, busy, active mission field. Encourage them to think of ways they can serve in this area.

### 2 Making Copies

**Leader preparation:** Working with art sometimes takes extra effort. Youth (and adults) sometimes feel intimidated by art as if their own experience of the work isn't valid. That's just not true. The best you can do for the youth in this activity is to allow each of them to have a personal experience with this artwork, and identify it as a godly moment.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: "Blind Feeling" by Diana Ong <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo>
- one piece of paper per person
- markers

Put the artwork on the table, and have each youth take turns loosely tracing some part of the art onto her or his piece of paper. While others are tracing, invite youth to fill in the details they think are important in their artwork and then start labeling the different parts with circles, arrows, and short descriptions. They might include descriptions such as: "This color is really dark and makes me feel scared," or "The look on the face is weird," or "I like the way the background looks."

### Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

Anything is acceptable. The point is to get youth interacting and thinking in a way that’s creative and nonjudgmental. Suggest that everyone tries to keep things positive.

While youth are writing, remind them that great works of art have inspired people to think about their faith. “Blind Feeling” bears witness to God’s care and love. What the youth say about it is also a testimony. As they share their experience, others get to see God through them. It’s a great chance to share God’s story.

### 3 Mission Possible

**Leader preparation:** One thing leads to another. A few years ago, the concept of “paying it forward” inspired many to offer help to someone else after having previously been helped by someone. Instead of paying back the person who helped him or her, a person looks for someone else in need in order to repay the original favor. Most youth get this, and many have heard of it. In this activity, you’ll help youth make a chart to take home to consider the “pay it forward” cycle at least once.

#### Supplies:

- one piece of paper per learner
- markers

Have each youth draw something that represents her or him in the middle of a piece of paper. A stick figure or a circle is fine. To the left of that, have each write “SURPRISE” with an arrow pointing to the symbol.

Describe a time when someone did something nice that was a complete surprise. Encourage everyone to remember such a time. Remind them that they probably said thanks and maybe have even surprised the person with a return favor. Then suggest that they might have heard of the idea of “pay it forward,” and discuss the concept with the group.

Have each participant write PIF halfway between the symbol and the right side of the paper and circle those letters. Then have them draw an arrow from the stick figure to the PIF circle. Then ask them to draw an arrow from the PIF to one more circle. Underneath that circle they can draw the sign for infinity, a sideways figure 8. Have the group think about this for a minute. *Do they see how amazing it is? First you were surprised by someone’s kindness. Then, you paid it forward to one other person, who could pay it forward to another. And this could go on forever. Even if it’s just one step at the beginning, at least three people are affected.*

Help the youth see that the person who offered the surprise feels good because it makes the one surprised feel good. The one surprised also feels so good, and it only makes sense to pass it on and feel good about that, too. Remind the group that it all starts with one person. Allow them time to talk about this experience. Ask for ideas about where to pay it forward in their own lives. Encourage youth to take home the chart as a reminder that one “pay it forward” action can make a gigantic difference.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Who Am I Now (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In order to reach out to help others, it's helpful to think outside ourselves. Sometimes this can be hard for youth. It's even beyond their development in many ways, but we can still do seed-planting now in hopes of a harvest in their memories later. In this activity, you have a chance to play a bit of a trick on the youth to challenge their perception. Have fun with it, and focus on the mission element, not the trick.

**Supplies:**

- paper and pens or pencils

Tell youth that you have a mission-planning activity for them today. In order for missionaries to do their best work, they need to know a lot about people. Have youth write down all they can think of to describe themselves. Include race, age, class, economic status, family, friends, neighborhood, housing, education, hobbies, likes, and dislikes. The more information, the better prepared they will be for mission. As they are compiling their lists, ask them what they know about what missionaries do. When everyone has a good list, ask for some highlights, anything in particular that might be interesting from the lists.

Ask the youth to pass their information to you. Then you say to them all, "Thank you so much for this information. I know the missionaries to our community will be glad to know you better and how to journey with you to God with this information." This will be a surprise to some youth. If so, talk about the assumptions that mission is only from us to others. If not, lead the discussion in a positive way toward acknowledging that God is still speaking to all of us wherever we are. The mission field hasn't changed. Everyone still needs to hear God's good news.

### 5 Pass the Salt, Jesus

**Leader preparation:** When we use our senses in combination with our learning, the memories linger longer. Matthew 5:13–20 gives us the chance to create a strong memory for youth. Even though you'll use table salt for this activity, help youth understand that the salt Jesus spoke of served a much bigger purpose than to season food. It kept food from spoiling, which saved people's lives. This salt, which Jesus used as an example, has a power greater than making chips taste better.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- salt in a shaker
- water and a glass for each person to drink from

Have youth shake some salt into their hands. Then have them lick a finger and cover it with salt. Read aloud Matthew 5:13–20 (or ask for a volunteer to read). Salt is mentioned three times in verse 13. Pause at each reference to salt and ask youth to taste the salt. After reading the whole passage, let youth have a drink of water. What would it be like if you had to eat or drink every time you heard the words in conversation? Jesus tells the followers that they are the salt of the earth. We understand that he means they are really important and that they need to remember their importance.

Have each learner make a salty finger again. *We're going to try a little experiment. I'm going to say a phrase, and when I do you're going to taste the salt. It doesn't matter if you like the taste of salt or not, because we're just creating a memory. Okay, put the salt on your tongue. "Jesus thinks I am important." Have a drink of water. Let's do it one more time to be sure. Put your salt finger on your tongue. "Jesus thinks I am important." Now take a drink of water and close your eyes. I'm going to say something, and you say the first thing that comes to mind. Wait a minute and then say, "Salty tongue."* At least one of the learners may get the half-serious joke and say, "Jesus thinks I am important." If no one does, you might have to go through the whole experiment again. Have fun with this, and remind youth that Jesus did anything he could to help people know that God loves them.

### 6 Law and Order

**Leader preparation:** We sometimes get stuck in thinking there's only one way to do things, even in church. As members of the mission field, youth need to know that God needs creative thinkers. Those who need to know God don't need a rule maker who forces them into a box where they must only think and act a certain way. Mission work is loving work that welcomes people with a caring embrace and compassionate concern.

**Supplies:** None

Tell youth there's a new sheriff in town and the rules are changing. There can be no exceptions to these new laws. Whatever the sheriff says goes. As sheriff, deputize one of the youth. Tell the learners that the first new law is that they must be moving at all times. They can't sit or stand still. They must be constantly moving or face severe penalty. Then, let the deputy start making laws. If the deputy needs help, whisper suggestions such as hop, crawl, whistle, mumble, or flap arms. Keep this going until you find a way to fire the deputy for breaking some law and hire another participant as deputy. Make sure everyone has a chance to be the deputy, and then sit down and talk about it.

Appoint yourself judge and abolish all laws for the future. *What's it like to follow laws that are silly or don't make sense? What would it be like if the laws and punishment were really serious? What do you think someone who doesn't know anything about church thinks about church people and laws? It's not unlikely that some people think church people have a lot of rules. Jesus came to move people beyond the laws to the love of God. If you meet anyone new with love, you meet them as Jesus did. The mission of the church is to continue to offer the love of Jesus, without the laws that confuse, are outdated, or are simply wrong.* Point out to the group that the Bible has been used to justify slavery. Some verses talk about how to treat slaves but not how to free them. Encourage the youth to think of how Jesus might talk about slavery today. The church welcomes all people with love. The mission field has no restrictions.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Flag Day (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Mission for Christians is being unafraid to tell others who we are and what we believe. For most of us, there isn't much real fear beyond our own embarrassment. But for some in the world, being a public Christian is still life threatening. In celebration of our freedom from fear to worship, we can make a public acknowledgement of our beliefs.

### Supplies:

- paper and markers

Explain to youth the idea that for most people being a Christian creates no worry or fear. But for some people, letting anyone know that he or she believes in Jesus could be dangerous. In some places, even today, Christians meet in secret, using codes and signals to let only trusted people know what they believe.

Some youth might not know the legend of the fish symbol for the early Christians. *When a believer wanted to try to discover whether it was safe to talk to another person about Jesus, he or she would make the top half of the fish symbol in the sand, as if casually making a mark. If the other person was a follower, he or she would make the bottom half of a fish and then quickly erase it. Then they could talk safely about what they were learning as followers of Jesus.*

Hand out paper and markers, and have youth make their own flags proclaiming their belief in God. As they work, think out loud together about how to help others who aren't so lucky to be able to be so open with their beliefs.

## 8 God's Battle Plan for Peace

**Leader preparation:** Even though the Bible contains plenty of warrior language from and about God, Jesus clearly defined a message of peace for his followers. It's helpful to remind youth that Jesus' message of love includes love for those closest to us and our enemies. It may be even more helpful to begin to live as if we believe that peace is possible.

### Supplies:

- Bibles

Read Romans 8:31–39 together. Then organize the group into a square, with their backs facing in. Tell them they are now the four walls of God's mighty fortress. Give each wall one of the following actions.

- **Wall 1:** Act out the sentence "God's warriors love their enemies."
- **Wall 2:** Show how God's warriors pray for peace.
- **Wall 3:** Come up with an extremely short skit ending with the sentence "God's warriors forgive."
- **Wall 4:** Pretend to be a statue entitled "God's warriors love as Jesus loved."

Give the "walls" time to think about what they will do, and then work your way around the fortress. Have each wall show its stuff. When finished, sit and talk about the different message that Jesus gives about war and peace. Ask them what difference it might make to think of God's warriors this way. Ask the youth what they think about phrases like "Turn the other cheek," "Love your enemies," and "Blessed are those who are persecuted." Find out if these make sense to the group, and let them struggle a bit with these difficult concepts.

Take time to remember Jesus' call for peace among all nations. Remind the group that the Bible says all things are possible with God, even peace. Tell the group that for centuries nations have tried to use war to bring people together but it hasn't always worked. Encourage these youth to be the first generation that substitutes peace for war.

### 9 A Mission Trip to My House

**Leader preparation:** Remind youth that mission work begins in their own hearts and in their own homes. As they develop the love of Jesus in their own lives, they will be able to share that love with others.

**Supplies:**

- one sheet of paper per youth
- markers

Make a tri-fold brochure by folding the paper into thirds, with each end coming toward the middle. Explain to youth that they have a chance to create a travel brochure that invites people to meet Jesus for the first time. Have them include means of transportation, meals, travel companions, sites, accommodations, and maps. Give them plenty of time to be as creative as they want to. This doesn't need to be a trip to the Holy Land. It could just as well be to Minneapolis or Kansas. Invite them to have fun and make the brochure as fun as possible. They might want to mention one of the Gospels as a source for more information. When they have finished, encourage them to think of a time when they might actually be able to give this brochure to someone and include their own phone number for further questions.

### Reflect

So how'd it go? Maybe you were able to give youth a chance to explore mission as it relates to giving witness and testimony. What activities worked to challenge youth to go beyond themselves? How well do you think they got the message? What do you wish there had been more of in these activities? What will you do differently next time? Make notes and know that God has been present in all your work, and these youth know more now than when they started. Offer thanks to God for the Spirit's intervention in your work with these important youth.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

The future is all smiles and opportunities and bright lights for this age group. There is little concern for anything but a positive expectation of the world to come, and there's nothing to be gained by changing that perception. Making a connection between future plans and faith practices involves showing these youth that God has a plan for the world that involves the use of their unique gifts and talents. This Exploration provides a great opportunity to link God with all that is to come for these youth and for their families.

### About this Exploration

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

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**  
**Philemon 1:1-25**

## Leader Preparation

Take a look back into your memory to give yourself a comforting sense of your future. When Jesus knew his days were numbered, he prepared his followers by praying for them and by asking God to send the Spirit to be with them until he returned. That same Spirit Jesus promised to the disciples remains with us today. As you explore the future and it's relation to giving testimony and witness with these youth, know that the Spirit surrounds you with encouragement, motivation, and inspiration.

*Prayer: Holy Spirit, make your presence known within me. When I am discouraged, urge me forward. When I falter, give me a gentle push to keep my balance. And when I am confused, fill me with the wisdom of the ages, that I might share my faith, and in so doing, share God. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90-120 minutes.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 God's Marketing Plan (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Of course, God is not a product to be broken down into market share and price per viewer. Just for fun, though, we can give youth a chance to consider what it would mean to get the biggest advertising contract of their lives. For the church to survive, it may become necessary to give in to some trends and do a better job of telling the story of church members and lives changed. Here's a first chance.

**Supplies:**

- (optional) video camera

Explain that the youth are now account executives at the world's most important advertising agency, and they've just landed the biggest contract the company has ever had—God. Tell them it's up to them to make God the most memorable thing in advertising history. Remind them that, like the sponsors of the best Super Bowl ads, God has high hopes. Tell the participants that the ads for God must include some that are funny, some that make people cry, and some that make people wish they'd thought of that. Remind the youth that advertisers often have only a minute or so, but the best in the business always come up with good ideas. Explain that the youth want to create an ad for God in video format on the Internet. Have youth come up with the script for the first ad to be shown when God arrives minutes from now.

As youth work through this, ask them to explain why they think advertising for God is important. *What message would God give in 30 seconds? What does it mean to make God more memorable than something like raising Jesus from the dead?* When all youth have finished a script, encourage anyone who has the desire to make a video and post it on YouTube for friends and family to see. Remind them that God still speaks through all means possible; their work on this video may reach someone in need of God's story.

### 2 Seeing the Future in Creation

**Leader preparation:** Most youth have done a project at school involving planting grass seed in a little cup and watering it carefully to watch it grow. Sometimes there's a face on the cup and the grass is the "hair." This same activity can help youth make a connection with present actions and future hopes.

**Supplies:**

- grass seed
- small cups filled with potting soil (one per participant)
- water

Ask youth to plant grass seed in a small cup of potting soil and add a little water. Then have the youth take the cup home with them, with the guideline to give the soil just a little water and a lot of sun every day. It shouldn't take too long for grass to grow.

As the youth are assembling these cups and planting their grass seed, talk about the amazing look into the future a plant provides. Most of us know what grass looks like, even if we've rarely seen grass seeds. We can feel quite confident that

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

this grass seed will become something familiar, proving that sometimes the future can be predicted. Connect this thinking with God, who constantly plants seeds of love and care within all of our hearts. God continues to create hopes for the future in us, and God provides nourishment with the Spirit.

*God has amazing hope in us. Knowing that, and knowing what we know about how grass seed grows, can we take the risk to have hope in ourselves? And if we have hope for ourselves, because of God, can we also take the risk to share that hope with others? It's the calling of God.* Invite youth to think about this each time they water the grass, knowing that God is calmly waiting for them to share their story with another person who needs to hear it.

### ③ What Time Is It?

**Leader preparation:** One way to imagine God's plans for the future is to go there and look back. This activity involves an imaginary journey that forces reflection on what we think is important now based on what we project people will think of years from now. It's partly a look at the many changes expected, as well as an honest evaluation of the world around us. Through this activity about the future, help youth take this careful look at the present.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Take a minute to tell youth what a time capsule is (some may already know). Ask youth to imagine the world "many" years from now. Keep it vague so that it's not so overwhelming to consider. *When people open the time capsule from this year, what do they need to see to understand what our world is like? Since we are people of faith, what do we want to tell them about what we believe?*

Give youth plenty of time to think about art, science, the environment, church, education, hobbies, entertainment, and more. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Fill up this imaginary time capsule, and then consider how knowing what we think is important informs how we will continue to spend our time in the future. *How do we think God feels about our choices? If we can imagine God choosing things for the time capsule, how would those choices be different?* Encourage youth to keep thinking about this as a faithful way to let others know what is important to people of faith. Such thinking spreads God's hopeful message and makes the future brighter.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Searching for Your Future (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** We don't have to go far to find places in our world where we could see need for improvement. From picking up garbage on the side of the road to feeding people who are hungry, housing people who are homeless, or educating those who are disadvantaged, there is plenty of work to be done to make the future brighter for others. Think about the places in your life where there could be improvement. Consider who you are today and who you would like to be tomorrow, next year, in 10 years. What do you need to do to get there?

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Spend time talking with the youth about things they would like to see changed in their environment to have a healthier future. Youth might suggest anything from improved eating habits or getting better grades to solving world hunger. Let their minds wander. *Think about your place of worship. What could be done to make it a healthier place in the future? Are there old programs that need to be rejuvenated or new programs to be introduced? Is the building in disrepair? When was the last time new members joined the church? Is the worship space inviting for younger, newer members?*

Make a list on the newsprint or a whiteboard, and then have a conversation about one thing this group could do to make a positive change for the future. After youth settle on that one thing, encourage them to identify practical ways to make that change happen. If possible, find ways to include the rest of the faith community in this project so that this witness goes beyond your group.

### 5 Running the Religious Race

**Leader preparation:** Sometimes you just want to get the youth up and have them move. This activity provides some relief for those youth who have trouble sitting still. In this activity, you'll be able to keep youth moving as long as you want while making a connection to 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18.

**Supplies:**

- a cup of water for each participant
- a robe or towel or something to signify the judge
- Bible

Put the cups of water at one side of the room, with a starting line as far away as possible. In between the water and the starting line, have the group create a race course. Choose a person to be the judge—give him or her a “costume”—and place the judge as far away as possible. Tell youth that you want them to run a good race. If they do everything right, the judge will determine their “guilt” or “innocence.”

Divide the youth into two teams, and then ask the judge to make up some rules. Rules can include what the racers have to do between the start and the water. Hop? Skip? Roll? The judge could also make a rule about how they have to drink the water. Backward? Lying down? Finally, ask the judge to explain how to ask for mercy. On their knees? Jumping? When all the rules are clear, say “go.” You can play this as long as you have time. Read and reread 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18 in between so the youth realize the silly connections with scripture. Encourage youth to remember that God wants them to have fun and share that fun with others as they look to a future where more people run the race of faith with them.

### 6 Second Childhood

**Leader preparation:** In this activity, a supply of quilts, blankets, large towels, or anything big (even paper) will help you turn your meeting place into the coolest fort ever.

**Supplies:**

- blankets, quilts, large towels, and large sheets of paper
- tables, chairs
- flashlight
- Bible

*Sometimes to go forward we have to remember where we've been. In this activity we will make the coolest fort ever and then read a passage from scripture together. Allow time for youth to build a fort with whatever materials you've gathered. Then together read Philemon 1:1–25. This will make a good memory for the youth of reading a whole book of the Bible while reliving a childhood activity. As God challenged the family in Philemon, God challenges us to think in new ways about what God's world will be like as all people are accepted.*

Take time to ask the group what they think about this story of a slave and how it makes sense in today's world. Ask the group to consider Paul's message to follow the rules but also to welcome everyone. Help the youth envision what changes the world might experience when what matters is community and relationship, not power and individual identity.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Once a Slave, Always a Slave (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Be careful with this activity. Youth can sometimes have hurt feelings. But by doing this activity and discovering those moments, important lessons might be learned.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Put two youth in charge of the rest of the group. If you know your learners well enough, you can choose two youth who normally don't really take charge. Allow the two a chance to give some orders. Call these two the "bosses" and the rest of the youth the "workers." Inform the group that the bosses will tell them what to do, and that they must do it willingly. Let this go on for a few minutes. Then have people sit down. Talk about what it's like to have to take orders and what it's like to give them.

Have the youth read Philemon 1:1–25. Point out that in the book of Philemon, slavery is considered normal, yet the writer wants to challenge that way of thinking. Talk about what it means to create a similar situation today. Use the example of bullying—when someone is bullied, it's close to the experience described in Philemon. Remind them also that when youth get together as a group and don't allow other youth in, the situation is pretty similar. Mention that slavery technically ended in the United States nearly 150 years before the country elected the first African-American president. Remind them that other incidents of oppression and slavery continue to this day. Tell youth that changes in attitude take time, and it give us hope to look back and see the progress that has been made. Ask youth to pray with you that by the time they're looking back on their whole life racial discrimination will be a distant memory. Help them realize they are part of the reason that could come true, as they share with others that they've seen hope for the future from God.



### 8 See It All: A Little Bit at a Time

**Leader preparation:** Always look for new ways to explore artwork with youth. They may not have a lot of experience, which means they also may not have a lot of prejudice. Give them plenty of room to think all sort of things about the artwork. Accept a wide variety of perceptions and ideas, which are as real as any the artist intended.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert Mcgregor  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm>
- small piece of paper
- paper punch

Have youth punch a hole in a small piece of paper and use it to look at the piece of artwork from a variety of different angles. Most importantly, encourage them to focus on what the punched hole shows them. Invite them to spend time at each place their senses tell them to stop. *What stands out in that particular section of the painting? What is really interesting? What does it tell you about what the painter was thinking? How does it help you think about what’s happening in the painting?*

Have youth move around the room—closer and farther from the painting—and make the most of looking at all parts of the painting. Then ask them to consider how with this painting, made a long time ago, the artist affected the future (the “now” for the youth). *What will you do in your life that does the same thing? God wants us to think of our actions and how they might affect the future. What stories of ours will inspire youth like you someday? We all have the chance to make a difference, and this painting shows us one way it can really happen.*

## 9 1st Perfect Church

**Leader preparation:** It’s fun to get youth’s perspective on what the perfect church experience would be like. Guide the youth through a thinking process that reminds them that part of the function of a church is to provide a safe place for people to share their faith. As future church leaders, help youth think about a church where all are welcome.

### Supplies:

- sticky notes, a small pile for each person

Tell the youth what it means to you to share your faith in church, and then give the group time to write down every idea they have for a perfect church experience. Have them put each idea on a separate sticky note. Encourage them to include whatever they think will make church worthwhile. Help them be creative enough to think of those who are in church now, those who are visiting, and those who will stop in by accident. *How does the church serve so many different people’s needs?*

## Reflect

When you imagine the future of the church, how have these activities helped your group prepare? What activities here inspired youth to consider their own vision and find their own hope as believers? Where will the church still struggle unless the questions asked here are answered? What were those unanswered questions? Thank God for taking what you’ve done with this group and working it to ultimate good someday.

When youth have written down lots of ideas (one per sticky note), have them read these to the group and put them all up on the wall where everyone can see. Encourage the group to be accepting of all ideas and, in the end, to choose one or two to think about further. Encourage the youth to keep thinking about these ideas and, where they can, to share them with church leaders.

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