

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Most children in this age group will be able to read, although there will be a few who struggle. In order to work best with this age, remember that for the most part life is good. They love to play and learn new things. They love to sing, move, and create. Allow yourself to be flexible and to let them guide you in discovering beauty all around.

About this Exploration

Experiencing beauty connects us with God in ways beyond our understanding. It grounds us and startles us awake with the reality of the Divine all around and within us. Beauty is not perfection or flawlessness but reality and vulnerability, brokenness and transformation. When we open ourselves to the Holy, we discover beauty everywhere, from the endless reaches of the universe to the intricacy of the atom. We find awe and wonder in all of life—the “Ah!” that takes our breath away and moves us toward connection with the whole of creation—and we grow in our understanding of the ways in which God loves and treasures us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Genesis 28:10–19a
Matthew 6:24–34

Leader Preparation

Keep in mind that this practice of faith comes under the larger heading of Worship. What does that mean for you? What do you think when you put this practice of faith in the context of worship? This group might be too young for this concept, but if you keep it in mind as you work with them, you will be better equipped to lead them into a place where they can appreciate beauty and worship together.

Prayer: *Gracious God, as I prepare to lead these children, help me to see the beauty in each and every one of them, and lead me to show them the beauty in themselves. Amen.*

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

① What Is Beauty? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In order to experience beauty, we first must have some idea of how we define beauty. With older children this can be interesting. Their eyes see things adults often overlook. In this activity the learners will help you experience beauty as they see it.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the group what they think of when they hear the word “beauty.” If they seem to be a little “stuck,” give them some ideas. Are toads, butterflies, mud, snow, and pine trees beautiful? Try to come up with a variety of things that they may or may not find beautiful. How do we determine what has beauty and what does not?

Remind them that in the first chapter of Genesis we are told that God created the world in six days and at the end of each day God said that it was good. Ask the group if they think that when God said it was good, then maybe God meant it was beautiful.

Invite the children to draw images of things in which they find beauty: sunset, city lights, butterfly, stars, a grandma’s smile, a best friend, and so on.

② Collage of Beauty

Leader preparation: Gather magazines. It saves time if you tear out a variety of pages ahead of time. That way the children are not distracted by the pages you don’t need.

Supplies:

- large piece of artwork board, several pieces of artwork board taped together, or a long strip of butcher paper
- magazines
- scissors
- glue or tape
- fabric

Talk with your group about what it means to experience beauty. Start the discussion by stating that we may not all experience beauty in the same way. Do some of your learners love animals while others find animals a nuisance? Do some of your learners love to swim while others prefer not to get their feet wet? Some children love snakes, lizards, and toads, others . . . well, not so much.

Pass out the magazines, and have the group create a collage of beauty. They can cut out whatever they want to display how they experience beauty in the world. If you have a variety of cloth available, you may also invite them to use that for their collage. Again, certain colors and textures will appeal to some and repel others.

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

3 Sights and Sounds of Beauty

Leader preparation: You may be familiar with the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” with words by Folliot S. Pierpoint to the tune Dix. Check it out in your congregation’s hymnal. Listen to John Rutter’s version of the hymn. Think about how this music moves you. Are the pictures helpful, or do they get in the way of your thoughts? Be prepared to share your ideas and invite the children’s responses to the video. This particular version was chosen because it is sung by children. You may wish to invite someone who is musically inclined to help you with this activity.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet and ability to project
- hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth” words by Folliot S. Pierpoint (tune by John Rutter), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHIfrLNYUGw>
- musical instrument (preferably a keyboard)

Invite your group to settle in and watch and listen to the video. Ask them to pay close attention to the words and pictures. After playing the video, ask them what they saw and how it made them feel. Some may have difficulty feeling anything. Talk to them about how music makes us feel certain ways. Play some minor chords or scales and ask them what that feels like or what they think of (they may say, Harry Potter, scary, monsters; let them share what comes to their minds). Play a major chord or scale and ask if that is different. As they get more comfortable with talking about how music makes them feel, play the video again, and see if they come up with other ideas.

Introduce the idea that beauty isn’t just something we see, but it is something we experience; we can “feel” it. Open the discussion to other ways they may feel or experience beauty, and invite them to keep this in mind as they go about their daily activities.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Angels among Us (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 28:10–19a. Try to put yourself in Jacob’s shoes. What would a dream like this mean to you? How would you envision the angels ascending and descending? How would you have responded to a dream like this?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) Bible costumes, if readily available
- (optional) props for drama: a stone (this can be a book or coat wadded up), ladder (this can be a simple sturdy chair)

Read Genesis 28:10–19a. Read the story a second time after asking the group to listen carefully to all the images in the passage. Then invite the group to act out the passage. If you have a large group, divide into several small groups and have them reenact for one another. You will need people to play the roles of Jacob, angels, and God.

Allow the group to use some poetic license, and encourage them to let their imaginations run wild. What would the angels look like? How many would there be? If you have a lot of angels, they can be climbing up and down imaginary ladders.

Invite the learners to think of their own dreams. After the group has had an opportunity to express themselves, talk about the pillar and pouring oil on it. Explain that the pouring of oil on people or things is called anointing, and it is a way of signifying that the person or object is blessed. Ask the group if they were to have an experience like Jacob's, what would they want to do "anoint" or "bless" the site where it happened? Finish by asking the children to name special places where they have experienced beauty. In what special places have they sensed God's presence with them?



5 Creating Beauty

Leader preparation: Georgia O'Keeffe is a well-known artist made famous by her simple, yet dramatic art work. Spend time at <http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/> to learn more about her. There is a brief video that explains her artwork and gives more detail of her method.

Supplies:

- link to <http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/>
- artwork: "Red Canna" by Georgia O'Keeffe <http://www.art.com/products/p10032683-sa-i674918/georgia-okeeffe-red-canna.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&ui=4FA2E7AB9F664A828CD2028E434AEDC4>
- paper
- art supplies (paints, markers, pencils, and so forth)
- computer

If possible, find a picture of a canna lily on the Internet for your group to ponder. Review the art style of Georgia O'Keeffe. Explain how she would make a pencil or charcoal drawing first, and then work on the colored picture. Together study the picture of the canna lily and Georgia O'Keeffe's "Red Canna."

Invite individuals to choose any object in the room, study that object, make a rough drawing with a pencil, and then create their own paintings of the object. The important thing here is the process, not the outcome. Invite your group to experience the beauty of their objects. For example, if it is wooden, is there a particular pattern in the wood? Does it have some interesting lines or shapes in it? The end product does not need to reflect the original object, but rather their interpretation of the object. For example, they may pick a chair and focus on one part of the leg that interests them, and that is what they draw.

6 Consider the Lilies

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 6:24–34. Make a list of all the things you worry about in your life. If possible, divide the list into things over which you have control and those over which you have no control. Offer all your concerns to God in prayer.

Cut out aluminum foil, keeping it smooth, and place it in the middle of the artwork board. Title the artwork board "God Takes Care of Me."

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork board prepared as noted in leader preparation
- pictures of lilies, birds, food, drink, children, clothes
- markers
- glue
- aluminum foil
- (optional) mirror

Distribute pictures to the children. Ask them to lift up their picture when they hear that item mentioned in the scripture. Read Matthew 6:24–34 to your group.

Help the children place the images on the artwork board. Encourage them to talk about what they find beautiful about the images. Point out the foil or mirror. Invite each person to come to the mirror or aluminum foil and look at it to see his or her own image. As each person is in front of the mirror, the group says, “God takes care of [name of child].”

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Beauty All Around (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look at the list of quotes about beauty on Attachment: Activity 7 and decide which ones will work best for your group. (Additional quotes can be found at <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/beauty.html>.) Write the quotes on pieces of paper and distribute them around your gathering space.

Supplies:

- “Beauty Quotes,” Attachment: Activity 7
- (optional) <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/beauty.html>
- paper
- markers
- masking tape

Point out the quotes to the learners. If some have difficulty reading, read these quotes to the group. Discuss the meanings. You may have to define a few of the words, but some of these will be easy for this group to define. Explain that these sayings come from some of the smartest people in history. Albert Einstein was a scientist (among other things) and still he was able to take in the simple things in life. Talk about people they know who are “important.” Do they think those important people worry about beautiful things? Who are the people in their everyday lives that they think of as smart (perhaps a teacher or someone at school)? Choose one quotation and see if the group can rewrite it in their own words.

8 A Beautiful Life

Leader preparation: For this activity you will need a clapping pattern. Practice it ahead of time. Also think of items you would want to take on a beautiful trip.

Supplies: None

Practice a clapping pattern with the group. For example, slap your knees twice, then clap your hands twice, snap with your left hand, and then snap with your right hand. You or the children can make up other rhythm patterns. Be creative. Use your feet, stand up, sit down, stoop down, clap hands with another person, use both the front and back of your hands.

Ask the children to think of some beautiful aspects of a beautiful life. They might be objects, people, or places that are special. As the group claps in rhythm, people will take turns saying, “For a beautiful life, I would like [name answer].”

9 Beauty Close Up

Leader preparation: Review some close-up images of objects. See the website listed below. Which images strike you as particularly lovely or interesting? Which ones make you want to learn more?

Supplies:

- website that shows close-up images of objects, such as <http://www.whatsfordinner.net/Mystery.html>
- computer with Internet access with projection capability

Display the website, which shows mystery photos—close-up snapshots of items. Choose a picture, and see if the children can figure out what it is showing. Reveal the answers after they have guessed. Repeat this process, allowing them to choose images to look at.

Ask: Which of these images are beautiful to you? Why? Is something beautiful because it has amazing properties, represents a certain value or tradition, or is pleasing? Is something beautiful because it makes us want to learn more?

Pray: God, this world is incredible. We could never learn all about it! May we feel your joy as we explore your good world. Amen.

Reflect

How did you experience beauty with your group today? What were some “ah-ha” moments? Think about how you experienced beauty in your everyday life before these activities, and think about how you will go forward from now on. Do you see yourself being more in tune with God’s hand in creation and in the everydayness of your life? Create your own beauty journal and keep a list of the times each day you experience the beauty of God’s presence in your life, until you just can’t keep up with naming them.

Attachment: Activity 7

Beauty Quotes

Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.

—Albert Einstein

When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator.

—Mohandas Gandhi

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.

—Confucius

I would define, in brief, the poetry of words as the rhythmical creation of Beauty.

—Edgar Allan Poe

Love of beauty is taste. The creation of beauty is art.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.

—Khalil Gibran

Of life's two chief prizes, beauty and truth, I found the first in a loving heart and the second in a laborer's hand.

—Khalil Gibran

It is not sufficient to see and to know the beauty of a work. We must feel and be affected by it.

—Voltaire

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

This age group is starting to gain an appreciation for some of the basic stories of the Bible. They have a sense of what is right and what is wrong and a pretty simplistic understanding of how the world works. As they explore scripture in search of the beauty contained therein, they will need some nudging to stretch their thinking. Given a little encouragement mixed with excitement, they may amaze you, and bring joy to the whole experience.

About this Exploration

Scripture is infused with beauty, evident in the Bible's rich images, stories, and ideas; its call to justice and right relationship with all creation; and its poetic, grace-filled language. As we interact with scripture, we discover new ways to sense the wonder, beauty, and goodness of God. We experience God's Spirit, and we are moved to worship.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Micah 6:1-8
Amos 5:18-24

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration it is especially important to remember that we are not doing Bible study. Rather, we are employing scripture to lead us to the faith practice of encountering beauty. Allow the Bible characters and their setting to come alive. Perhaps you will start an activity with one idea of where it might lead and find yourself in a different place in the end. That is the gift of allowing the scripture to speak to you and lead you as you lead others.

Prayer: Creating and loving God, lead me as I explore your life-giving presence. Show me the beauty deep within each child. Help them to see the beauty within themselves and in scripture. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

 1 Today Is a Day of Rejoicing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Nehemiah 8:1–12 sets the stage for the rest of the chapter of this story. Ezra, the priest, brings the law to the people, and they respond with rejoicing and weeping. There are several clues that let us know the people wanted to hear the law and were eager, but weeping may have been a response to understanding they have not been faithful. The focus here is on the reception the people had to the law and their rejoicing.

Most children understand that some boundaries are needed or there would be chaos (even though they may not use that exact language), and so they look for some structure. A seasoned youth pastor once said, “If you have enough structure, you don’t have to be strict.”

Supplies:

- Bibles

Familiarize the group with the story in Nehemiah 8:1–12. Start the conversation by asking what it would be like to live without any rules. Invite the group to form a kids’ club. They are in charge of setting it up. Give as few rules as possible. (In some groups, you may have to assign someone to be in charge of organizing the club. In most groups, someone will take charge.)

Talk about this experience. How did they decide together how to proceed? Why did they need to agree to rules? How does this experience compare to scripture and the reaction of the people to hearing God’s laws? Refer to the text and explain that the people were so glad to have order and structure, they rejoiced.

2 And It Was Good

Leader preparation: There are two different accounts of the story of creation in Genesis. This activity focuses on the first story. As you review the text for yourself, even though it might be familiar to you, look for some detail that may strike you as new this time. For instance, notice that it says, “there was evening and there was morning.” We most often say, “morning and then evening.” What else stands out for you this time? Bring that eye-opening approach to this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- art supplies (markers, paints, stickers, magazines, fabric, sequence, yarn)
- large piece of butcher paper divided into seven sections

The first story of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 reminds us that everything God created was good. Read the text one time as a group. Then have the group break off into pairs or threes and have each small group choose one day of creation on which to focus.

Have them read the verses for that day and create something on the butcher paper that reflects that day of creation. Invite them to be as creative as they can, using not only markers, but any other supplies you have handy. As the group works, talk about how God saw all of creation as good. Finish this activity by asking individuals to name one thing about creation that they find most beautiful.

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

③ For Everything There Is a Season

Leader preparation: Ponder the paired words listed in the body of the activity. What “times” are your children in right now? Are any of them mourning? seeking? laughing? If you wish, list these paired words on newsprint.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) markers and newsprint with paired words listed
- (optional) computer with Internet access, speakers, and projection capability
- (optional) song: “Turn, Turn, Turn” performed by the Byrds <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHvf20Y6eoM>

Read together Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Point out that this text offers pairs of contradictions related to the natural experiences of life. List the pairs noted below.

- born/die
- plant/pluck up what is planted
- kill/heal
- break down/build up
- weep/laugh
- mourn/dance
- throw away stones/gather stones together
- embrace/refrain from embracing
- seek/lose
- keep/throw away
- tear/sew
- keep silence/speak
- love/hate
- war/peace

If you have Internet access and can project the YouTube video to your group, share that as a way of hearing the scripture. Make sure they understand that the song (written originally by Pete Seeger) was created by using words from the Bible.

Talk with the children about how we can memorize a part of scripture and be able to recite it, but we also want to be able to live out the scripture as we practice our faith. Invite them to think back to the video. How are the people in the video living out their faith?

Pick a few other of the dichotomies in the preceding list that you are comfortable sharing with your group, and talk about what it means to practice experiencing beauty while weeping and laughing, or seeking and losing, or planting and plucking up. Encourage the children to think about what it means to try to practice experiencing beauty in the week to come.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 Are You In Over Your Head? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: African American spirituals were written to give hope during very difficult and oppressive situations. Their music is often lively, and the words remind us that during great adversity God is present helping us through. Some of the traditional African American spirituals also become freedom songs during the civil rights movement.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song: “Over My Head” African American traditional, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2DLSXYp6Q&feature=related>
- markers and newsprint or white board
- (optional) rhythm instruments

Listen to the song “Over My Head.” Talk about how African American spirituals helped people to have hope when they were slaves. Ask the children if they can think of times when life wasn’t very pleasant and they wondered if it would ever get better.

There are many stories in the Bible of times when people felt alone and unsure of the future. Abraham and Sarah moved to a new home away from their families and waited a LONG time for children; Jonah ended up in the belly of a big fish trying to get away from God’s call; Job tried to be very faithful and yet met with a lot of hardship. These are just a few examples of people in the faith who struggled to understand the love and presence of God.

Read the words to the hymn. Invite the children to create their own lyrics. “Over My head I see [_____] in the air” Fill in the blank with words that the children associate with beauty or encouragement. They could change the first part of the refrain: When I am afraid, or when I am alone, or when I am with friends, and so forth.

When you have a few verses figured out, play the music again and encourage the children to sing their own lyrics and use actions to the song. This is a good time to shake out the sillies and get everyone moving. If you have simple rhythm instruments available, they can be used here, but they are not necessary.

Remind the children that even in very difficult times, when we remind ourselves to allow God to help us through the situation, we can find joy and beauty.

 5 Beauty in Chaos

Leader preparation: The story of the Transfiguration can be confusing to this age group (and to adults as well). The disciples must have been shocked by this event. Peter wanted to preserve the moment. However, the disciples were able to appreciate this moment and move on to witness even greater beauty. Study the print “Navaro Rapids.” Look for the places where you see beauty and yet how chaotic the water can seem.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Navaro Rapids” by Ando Hiroshige, <http://www.art.com/products/p10023130-sa-i802528/ando-hiroshige-navaro-rapids-c1855.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=ab4fda6b36f84ed3b285828650303e96&searchstring=navaro+rapids>
- Bibles

Read together Luke 9:28–36. Ask the children how they think the disciples might have been feeling after they witnessed this spectacular event. Display the artwork “Navaro Rapids.” Ask: *What do you see in the picture? How does the water make you feel? Would you want to be in the midst of that water? Does it frighten you, or excite you?*

Talk about how the view of a rapids changes from moment to moment. Compare this example to their lives. Have they ever noticed that no two soccer games are ever the same? Have they ever played a musical instrument exactly the same way twice? Have they played a video game and never accomplished a level exactly the same way two times in a row?

Life is fluid, always changing. If we, like Peter, try to capture one beautiful moment, we risk losing the opportunity to experience other moments of beauty. Encourage the group to move through the coming week with an appreciation for each moment and an awareness that Jesus is with us all the time.



6 Magi, Magi, Everywhere

Leader preparation: The story of the Magi will likely be familiar to this age group. They may have understood, from various images, that there were three Magi. We do not know this to be true, even though three gifts are mentioned. This painting provides the spark for a closer look at a familiar Bible story.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Journey of the Magi” by James Tissot, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/124487127?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Read Matthew 2:1–12. Talk about what details the children heard in the story. What did they hear in this story that was new to them? You may need to explain that “magi” is another term for the wise men. Display the artwork “Journey of the Magi.” Say that this is one artist’s vision of the journey of the Magi. Ask the children to share their impressions of the painting. What is surprising? What do they particularly like? Where in the painting do their eyes want to travel?

Talk about the Magi’s experiences. What do the children think the trip home might have been like for the Magi? *Was it frightening because they were disobeying Herod’s orders? Was it somewhat filled with awe and beauty because of their experience of seeing the child Jesus? What would it have been like to do what they thought was right despite the risk of angering the king?*

Pose as an interviewer, asking members of the group (who can pretend to be part of this caravan) about their experience of visiting baby Jesus.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 The Festival of Booths (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Festival of Booths is celebrated in Jewish culture as the celebration of the harvest. At one time, people would build small booths, or Sukkat, to stay in during the celebration to remember their time as exiles when they were homeless. In most communities today this event resembles a Thanksgiving celebration.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- markers, crayons, pencils

Read Nehemiah 8. Review Nehemiah 8:13–18. Provide background about the Festival of the Booths or Sukkot. There are very specific rules for building a Sukkat. It must be outside and temporary, and it must have at least three walls. The roof must be made of vegetation, anything from fruit to vines to bamboo. The inside of the Sukkat may be decorated simply with pieces of paper with a Jewish prayer written on it. A recent tradition added to this ancient celebration is to hang children's artwork inside the booth as a way of rejoicing in the children's accomplishments.

Invite the children to write prayers on individual pieces of paper. On another piece of paper have them draw a picture of something they consider to be beautiful.

Divide the group into two groups. Have each group stand in a line facing the other group. People will place their hands palm to palm to form a tunnel. Individuals will take turns walking through the tunnel (your booth) as a symbol of remembering God's goodness. Each person may pause inside for a few moments of silent prayer.

8 Scripture Art

Leader preparation: The website "Kids Talk About God" displays a number of scripture verses that have been illustrated by children of various ages. Browse the site to determine some of the galleries you think will be interesting to your group.

Supplies:

- website: "Kids Talk About God," <http://www.kidstalkaboutgod.net/tspankingabid/210/Ideas/ChildrensWallArt/tabid/598/Default.aspx>
- Bibles
- computer with Internet access, preferably with projection capability
- (optional) blank paper
- (optional) colored pencils, pencils, markers, crayons

Link to one of the art galleries on the "Kids Talk About God" website. You can choose either an Old or New Testament gallery. Point out that these verses have been illustrated by children of various ages.

Browse through some of the images. Ask the children to choose one verse they like and write down the scripture reference. Then they will look up that verse in

the Bible and try to memorize it. Partners can help each other practice.

If you wish, distribute paper and writing utensils so children can make their own illustrated versions of the scriptures they chose.

9 Thy Word

Leader preparation: The video for this activity shows images of older children and youth accompanied by the song “Thy Word.” As you preview it, think of the faces of the members of your group.

Supplies:

- song: “Thy Word” by Michael W. Smith, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9VKSBBForjY&feature=related>
- Bibles
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

The Book of Psalms contains songs that would have been sung in Bible times. Invite the children to watch the video that shows “Thy Word,” a contemporary setting of Psalm 119:105. Have the children find that verse in their Bibles. Ask them to take note of which images they particularly like. What other images would they choose to pair with this song? Why? Listen and watch again, perhaps singing along with the chorus.

Reflect

What was a new learning for you during this session? When did you experience beauty? Were there times when the text didn’t evoke anything beautiful for you personally? Practicing our faith, like exercising for a race, is not always easy. Sometimes we get into a slump. Remember that this is a journey with hills and valleys. Both can be part of a journey filled with beauty.

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

For the most part, children of this age group are followers. They want to follow rules. Everything is new to them, and they love to learn new information and share it with others. Talking to them about discipleship as being about following and learning should make sense to them.

About this Exploration

As disciples, we seek to live as Jesus lived, awake to God's ongoing invitation to sacred relationship. This awareness helps us to discover beauty throughout our journey of discipleship, in both whole and broken places. We open ourselves to the possibility of restoration and renewal, both individually and in community. We connect with God as complete persons—with bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits. We learn to trust our physical senses as entry points into boundless worlds of beauty; they are signposts by which we discover the Holy in the ever-changing creation around and within us. As we engage the Spirit through beauty, God opens us to an entire world of sacred opportunity and pulls us gently, powerfully toward transformation.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 35:20–29
Acts 9:17–20

Leader Preparation

Because this faith practice comes under the larger group of worship, many of these activities will be worship-focused. The hope is to encourage the children to experience the beauty of worship and to hear their own call to discipleship. Think about worship services that have been particularly meaningful to you. When has the call to discipleship been especially apparent?

Prayer: God of quiet times and loud singing, God of prayer and praise, God of sermon and scripture, be with me as I connect with these young people. May my journey invite them to experience their own journey as a gift of beauty and wonderment. Amen.

Session Development

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

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Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Defining Discipleship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: What does it mean to these young people to be a disciple? How do they begin to experience beauty as disciples if they don’t know what a disciple is? In this activity you will help the participants come to an understanding of discipleship that is relevant for them.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Write the word “Disciple” at the top of a page of newsprint or on a whiteboard, and ask the children what it means. Write down anything they offer. Affirm their suggestions, and gently correct any misconceptions. Summarize by telling the learners that being a disciple is to be a student or follower.

Play a game of Follow the Leader. In order to follow, one must listen carefully and watch closely. Make some of your movements slight, such as moving just one finger or making a small movement of your head.

After a few rounds, read the following scripture passages together: Matthew 4:18–22, Mark 3:13–19, Mark 10:35–45, Luke 5:1–11, and Luke 24:36–49. After you have read these accounts, remind the children that together you are exploring the faith practice of experiencing beauty. Encourage people to share what they find beautiful about these passages.

Discuss what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Encourage the children to find beauty in everything they do for the rest of the day. Let them know by doing this they are practicing being a faithful disciples of Jesus.

2 A Beautiful Offering

Leader preparation: The references in Exodus 35 to the colors of fabric are significant, since the dyes for these colors were difficult to come by, which made the fabric very expensive. The same was true of the other valuables that were mentioned. How often do we participate in taking an offering for the church or a special mission project, but don’t give much thought to the value or “beauty” of our gift?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- fabric (red, blue, purple, or a combination thereof)
- a wooden object
- a variety of costume jewelry

Discuss with the children the different times that an offering is taken in your church setting. *Is one taken during the faith formation/church school time? When is it taken during worship? Are there ever occasions when there is no offering? When? Why? When you give an offering, how do you decide what to give?*

Read together Exodus 35:20–29. Ask the children what they think about the offerings given in this passage of scripture. Talk about what it must have been like to put so much effort into giving an offering. Allow the children to look at and touch

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

the objects you brought. Talk about how these items would have been difficult to come by in the time of the early Israelites and how valuable these items would have been. Ask the children when, if ever, they have tried to make an offering or gift be representative of God's love and grace in their lives.

Name some gifts God has given us. Some ideas are the earth, our families, our faith, and so forth. Give the children a moment to think about the most precious or priceless thing in their lives. Steer them away from "stuff we can buy" and more toward those things that clearly come from God. What are some creative offerings they could bring to show God how grateful they are for God's gifts to them? Invite them to take this conversation home to their families.



3 Who Is My Mother?

Leader preparation: One gift of being a part of a church community is that it broadens our understanding of family. Both in times of celebration and grief we find ourselves embraced by this extended family and comforted by their company. It is good to be reminded that Jesus did not live alone, but called disciples along the way to share the journey. Discipleship is not an individual activity; it is a way of life in the midst of community.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)" by Mary Stevenson Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/819365921?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- (optional) several pictorial directories of your church family
- colored paper
- pens, pencils, markers
- envelopes

With the children, study "Caresse Maternelle." Ask the children to think about the relationship between the two characters. A first assumption may be that this is mother and child (especially since the title is "Maternal Embrace"), but who else could it be? Ask the children if there are people in their lives who are really important to them who are not their parents. Invite them to think of other members of your faith community. (As an option, if they can think of someone, but can't think of that person's name, encourage them to go through a church pictorial directory to see if they can identify someone.) Point out that these special people are often leading by example. When we follow their example, we are being disciples.

Tell the group that they will be able to show thanks for people who have made them feel special. Use colored paper to make note cards by folding them in half. Invite the children to decorate the cards and write words of thanks on them. Perhaps they could write, "Thank you for sharing the beauty of your friendship."

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 What Does the Lord Require of You? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: One way we participate in discipleship is to offer our gifts in response to Christ's love in our lives. Through this activity the children will not only provide a gift to be used in worship, but they may begin to evaluate how they share their own gifts regularly in worship.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens or pencils

Talk with the children about how we experience beauty in many different ways during worship (we sing songs, read scripture, use drama, and sometimes we may even dance). Tell them that another thing we do every time we gather is collect an offering. Talk to them a little about what the offering represents. Do they like to put something into the offering plate? Do they understand why we do this in worship?

Explain that the gift we put in the plate is not the only gift we can offer. We can offer ourselves to work within the church. Have the children use the paper and pens and draw a symbol of a gift they have to share. Perhaps it is an instrument they play or something they enjoy doing. Have them share their symbol with the group and talk about how they can share that in the community of faith.

Explain that we take up the offering during worship as a grateful response to God's love in our lives. When we live out our lives as an offering, we do the same.

5 Simon Says What??!

Leader preparation: The Magi were given strict instructions by Herod, but they chose not to follow them. Children of this age are often caught between being obedient and not wanting to do something wrong. A simple game of Simon Says may help them understand that sometimes *not* following the rules can lead to something beautiful. It is important in this activity to know your group well. If you have a group of daredevils who will try anything once, this may not be a good activity with that particular group.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Journey of the Magi" by James Tissot, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/124487127?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401

With the children study the artwork "Journey of the Magi." Talk with the children about what it was like for the Magi to have the experience of visiting Jesus and his family and then having to decide not to follow King Herod's orders. The Magi were important people in their own country, perhaps even kings themselves. *As visitors in a foreign country, how do you think they should respond to the resident king?*

Play a game of Simon Says with your group. Make sure you are Simon and try to get them to do some things they know they shouldn't do. Of course, it is important to make sure the children stay safe and that you don't interrupt other groups

who may be meeting. Some ideas are for them to tear a page out of the Bible, run in the sanctuary, or take something off the altar or communion table.

After a few attempts at the game, talk to the children about what it was like to be asked to do something that they knew was wrong. How hard was it to not obey their leader? Was it difficult for them to not follow directions? Being a disciple isn't always easy. Sometimes we have to make a choice *not* to follow someone who is leading us to do something that could be harmful either to ourselves or others. But when we are sincere about being faithful, even though we may not be following what other people think we should be doing, we can find being a disciple to be beautiful.

6 Stained-Glass Windows

Leader preparation: Churches from many traditions have stained-glass windows in their sanctuary. Even if your church does not have stained-glass windows, the children may have seen them in other churches. Sometimes these windows are given in memory of a loved one to offer beauty to the church. If your church does not have stained-glass windows, you can talk about how your clear glass windows offer the opportunity to look out into the world and see some of the natural beauty around you.

Supplies:

- wax paper cut in the shape of a church window
- pieces of old crayon, thinly shaved
- an old towel
- iron
- ironing board or other surface to use for ironing
- construction paper
- scissors
- images of stained-glass windows, <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=stained+glass+windows&qpv=stained+glass+windows&FORM=IGRE#x0y76>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Begin the conversation by talking about the windows in your church. Why does your church have the kind of windows it does? Ask the group what they think about stained-glass windows. Are they pretty, too dark, too busy, hard to figure out? If your church does not have stained glass windows, or if some children haven't seen such windows, show them the pictures from the website.

Explain to the children that in some traditions the churches have stained-glass windows to illustrate stories and imagery of our faith. Some traditions think that the stained glass adds to the beauty of the worship space. Often the art in the window reminds of us our call to discipleship by depicting Jesus and his disciples and other stories of the faith.

Give each child two pieces of waxed paper and some crayon pieces. Have everyone place pieces of crayon between the two pieces of waxed paper. After the children have placed the crayon pieces the way they want them to be, go over the wax paper with a hot iron. Place a thin towel between the wax paper and your iron to protect your iron. Be sure your iron is *very* hot. Keep the iron in motion. You can stop ironing when the crayon shavings are all melted. Allow the art to cool for a week.

The children could use the construction paper to make a frame for their stained glass picture.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Benedictions Abound (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The benediction is literally a blessing at the end of worship. Through the benediction people are being blessed and sent out into mission and ministry. Many worship leaders use the same words for the benediction, but some have found more creative ways to bless the congregation and send it forth. Throughout this activity continue to remind the children that they are creating a blessing that will help others to experience the beauty of worship and being sent out into the world.

Supplies:

- paper
- pencils

Talk with the children about worship. How many different parts of the worship service can they name? Ask them what happens at the end of the service. *What words does the pastor or worship leader say? Are they the same every time, or do they change?*

Explain to the children that the last words said at the end of worship are called a benediction and that literally they are a blessing. Ask them what they think it means to be blessed. After they have shared their ideas, explain that being blessed means to be touched in some way by God or to be fortunate. They could think of being blessed as feeling special because God is in their lives.

Tell them that the blessing sends the congregation out into the world to live as disciples of Jesus. Ask the children what they think that might mean. After you have had a few moments of discussion, invite the children to write benedictions. Remind them that they are blessing the people and sending them out into the world to be disciples. One template is: Refer to God + Remind the people of their calling + Send them forth. (For example, “The God of love embraces you with kindness and sends you into the world in peace.”)

At the end of this activity, share the different blessings that the children have written. Read them as blessings for the children gathered today.

Option: Check with the pastor about the possibility of using the children’s benedictions in worship.

8 Seeing the Light

Leader preparation: Before Paul became a great leader in the early church, he actually persecuted believers. Paul was named Saul, and he actively sought out and murdered people who believed in Jesus. One day he had a conversion experience. In the midst of that experience he lost his sight. The portion of the text we use for this Exploration is when Ananias visited Saul, and Saul regained his sight. Sometimes children have strong opinions. They are in a sense blind to something’s beauty (such as a certain classmate, food, or activity), and they have to be “converted” to see things a different way.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- blindfolds
- miscellaneous objects the children would find beautiful and could verbally describe to one another (a picture, a carving or knick knack, a gem, and so forth)

Tell the children the background of Saul/Paul from the leader preparation section above. Talk with them about what it means to persecute other people. Ask the children what they think might have happened to Saul. Read Acts 9:17–20. Talk about their predictions about what would happen and what actually happened to Saul. Explain that sometimes we can be blind in our attitudes. Saul needed to learn what it meant to follow Jesus. Once he did, he stopped persecuting Jesus’ followers and became a follower himself.

Ask for a volunteer to be blindfolded. Bring out one of the pictures or objects, and invite the rest of the children to try to describe it to the blindfolded volunteer without saying what it is. After a few moments, take off the blindfold, and ask the child if the object is anything like what he or she pictured. Repeat the process with different objects so that most of the children can have a turn to be blindfolded.

Wrap up the discussion by asking how this experience made people feel. How did they like being blindfolded? What is it like trying to listen to others without being able to see or experience what they are trying to share with you? Explain to the children that being a disciple is to be a follower or learner. We are called to follow Jesus and to learn as much about him as we can so that we can share our experience of him with others. Invite all to go into the next week trying to find ways to keep their eyes open to the beauty of Christ around them.

9 A Daily Practice

Leader preparation: The whole point of this resource is to emphasize faith practices in our daily lives. In order to do this we have to remind ourselves to practice our faith every day. This activity is meant to remind the children to practice experiencing beauty throughout the week. This activity is adapted from the “Living Practices in Daily Life” setting of “Faith Practices Experiencing Beauty.” You may want to go to this part of the website ahead of time to find other activities to show the children.

Gather lots of items that give different tactile sensations: smooth, sticky, squishy, prickly, crackly, soft. Place these items in a paper bag. Each item should be small enough to hold in the hand. Some suggestions are:

- a small rock or marble
- a feather
- a handful of dryer lint
- a leaf
- a stick
- a small sheet of paper
- a nail
- a ball of clay or Play-Doh
- a wadded up ball of tape (so you can feel the sticky side)
- a sweet gum ball or other seed pod from a tree
- a shell

- a piece of flannel
- a coin
- a sponge
- a crayon

Supplies:

- paper
- pens, pencils, or markers
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- a paper bag
- a variety of items that give different tactile sensations (see the list above)

When Jesus walked on earth, he touched people. He let them touch him. He connected with people who usually didn't feel a loving touch—lepers and prostitutes, old people and children, sick people, and those who needed emotional healing. He expressed love and acceptance through touch, and he taught his disciples to reach out as well.

Life is full of many different sensations, but often we don't register them simply because they're so familiar. Try to be intentional about touching and experiencing ordinary things and using those ordinary things as a focus for prayer.

Pass around the paper bag with several different kinds of items. One at time, each person will reach into the bag and with eyes closed will draw out an item. Without looking at it, the person holding the item will feel it and describe it without naming it, while the others try to guess what it is.

As you touch these items without being able to see them, think about the ways you can reach out and connect with the world around you with the loving touch of God. Maybe it's something as simple as picking up trash or recycling your soft drink or water bottle and remembering that the earth doesn't belong to us. Maybe it's kissing away the pain of a skinned knee of a younger child or talking to a grandparent. You can bring the touch of God to everything you touch simply by being aware of the power of that connection.

You could suggest that the children try this activity at home with their families. As you send the children from this session, remind them how important it is to remember that God is in everything. When they touch a part of nature, God is in that beauty.

Reflect

Now that you've been through this Exploration, how has your understanding of discipleship been shaped? What can you take away from this experience that will help you continue to engage in the practice of experiencing beauty? How is your understanding of being a disciple helping you lead others in shaping their own understanding? Where is God leading you from here?

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Christian tradition is rich with color, sound, poetry, dance, and prayer . . . in other words, with beauty. We have the stories of our faith and the lives of our ancestors to experience, and we have modern liturgical dance and music to nourish us. Throughout these activities the children will experience a piece of history. You can help them discover a way to reclaim the beauty of Christian traditions and share it in your setting.

About this Exploration

For centuries followers of Christian tradition have sought ways to connect with God. Layers of song, prayers, spoken word and silent searching have characterized the heart of the community of faith in its longing for this connection. The ways we worship and live out our daily lives reflect these traditions, sometimes without our even knowing it. At times, traditions are left behind for generations and then rediscovered in new, relevant, and powerful ways. This Exploration seeks to examine, appreciate, and perhaps revive some of our traditions and thereby bless and empower a faith that is rooted in today's world and experience.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 8
John 12:1–8

Leader Preparation

Although this Exploration focuses on the larger understanding of tradition in the Christian faith, you will want to be familiar with some of the traditions in your particular setting. Try to have a clear understanding of what your church does for the sacraments and holidays. Be prepared to share with the children some of the important traditions in your setting and why they have become central. Keeping in mind that this faith practice comes under the larger umbrella of worship, you will want to bring the children back to the practice of experiencing beauty in worship as you work through these activities.

Prayer: God of sacrament and ritual, as I prepare myself to lead this group of learners, guide me. Help me to stay centered in my understanding of our rich traditions and to shepherd these children to experience beauty in the many ways our faith community comes together. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Right in Front of Our Eyes (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity you and the children will walk around the church. If necessary, make advanced preparations in order not to disturb other groups that are meeting.

Supplies:

- paper and pencil to take notes in case you have questions to ask the pastor

With the children take a walk around your church, especially into the sanctuary. If your building has stained-glass windows, spend time in front of each window, and talk about what you see there. As you walk around, discuss what comes to mind when you think of church. Does a church have to have pews? Is there a cross someplace where everyone can see it? Do you have a baptismal font or baptistry, a communion table, or an altar? Talk about what each of these things mean to you in your setting and in the Christian tradition overall. If you aren't sure of some answers, make a list of questions to ask your pastor.

Ask the children what in the space has special meaning to them. What do they like the best? What are they most curious about? If some of the items, such as the pulpit or communion table, were given in memory of someone, lift that up as a tradition. Share with the group that many things we take for granted have a long history in our tradition. What about our tradition offers us ample opportunity to experience beauty? How do we practice “taking it all in” and making a conscious effort to experience beauty every time we gather for worship?



2 Semana Santa

Leader preparation: In Central America, Holy Week is celebrated with much pageantry. Long processions take place from one end of town to the other all through the days leading up to Easter. Explore the website in the supply list below and look at the pictures of some of the beautiful Alfombras (carpets made of flowers) and other pictures of the processions. Study the artwork “Guatemala: Procession” and ponder its depiction of Holy Week in this one Latin American country. Holy Week is an important time in our Christian faith, and processions have been a part of our tradition since the very first procession when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Supplies:

- Bibles (Matthew 21:1–90, Mark 11:1–10, Luke 19:28–38)
- artwork: “Guatemala: Procession” by Betty LaDuke, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/435534699?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- computer with Internet access, preferably with projection capability
- pictures of Semana Santa in Guatemala, <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=semana+santa+guatemala&qpvrt=semana+santa+guatemala&FORM=IGRE#x0y703>

Option 1:

- glass jars for each person
- multiple colors of sand (available at any craft store)
- craft sticks

Experiencing Beauty

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

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

Option 2:

- 8” x 10 ” or larger card stock for each person
- glue
- multiple colors of sand
- pencils

Talk with the children about Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Ask them to tell you what they know about how these are celebrated in your congregation. Show them where in the Bible they can read about the beginning of these Christian traditions

Display the artwork “Guatemala: Procession.” Ask them what they see in the picture. What do they think of all the colors? Who do they see? What images stand out for them? If you are able, show them the pictures from the website (listed in Supplies).

Many people in Latin America live in poverty, and the church has become the place of rest and relief for them. They make a weeklong celebration of Holy Week that doesn’t take place just in the church at worship, but involves the entire community. This week reminds them that God loves them and wants them to have lives filled with joy and hope. The elaborate colors and processions help them experience beauty as connected to the very heart of their faith. Life in Guatemala is filled with color. Their clothing is colorful, the landscape is colorful, and everywhere you look there is an abundance of color.

Option 1: Have the children make colorful sand sculptures in jars. Each person layers the different colors in the glass container provided. Use the craft sticks to push the sand around in the jar to make the design.

Option 2: Have the children draw a picture. Spread the glue within the lines, and pour the sand over the glue. These pictures will need to dry for a bit before they can be taken home. Have the children talk about their designs.

③ Taste How Good It Is

Leader preparation: Although it isn’t necessary, a loaf of freshly baked bread would add to this activity. Other options are Hawaiian bread or some other sweet bread. Bread is an important symbol, since it is what Jesus offered his disciples to remember him by at the Last Supper. If your church welcomes children to the communion table, this activity is a great opportunity to talk about what that tradition means and what a gift it is for us.

Supplies:

- uncut loaf of bread
- grape juice
- small cups

Invite the children to tell you everything they know about communion. Ask them why we use some form of bread and juice. What do those elements mean to them? Focus your time on how Jesus blessed and broke the bread with the disciples and instructed them to “do this in remembrance of me.” As Christians, every time we break bread together we are to remember Jesus and what he means to us. The symbolism of breaking bread together reminds us to share with others in our midst and to make sure all are welcome to the table.

Allow the children to smell the bread. Divide it or let them pull off a piece, and allow them to eat the bread. Have them hold the bread in their mouth for a moment. Encourage them not to gulp it down, but to try to savor and enjoy the bread. Have

them smell the grape juice and then take a small drink. Talk about how communion is shared in your setting. How often do you share communion? Who may participate? What traditions are important in your own setting? What questions do you have for your pastor about communion?

As you wrap up this activity, remind the children that sensing beauty can be done with more than the eyes. We can experience beauty through taste, smell, hearing, and touch. What beauty have they noticed in their faith community lately?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Celebrating the Seasons (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The church year is filled with celebrations when we bring out our best and dress up our worship. Many churches decorate with banners and flowers at Christmas and Easter, but what other times in the church year can we bring out the beauty of the season and enhance our space? If possible, talk with the person in charge of your worship space and ask if your group can plan to prepare the space in a special way for one of the upcoming Sundays.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Seasons of the Church Year,” Attachment: Activity 4
- Bible

Ask the children to list some seasons of the church year; refer to the list on Attachment: Activity 4 for assistance. If your church has altar cloths, talk about the different colors of them for the seasons and what symbols they might have on them. Do people order special flowers for certain days or times of the year? Are there banners that get hung up for certain occasions? What other decorations do you remember using at different times of the church year?

Think about the Sundays ahead. Is there one where you as a group would like to plan to prepare the worship space in a special way that would enable the congregation to experience beauty?

Invite the children to create a paper banner that could form the basis for a cloth one to be developed. Read Psalm 8, and make that the theme of the banner. These questions may help guide your project:

- In what season of the church year will this Sunday fall?
- What scripture will you feature? If your pastor follows the Revised Common Lectionary, ask which texts will be used on the Sunday you choose.
- What colors will you use? Why?
- What images would you want on the banner? How will those images help the congregation understand the worship theme that day?

Option: If there are people in your congregation who sew, see if they would be willing to create a cloth banner from the children’s paper banner.

5 A Lovely Gesture

Leader preparation: In Jesus' time there were no paved roads, only dirt roads. People mostly wore open shoes, so their feet would get quite dusty and dirty. It would have been considered hospitable to wash a visitor's feet after a long journey. There was also the practice of anointing a body after death, mainly to help mask the odor of a decaying body. In John's Gospel we see a mixing of these traditions. What you will want to be able to help the children understand is that Mary was doing something really quite common and that Jesus experienced it as a beautiful gesture. Many churches observe a traditional foot washing service on Maundy Thursday as they remember Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. You will need to alter this activity if there are participants who are allergic to certain scents.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- perfumes or lotions of different aromas
- spices (cinnamon and cloves are good)
- cheese cloth cut into about 4" squares
- ribbon
- small strips of paper with a hole punched in one corner
- pens or pencils
- hole punch

Read the story of Mary anointing Jesus (John 12:1–8.) Talk about foot washing. Explain that when people traveled great distances on foot, they were often greeted at their destination by someone ready with a bowl and water to wash their feet. In this story Mary uses a very expensive perfume that was so fragrant the aroma filled the house.

Experiment with some of the perfumes or lotions you brought. If someone puts one on, how close do you need to be to that person to smell it? Does everyone like the same scents? Are some stronger than others? Have you ever been in a public place and become overwhelmed by someone else's perfume or aftershave?

On the strips of paper, have the children write "To Bless You" or another phrase that has come out of this time together. Take the spices you gathered, and have each child place a combination of the spices on a square of cheesecloth. Then tie it with a ribbon, making sure to put the ribbon through the hole in the strip of paper so it is attached, too. Find a time to share the bundles with other members of the congregation, or invite the children to give their gift to a person in the church who is special to them.

6 Come to the Dance

Leader preparation: The art of dance in worship goes back to the days of the Israelites. Dance is a way to use our bodies to show appreciation for God's love among us. By using some simple strips of cloth, the beauty of the dance will flow with the dancer.

Supplies:

- strips of cloths (about 3'–5' long) of various colors
- song: "Over My Head," African American traditional, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2DLSXYxp6Q&feature=related>
- Bibles
- (optional) variety of musical instruments
- (optional) "Order My Steps Movements of Praise," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK6xIKLaEq0>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Read Psalm 150. Talk about the many ways we praise God in worship. Notice that the scripture says to dance and use musical instruments. Play the song "Over My Head" for the children. After they have heard it one time, invite them to create movements to go with the words. Remind them that we want to praise God with our motions, so the motions need to be respectful. If you want, invite them to use the fabric and allow it to be used in the dance. They can also add instruments.

This activity can get out of hand and become a loud clanging chaotic mess, so it is best to introduce the instruments and movements slowly. Try to choreograph the movements so that they complement one another as well as the music.

Option: Show an example of liturgical dance on the YouTube video. Have the children notice how the movements and dancers complement one another and the music.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Baptism Bulletins (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Churches have all kinds of traditions when it comes to baptism. Some churches give certain gifts, some hang special banners, and some sing specific songs every time someone is baptized. During this activity you will talk with the children about baptism in your church and invite the children to draw bulletin covers that can be copied and used for baptisms. If your church is paper-free, consider making the bulletin cover a keep-sake cover that can be used to write down memories of the day.

Option: Invite a minister to join your group to discuss baptism in your setting.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- plain white paper
- markers, pens, pencils
- hymnals
- (optional) minister

Begin this activity by asking the children to describe baptisms in your setting. Some questions to consider are:

- Who is baptized: children, adults, babies?
- Who participates in the service?
- What happens?
- Are there any special words the pastor says?
- What promises are made?
- Are there any songs the children remember being sung at baptisms? Look through the index in your congregation's hymnal to find baptism hymns.

Read Matthew's version of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13–17)? What are some symbols we use for baptism? Talk with the children about how the ceremony of baptism is central to our tradition. It is a beautiful day in the life of the church family when someone is baptized.

Invite the children to make a bulletin cover that can be reproduced for worship when there is a baptism in the congregation. Remind them that we want to bring out the beauty of this event and offer a gift of remembrance for the family. In order to make the cover easier to reproduce you might consider having them do simple black and white drawings. If your church is paperless and you are creating keepsakes for the family, color and more elaborate drawings would work fine.

8 The Work of Your Fingers

Leader preparation: Psalm 8 has been used in many ways over the centuries to talk about God's beautiful creation. Hymns and anthems have been written with these words, and many works of art have been inspired by this psalm. You will be using Psalm 8 with the group to lead them in producing their own work of art. Allow the children to have fun, but be prepared to clean up a bit of a mess.

Supplies:

- finger paints
- paper
- smocks or old shirts for the children to put on over their clothing
- newspaper or some other protective covering for tables
- either a basin of water for washing up, or extra helpers to assist children in cleaning up

Read Psalm 8 together at least two or three times in a variety of ways. For example:

- read a verse, and have the children repeat after you
- change your volume
- emphasize the nouns in each phrase

Focus for a moment on verse 3. Invite the children to imagine God's fingers creating the heavens, stars, planets, moon, sun, clouds, and so forth. Have the children put on the smocks and gather at a table where they have access to paints and paper. While you read different verses of the psalm, the children will fingerpaint whatever images come to mind.

While they are creating, talk with the children about how the Book of Psalms is really our very first hymnal. Music is a rich part of our tradition, dating back to creation. Music is one way we experience beauty in our worship and our lives.

9 Prayer Beads

Leader preparation: Praying is central to the Christian tradition. The forms of prayer are as varied as there are people who pray.

Supplies:

- ribbon cut in 18" lengths
- a variety of beads with holes big enough to thread onto the ribbon
- (optional) small crosses or other symbols

Talk with the children about the importance of prayer. Invite them to make small prayer beads. One way to string the beads is as follows:

1. Cut a piece of ribbon about 18" long.
2. String the thread through the cross (or other charm) if you have one.
3. String one end of the thread through the bead and the other end in the opposite direction through the bead.
4. Repeat this pattern for all the beads.
5. Tie a knot at the end of the ribbon.
6. By feeding each end of the string through opposite sides of the bead, the beads can slip up and down the string.

While the children choose their beads and thread them, talk about the gift of prayer and how it can help us sense the beauty of God. Suggest that they carry their prayer beads with them as a reminder of God's love.

Reflect

So often when we think of tradition we get caught up in having to do things "the way we've always done them." In what ways did these activities help you to embrace a tradition and find the beauty within it? Does the tradition come more alive for you now than it did before you lead this Exploration? Think about the children and their experience. Did they come away wanting to experience beauty in traditional worship practices? As you walk away from this time, find a way to remind yourself to be open to experiencing beauty in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

Attachment: Activity 4

Seasons of the Church Year

Season	Color	Length
Advent	Blue/Purple	4 weeks before Dec. 25
Christmas	White	12 days
Epiphany	White or Green	7-9 weeks, depends on the date of Easter
Lent	Purple	6 weeks
Easter/Eastertide	White/Gold	50 days
Pentecost Day	Red	1 Sunday
Season after Pentecost, or Ordinary Time	Green	After Pentecost until Advent

Some Special Days to consider during these seasons:

Advent:

Blue Christmas service (Many resources are available by googling "Blue Christmas Service")

Epiphany:

Baptism of Jesus (first Sunday after Epiphany)

Transfiguration (last Sunday after Epiphany)

Lent:

Ash Wednesday

Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Easter

Season After Pentecost

Pentecost Sunday

Trinity Sunday (first Sunday after Pentecost)

World Communion Sunday (first Sunday in October)

Reign of Christ Sunday (last Sunday after Pentecost)

Some other dates to consider (check with your denomination to see when these are celebrated and what resources are available)

New Year's Day (some churches have a special celebration on this day)

Martin Luther King Jr. Day (or Sunday closest to it)

Healthy and Human Services Sunday

Racial Justice Sunday

Church Vocations Sunday

Amistad Sunday

Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries Sunday

Mother's Day (also referred to as Festival of the Christian Home)

Father's Day

Christian Education Sunday

American Indian Ministry Sunday

Access and Disabilities Sunday

Children's Sabbath

Higher Education Sunday

Laity Sunday

Stewardship Sunday

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Children of this age are normally very compassionate. They identify with other children and like to learn about them and how they live. They want to know more about what is going on in other parts of the world and will connect easily with the stories of others. They are naturally mission-minded.

About this Exploration

The beauty that surrounds us—in our relationships as well as the gifts of creation—points us to God. When we actively engage with our faith, we open ourselves to seeing beauty everywhere, in an ever-widening context. As we awaken to a new appreciation for the divine, we are better equipped to reflect beauty ourselves and join with others to experience the grace and glory of God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Ecclesiastes 3:1–13
2 Corinthians 5:16–20

Leader Preparation

With modern technology this Exploration can take you all the way around the world. It would be helpful to spend time on your denomination’s website getting to know what missions your church supports. These activities include suggestions for mission sites, but you may be aware of others to substitute. These suggestions are just meant to get you started. Keep in mind as you go through these activities that when we participate in mission we experience the beauty of sharing God’s love.

Prayer: *Creator God, you made the whole world, not just my little corner of it. Help me to broaden my horizons by encountering other places and people. May I be a guide for these children as they explore. Amen.*

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Mission Alive (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The church is at its best when it reaches out to others who are in need. Mission is at the heart of the church, and those churches who are deeply involved in mission experience God’s love abundantly in so many different ways. In this activity you will talk about mission right in your area and think about what you can do to reach out to others.

Supplies:

- (optional) telephone books

Ask the children to describe times when they have been helped. Perhaps they needed assistance with a homework assignment, or a new dance routine, or a new play in football, or a new chore at home, and so forth. What about that experience was positive or beautiful? In what ways have they helped someone else? What were the circumstances (if they are willing to share)? How did they feel after completing the experience?

Ask the children what they think of when they hear the word “mission.” Are they aware of any missions that your church participates in regularly? Lead a discussion based on the following questions:

- Has anyone collected food for a food pantry?
- Has anyone donated clothes or toys to a shelter?
- Has anyone been a reading buddy or mentor or tutor?
- Name some volunteer activities in the community. Has anyone participated in similar activities already? If so, how are they beautiful? How might they be

As an option, ask the children to look up in the phone book some agencies that help other people.



2 Take a Deep Breath

Leader preparation: Think about the early days of spring when you can finally open your windows and air out your house after a long cold winter. Think about how that first fresh wind smells, how your sheets smell after being out on the line in the wind, and how you can finally breathe fresh air. This activity is about helping the children be more aware of the sights and sounds around them.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Wind from the Sea” by Andrew Wyeth, <http://www.art.com/products/p15524076-sa-i3804653/andrew-wyeth-wind-from-the-sea.htm?orig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=dfff3132492f45b38c1f69b8ff1b86c1&searchstring=wind+from+the+sea>
- black construction paper
- scissors

Talk with the children about what it is like to open the windows after a long, cold winter. Ask them if they ever noticed what fresh air smells like. Show them the artwork “Wind from the Sea.” Talk about what they see in the picture. It is okay if they really don’t see anything but a window and a lot of “brown.”

Experiencing Beauty

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

After talking about the picture, ask them what sea air smells like. Explain that it smells different because there is salt in the sea, and you can also smell the fish and the kelp. For many people sea air is a very pleasing smell. If you live near the sea, you may be so accustomed to the smell of sea air that you no longer notice it.

Experiencing beauty isn't always about what we see, but often it is about what we remember or smell or even feel. When you go outside in your setting, what do you smell? Do you smell the sea? Do you smell certain trees or flowers? Do you smell pollution?

Ask the children to cut rectangular holes in the middle of the pieces of construction paper to form “window” shapes. They may hold them in front of themselves and talk about what beauty they wish to see in their environments. Where can they create beauty in their settings?



3 Check out My Week

Leader preparation: Most children this age will have planners, even if just for their school work. This activity helps them think of their regular context in terms of faith and beauty.

Supplies:

- pencils, colored pencils, or markers
- “Weekly Calendar,” Attachment: Activity 3a, and “Monthly Calendar,” Attachment: Activity 3b

Invite the children to name activities that are part of their regular weeks (such as school, practices, church, chores, and so forth). Distribute the weekly and monthly calendars from the attachments. Each person will fill out a template with the regular activities that occur over at least a week or two.

Then have the children review their calendars in light of these questions:

- When am I aware of God's presence with me? (Place a star near that activity.)
- When do I feel beauty? (Place a checkmark near that activity.)
- When do I feel discouraged or like life is draining out of me? (Place an x.)
- Where would I like to become more aware of beauty? (Place an exclamation mark.)

Encourage the children to take home these templates and check them from time to time. Has their awareness of beauty been growing?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

**4 Rain, Rain Go Away (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: It's easy to talk about experiencing beauty when the sun is shining and we're able to be outside and play. But what about on those cold, gloomy, rainy days? This age group can be easily entertained and just as easily bored. Give them five minutes with "nothing to do," and the boredom kicks in. This activity is meant to have them rethink the myriad of things they can do to make even a rainy day bright and sunny. This activity is meant to be acted out, so give them room to explore.

Supplies:

- (optional) blanket or two
- "Going on a Lion Hunt," Attachment: Activity 4

Invite the group to imagine going on a nice camping trip where they will be able to go swimming, fishing, hiking, and playing outdoors. Ask them to act out how they might feel if they were in the middle of this trip. (Encourage them to pantomime one of the activities and focus on the smile on their faces). Make a loud noise (kind of like thunder), and tell them a big storm is coming.

They have to come inside! Ask: *What will you do now! Are you sad? Do you want to go back outside? Is your camping trip ruined?*

Have them look around inside. They can't fish or swim or hike in the woods. But can they pretend to be on a camping trip? Can they build a tent with the blankets (if you have some)? Can they come up with inside games to play together? Invite the group to create an indoor camp setting. Let them imagine the props, and let them suggest games to play. Perhaps you could sing songs around a pretend campfire. Perhaps you can tell rhythm stories such as "Going on a Lion Hunt," Attachment: Activity 4.

A wise person once said, "Choose to be happy and you will always be happy . . . wait to be happy, you may never be happy." The same can be said of experiencing beauty and enjoying life. Sometimes our circumstances are disappointing or sad. However, we can still look for the beauty all around us, even on rainy days.

**5 Maternal Embrace**

Leader preparation: Study the artwork "Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)." What connections might the children in your group make between this print and their lives? What beauty do you notice in this artwork?

Supplies:

- artwork: "Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)" by Mary Stevenson Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/313785934?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Invite the group to spend time looking at the artwork "Caresse Maternelle (Mother and Child)." Ask the children what they think led to this moment for the mother and child. What do they imagine the child is thinking about? What about the mother?

The postures of the mother and child show their closeness. The group will experiment with miming actions that depict acts of service that could take place in a regular week. Invite them to call out places they go regularly (for example, the mall, school, soccer, piano lessons, and so forth.). Now have them call out needs that others might have in those contexts (perhaps a broken bicycle, being bullied, being frustrated with homework).

In pairs, children will mime one way to show care to someone in need of help. Others will try to guess the situations being portrayed.

6 You Experience Beauty in THAT?!?

Leader preparation: Most of us are familiar with the old cliché “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” In this activity we want to help the children understand that many surprisingly different items can still hold beauty.

Supplies:

- pictures of ugly animals (a simple Web search entitled “ugly animals” will give you plenty of images) or go to <http://webecoist.momtastic.com/2010/06/29/ugly-by-nature-the-worlds-13-ugliest-animals/>
- images of children from around the world, including the developing world <http://www.flickr.com/groups/399421@N25/>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Talk with the children about what and where in the world they experience beauty. One by one show them the pictures you found on the web while asking them if this is something they find beautiful. Most likely they will laugh at some of the images. Ask why they are laughing. Ask: *Is laughter in and of itself a beautiful thing? Can you find anything in any one of these pictures that is at least cute?*

Now show them pictures from the link to the photo-sharing link (flickr.com) provided in the supply list. Look at each picture and talk about what is beautiful in these pictures. Explain to the children that when the church participates in mission just to help other people sometimes we miss the beauty of what the other people have to offer to us. These pictures show children playing, praying, laughing, and learning. Explain to the children that our involvement in mission is two-way. We give to others to help them in difficult situations, but we also receive much from them when we engage them in conversation.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Raising Awareness (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: There are so many things we take for granted that other people in the world do not have or haven’t even heard of. This exercise is meant to raise awareness and some money for a mission project. Be aware that some of your own families may be in need. Highlight that the children need not contribute financially to the project, but encourage them to pray for their own needs and those of others as they work through the calendar.

Supplies:

- calendar, Attachment: Activity 7

Talk with the children about things they have that other children in the world may not have or may have lost. Talk about how everyday things we take for granted don't exist in some other areas of the world or even for people in our own country.

Hand out the calendars. Read through the items together. Ask the children to take home the calendars and follow the directions on them if they wish. Whether or not they are able to put money in a jar for each day, encourage them to say a little prayer such as, "Thank you, God, for windows (or books or doors and so forth)."

At the end of the thirty days, have the children bring in their jars of pennies. As a group decide what mission to support with this money.

8 Kids 2 Kids

Leader preparation: Children of this age respond well to getting to know or helping other children their age. Visit the website "Kids 2 Kids", and sort through the activities that you think would work best for your group. If it is possible to have them get on computers themselves, they can even play some of the games on the site.

Supplies:

- (optional) computers
- resources from "Kids 2 Kids" website <http://www.kids2kidsmissions.org> or similar website from your denomination, or go to <http://onegreathourofsharing.org/>

Explain to the children that there are people in need all over the world. Some live in our own communities, and some live in distant lands. Where the people who need help live isn't really important; what is important is that we are willing to reach out to people everywhere. Tell them about the "Kids 2 Kids" website, and show them what you found there. Explore some of the locations listed. Note that even our simple acts of friendship and prayers make the world a more beautiful place.

9 The Old Has Passed Away

Leader preparation: Although children this age often forgive easily, they can be quick to "never talk to a friend again." In 2 Corinthians 5:16–20 we are invited to participate in the ministry of reconciliation. If you have ever been deeply hurt by someone and then found a way to reconcile, you will know how important and beautiful reconciliation is. Be prepared to talk to the children about forgiveness as a way of life. For children who may have been abused, you will also want to talk about being safe. Just because we forgive someone doesn't mean we let that person hurt us again.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) Internet access
- (optional) dictionary
- (optional) duct tape

Ask the children if they have ever had a quarrel with a friend. Talk about what it feels like to be mad at a friend.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–20. Talk with the children about reconciliation; if necessary look up the word, either on the Internet or in a dictionary. Explain that it means to become friendly again after a problem. Explain to the children that we are talking about experiencing beauty and what that means in our context and through mission. So often we think of mission as something we do in faraway places, but mission can happen right at home even with our best friend. If we have a misunderstanding with someone, we may feel hurt and even angry. Ask the children what it feels like to hang on to that hurt and anger.

You may want to take a ribbon and have someone wrap it around your wrists as an example of how resentment binds us up. Continue to talk about reconciliation and what it feels like to make up after a quarrel. Tell the children that in all of our relationships we will have difficult times, but to really appreciate the gift of the relationship and the beauty of it we must find it in our hearts to make peace or “make up” with a friend or relative.

At this point you may remove the ribbon to show how good it feels to be released from angry feelings.

Reflect

People who spend their lives committed to mission can find incredible beauty around them. Where did you find beauty in this Exploration? What made you want to reach out, and what made you feel the need to be more reflective? How can you make take your experiences with the children during this Exploration part of your faith journey?

Weekly Calendar

Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Monthly Calendar	MONTH	SATURDAY						
		FRIDAY						
		THURSDAY						
		WEDNESDAY						
		TUESDAY						
		MONDAY						
		SUNDAY						

Going on a Lion Hunt

Refrain:

Going on a lion hunt.
I'm not afraid.
I'm going to catch me
a BIG lion!

*(Spread arms to demonstrate the word
"big" as you say the word.)*

But look!
What's that ahead?
*(Raise your head to your forehead, as
though you were looking far away.)*

Uh-oh.
There's mud ahead!
Can't go over it.
Can't go under it.
Can't go around it.
Better go through it.
*(Make sloshing sounds and move
hands and feet as if wading through
mud.)*

Refrain

Uh-oh.
There's a lake ahead.
Can't go over it.
Can't go under it.
Can't go around it.
Better swim through it.
(Make swimming motions.)

Refrain

Uh-oh.
There's a gate ahead.
Can't go over it.
Can't go under it.
Can't go around it.
Better go through it.
*(Gesture as if you open a gate, walk
through, and close it.)*

Refrain

Uh-oh.
There's tall grass ahead.
Can't go over it.
Can't go under it.
Can't go around it. We'd better crawl
through it.
*(If room permits, children can crawl
around.)*

Refrain

Uh-oh.
There's a cave ahead.
Can't go over it.
Can't go under it.
Can't go around it.
Guess we'll have to walk into it.

It's dark in here.
I see two shining lights.
I feel something furry.
I feel a c-c-c-cold nose.
I feel s-s-s-sharp teeth.
It's a lion!!!
(Shiver and make terrified faces.)

Run out of the cave!
Crawl through the grass!
Open the gate!
Swim across the lake!
Wade through the mud!
Run into the house!
Close the door!
Run up the front stairs!
Crawl under your bed!

Attachment: Activity 7

Each day, for the next thirty days, look at the chart below. If you like, you could put a penny in your jar for every item you have in your house listed in that day's square. For example: On day one, count all of the windows in your home. If you have thirty windows, put 30 cents in your jar.

<p>WINDOWS Many people live in homes that have no protection from the rain.</p>	<p>DOORS Do you lock your doors to your house? What if you didn't have any doors to lock?</p>	<p>WATER FAUCETS In many areas children have to walk miles to get water and bring it home in containers.</p>	<p>PAIRS OF SHOES Many children do not have even one pair of shoes. They go barefoot all day every day.</p>	<p>BEDROOMS Would you want to sleep with everyone in the same room? Many families do because they only have one-room homes.</p>	<p>CANS IN YOUR PANTRY Do you have extra food in your pantry? Some families must go to the market every day for food.</p>	<p>TELEVISIONS What would you do if you didn't have even one TV?</p>
<p>BOOKS Sometimes we take reading for granted. Some children don't even own one book.</p>	<p>COMPUTERS Can you imagine living without computers?</p>	<p>LIGHT BULBS What if you had to go to bed at sundown because you didn't have electricity?</p>	<p>VEHICLES Many poor people rely on public transportation. They don't own a car or even a bike.</p>	<p>PICTURES OF YOU What if your parents never had a picture of you or never saw a camera?</p>	<p>BATHROOMS What if you had to go outside to the bathroom, even in the cold and rain?</p>	<p>PAIRS OF PANTS Some children only have one or two sets of clothes. Still think you have nothing to wear?</p>
<p>PENCILS Some children don't have pencils or paper to take to school.</p>	<p>TELEPHONES Most houses in some areas of the world do not have access to a telephone.</p>	<p>COATS Some children only have one coat to wear and some have none.</p>	<p>TOYS Some children have never had even one toy.</p>	<p>FORKS Can you imagine eating with your fingers every meal?</p>	<p>DVDS Many of the world's children have never seen a movie.</p>	<p>CHAIRS Many homes do not have furniture. People sit and sleep on the floor.</p>
<p>FAMILY MEMBERS Children who live in war zones have lost many family members.</p>	<p>FRIENDS Children whose homes have been struck by disasters may have to leave their friends to go to a new home.</p>	<p>TYPES OF CEREAL Some children eat the same thing for every meal every day.</p>	<p>DRINKING GLASSES Some families have to share one common drinking glass.</p>	<p>DRAWERS OF CLOTHING Think of the people who have one outfit to wear.</p>	<p>CLOSETS Most people don't have a closet because they have nothing to put in it. How many do you have?</p>	<p>KNICK KNACKS Many people have none.</p>
<p>PIGGY BANKS Imagine not having any money at all. So many families live in poverty all over the world.</p>	<p>BARS OF SOAP In some areas soap is a luxury and a family may only have one bar at a time.</p>					

Experiencing Beauty



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

It can be difficult for this age group to have much of a sense about the future or to talk about vision. They are pretty grounded in the present. They look forward to birthdays or Christmas, but if you talk about doing something today that will have an impact in the next season or years from now, they can become impatient. In this Exploration the goal will be to help them think about things they can do now that will help not only them, but also other people, experience beauty in the future.

About this Exploration

As we engage with God, we grow in our capacity to understand God's work. Yet the beauty of God's handiwork is all around us in creation if we open ourselves to experience it. We often move from the traditional understanding of what it means for someone or something to be beautiful to a deeper awareness of the Divine in all that has been created. In Future and Vision, we explore the beauty of the cosmos, the earth beneath our feet, and the sea below. As we marvel at God's handiwork in worship, we dare to imagine the wonders of God's realm, both now and in the future.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Job 38:1-11
Revelation 21:2-5

Leader Preparation

Often when we think of looking forward, it is helpful to look back. Think about a goal you may have had for a long time but have not achieved. Can you picture a time in the future when you will have achieved that goal? If you had started sometime in the past, would you be there now? The goal of these activities is to get started on experiencing beauty now so that at some point in the future it becomes second nature. Give yourself time to think about when you passed up an opportunity to experience beauty because of other distractions. Try to let go of those distractions as you lead your group through this Exploration.

Prayer: Holy God, you created the earth and saw that it was good. Help me during this time to breathe in that goodness so I might lead with passion and grace. Bless each of these children as we explore the beauty in our lives. We pray that what we experience today will be with us for years to come. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① It May Not Be About You (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Job had a rough time. He spoke up to let God know what he felt. For this age group fairness is really important, but life is just not fair. Be prepared to struggle with them about these issues without giving them the answer, for as we all know there is no answer for the unfairness we experience in life.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Explain to the children that Job seemed to face a hard time every time he turned around. We are told he was blameless and upright (chapter 1), but he lost his property, had problems with his health, was filled with grief, and just couldn't seem to get a break. He complained to God, but God had other words for Job. Read Job 38:1-11 to the children with as much feeling as you can. You could encourage the children to say, “Yeah, where was I then?”

Talk with the children about a time when they felt they were treated unfairly. After they have shared, turn the conversation around and ask if they ever received anything they didn't really deserve.

In the book of Job we are reminded that we weren't around when God created the earth, so who are we to think we know better than God? Remind the children that even in our worst times, God is present, offering us hope. Encourage them to remember that even when things aren't to our liking, there are still plenty of reasons to give thanks and to take in God's gifts of beauty. Ask the children to name beautiful aspects of creation that remind them of God.

② Weeding the Garden

Leader preparation: Locate pictures of gardens that are overgrown with weeds and some pictures of gardens that are well kept. Think about the “weeds” in your own life and how you will want to talk to the children about how we can remove spiritual weeds.

Supplies:

- pictures of flowers and some of gardens with weeds
- strips of paper about 2" x 6"

Invite the children to describe helping to plant or weed a garden. What was that experience like? Were you working by yourself or with someone?

Point out that it is easier to pull a few weeds every day rather than to wait and have to pull a lot of weeds at one time. (A comparison could be cleaning up their room a little each day versus having to spend a Saturday tidying.) Ask them what the garden looked like before and after they pulled the weeds.

Turn the discussion to talking about weeds. What do weeds do? Why do we pull them? What are some weed-like attitudes? Is hatred a form of weed in our minds? Ask the children to think of other actions or feelings that we have that could be thought of as weeds.

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

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

Have each child take one or two strips of paper and write down areas of our lives that could be seen as weeds (such as anger, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, and so forth).

Explain that if we want to practice experiencing beauty in our lives, then we also have to practice weeding out our lives. If we are mad at our friends, we can't experience the beauty of having friends. If we always have to have our own way, we can't experience the beauty of learning to share.

3 From Cradle to Rocker

Leader preparation: Many churches have a cradle roll that displays in one way or another all the babies who have been born into the church. The names are usually kept on the roll until the child starts attending Sunday school. A few churches also have a rocker roll, which has a picture of all of the shut-ins along with some information so that the church family can keep these people in their prayers. During this time you will make a mini-cradle or -rocker roll. Check with your pastor for a list of names for this activity.

Supplies:

- stickers that represent older people and babies
- poster board
- markers
- church directory or names on cradle roll and names of elderly who are shut-in

Talk about babies who have been born or adopted into your congregation and some of the elderly persons who come to your church. We hope that the babies will grow up and become strong leaders in the church; the elderly who have served for many, many years have provided a place where these children can be right now.

Talk about what it would look like to honor both the very young and the very elderly in your faith community. At this point in time, neither may be able to do much in the church, but we want to show our gratitude for what the elderly have done and live in the hope of what the youngest will be able to do. Introduce the idea of the cradle roll or rocker roll.

Create two lists on poster board, one with names of the elder members of the church and the other with names of babies and toddlers. Decorate them appropriately. For the rocker roll, you may write, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and for the cradle roll, "Little children, come unto me."

Finish by telling the children that celebrating the young and old helps us appreciate the beauty at both ends of life.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 What Time Will it Be? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Many churches create time capsules to celebrate significant anniversaries, hoping those capsules will be opened at a much later date (often fifty to a hundred years later). If your group is one that you know will continue meeting even after you have completed your study of this faith practice, consider making a time capsule to be opened in a few months. Find out if your church has a time capsule, and if so, when it was started and when is it to be opened.

Supplies:

- container such as a large envelope or shoe box
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- pencils
- pens

Time capsules are used in order to preserve memories for the future. One way of measuring our faith is to place related items into a time capsule that is opened later on. People and groups place into a time capsule descriptions of what life is currently like, such as newspaper articles or ads with prices. Others put hope for goals in a time capsule. As a group have the children create a list on newsprint or a whiteboard of five goals or predictions related to experiencing beauty as a faith practice. Once they have named everything they can think of, have the group select five of their ideas to place inside their capsule.

When you have finished the time capsule, decide where it is going to be stored. This is also a good time to talk about how you are going to help one another over the next months to practice experiencing beauty.

Option: You could open the time capsule in a predetermined amount of time to check on your progress.

5 In the End Is the Beginning

Leader preparation: The hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” is increasingly popular for funerals. It was written by Natalie Sleeth and dedicated to her husband, who died shortly after it was published.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and projector
- hymn: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>

Listen to the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” on YouTube, and view the pictures that go with it. Ask: *What does this hymn make you think of? What do you like about it? Let’s talk about the beautiful pictures you can see in the video. Let’s talk about endings and beginnings. What things need to end for other things to start?*

What transitions have the children already been through (such as starting or changing schools or moving)? How can they remember God’s presence as they go through these changes? What can they think about doing in the next week or even month that would bring beauty to someone (even themselves) in the future? God is with us as we go into the unknown.

6 This Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Leader preparation: A number of places in the Bible refer to our bodies as earthen vessels of God’s love and grace. During this activity you will want to be able to talk to the children about how we are created in God’s image.

Supplies:

- Bible
- modeling clay

Have the children find the following scriptures in their Bibles: Jeremiah 18:1–4, Isaiah 64:8, Romans 9:20–21, and 2 Corinthians 4:7. Talk with the children about our bodies as vessels. You may want to ask some questions: *What is a vessel? Besides our organs and tissues, what do our bodies hold? If our bodies are vessels made by God, what does God expect us to hold in them?*

Explain to the children there are all types of vessels. You are going to make vessels from modeling clay. Invite the children to take some clay and start making a vessel. The creation can be any shape or size, but it needs to be able to hold “something.” While they are working with the clay, talk about how the clay doesn’t always do what we want.

Tell the children you want them to take home their vessel and put it someplace where it can be a reminder that their bodies are vessels that God made. Remind them that experiencing beauty isn’t about seeing “pretty” things, but it is about celebrating the gift of God’s love and grace in our lives every day.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Going Out in Love (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Children of this age are usually aware of what is going on in the world. With all of the talk of wars, natural disasters, and crimes, the world can seem to be a scary place. We can spend a lot of energy fretting about the state of our world, but how much energy do we spend on coming up with creative ways to be a positive presence in the world? This activity is meant to help the children develop a sense that they matter and they can make a difference in the world.

Supplies: None

Play a game of add-on telephone. One person begins a message by stating one word. The next person adds a word to the message. The object of the game is to produce a kind greeting or wish for someone with exactly the same number words as there are people in the group.

Explain to the children that sometimes the difference between a great day and bad day can be an encounter with someone else. Ask them to think about the different people they encounter. Maybe it’s a server at a restaurant, a cashier at the grocery store, or a checkout person at a fast food restaurant. Encourage the children, in each of these scenarios, to take time simply to say, “Have a great day” (or evening).

This practice is one they can use in the course of the school day. They can offer a simple wish for a good day to their teachers, friends, the office staff, or anyone they meet.

8 Make it All New

Leader preparation: Revelation 21 gives us the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. Is this something we expect God to just do for us, or does God equip us so that we can participate in the creation? Because of variations in weather, you may need to adapt this activity. The tree is just a suggestion. Another option for this activity is to talk about the scripture and invite the children to bring plants/trees to be planted if you are meeting again.

Check out the Arbor Day Foundation or local nurseries. Some offer free trees.

Supplies:

- dirt
- cups
- seeds
- planting tools
- (optional) plants or trees
- (optional) permission to plant in or near the church
- hymn: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>

An old Chinese proverb states, “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is today.” Ask your group when the last time was that they planted a tree or any kind of plant. Talk to them about Revelation 21:2–5 being a promise from God of a new heaven and earth. Read this scripture.

Talk about things about the earth that might need to be beautified. For example, pollution causes trouble in the earth. Consider the impact of human and animal life related to the loss of natural resources.

- Fertile lands have been transformed into highways, grazing fields, residences and commercial centers. Reducing vast agricultural areas depletes the production of food.
- The use of fertilizers and pesticides in the farms to boost food production causes air poisoning and pollution that are harmful to plants, animals, and humans.
- Wildlife needs a particular kind of environment to survive. For instance, some birds fly to warmer countries during winter season, but when the habitat is destroyed by loggers, these birds will go somewhere else, the environment of which their body can’t tolerate. Wildlife will soon be doomed for extinction.
- Many countries rely on fossil fuel, which is nonrenewable. For energy needs. Fossil oil such as gasoline and diesel pollutes the air, which results in global warming. Every day, thousands of vehicles add smog, pollution, and other toxins into the environment.
- For commercial purpose, trees are cut down and no new trees are planted to replace them. Soon there will be no more trees in the forest to prevent soil erosion and floods.

As a way to promote beauty and the replacement of natural resources, plant seeds in cups or plant trees. Point out that it is true that God has given us a beautiful earth, but God has also given us the gifts and skills to continue making the earth a beautiful place to live. After you are done planting, say a prayer for your plant’s growth and thank God for the beauty of the earth.

Finish by singing “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.”

Option: If you are planting flowers or trees outside, you will also need to decide on a schedule of watering the plants so they have a chance to grow.



9 Window to the Future

Leader preparation: These older children may, for the most part, be optimistic about the future. However, they are at an age when they may start to feel anxious about upcoming changes. Remind them that God’s presence goes with them into the future.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Wind from the Sea” by Andrew Wyeth, <http://www.art.com/products/p15524076-sa-i3804653/andrew-wyeth-wind-from-the-sea.htm?orig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=dfff3132492f45b38c1f69b8ff1b86c1&searchstring=wind+from+the+seaby>
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projector

Display the artwork “Wind from the Sea.” Ask participants to first observe the painting. *What do you notice? What do you think is about to happen? Now imagine that you are looking through the window as if you are looking into the future. What beauty do you hope to see? What do you feel?*

The Spirit of God has often been compared to wind. What do they think of the breeze blowing the curtain? How actively are they aware of God’s presence in their lives?

Allow a few moments of silence in which the children may pray silently for God’s Spirit to lead them so that they may enter the future with hope and confidence.

Reflect

What is it that gives you the most pleasure in life? Where do you experience beauty? As you think about what you have been able to do with your group, what gave you the most satisfaction? What was your greatest challenge? What is going to guide you in the future as you think about experiencing beauty as a gift from God? What is one thing you can do each day to intentionally experience beauty and worship God?