

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Adult learners bring a rich and colorful portfolio of life experiences to encounters with practices of faith. Defined in this resource as persons older than eighteen years of age, adults are involved because they are motivated and eager to discover or enhance their understanding of the Bible, their faith, and their role as Christians in society. Together these factors form a rich foundation for teaching and learning. Adult learners are diverse, with varying skills, abilities, mobilities, and ideas. Session activities keep learners focused and engaged as they learn together.

About this Exploration

God not only creates our bodies, but God also relates to us through the embodied form of Jesus Christ. We are moved to reclaim God's presence in the joyful and messy details of everyday life, a task more complicated and richer than depicted in the idealized images of bodies in the media. Through the senses, we experience and explore creation. We enjoy the sight of a rainbow, the smell of roses, or the taste of garlic. We connect with each other through the sound of a voice, the touch of a handshake, or the intimacy of a kiss. We can choose to use our bodies in ways that affirm that we are made in the image of God, discover that God's goodness is planted within our bodies, and express ourselves through our varied talents and limitations.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19:4–8

John 4:1–42

Leader Preparation

To discover is to become new: to look at an object with different lenses; to hear words or music with heightened listening; to engage in activities that stimulate the taste buds, tantalize the emotions and require touch. This Discovery Exploration of Honoring the Body encourages novel encounters of learning, sharing, and experiencing.

Prayer: Holy God, in this faith practice help me to guide learners that we may be open to the possibilities that emerge in our time together as we explore the physical, social, emotional and spiritual dynamics of body. Thank you for our bodies, minds, and spirits. 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 Honor the Body Acronyms (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Kings 19:4–8 and John 4:1–42 and become familiar with the respective stories. Note key words that jump out at you. In this activity participants will create an “Honor the Body” acronym using words inspired by these scriptures. An acronym is a word or set of words in which each letter represents a word of additional meaning. For example: HOMES is an acronym used to memorize the names of the Great Lakes—Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, pencils or pens

Welcome participants. Invite them to sit around the table. Read 1 Kings 19:4–8 and John 4:1–42 aloud together. Divide into two groups. Ask each respective group to highlight words from the scripture that seem especially powerful. These words will then be used to create acronyms that represent the scripture and lift up honoring the body.

If necessary, suggest words such as LIVING WATER. An acronym might be: Life Includes Variety Incorporating Nutritious Goals With Actions That Engage Reflection. Invite groups to share their final products.

2 Dramatization of 1 Kings 19:4–8

Leader preparation: This activity invites participants to incorporate drama to reimagine Elijah’s encounter with the angel of God as he rested beneath the broom tree. Read 1 Kings 19:1–8 a few times to understand the dynamic under which Elijah was living. (Also, note that 1 Kings 19:4–8 does not mention the prophet’s name.) Participants will create short skits using their bodies as props and characters to reenact the story.

Supplies:

- Bible
- open space where participants may work in small groups to act out the dramatic representations

Welcome participants. Explain that prophets were sent by God to represent God’s word and actions over and against the words and actions of those in power who were straying from God’s ways. This particular passage concerns the prophet Elijah and his struggle to remain faithful as a servant of God. Divide participants into groups of three or four. Each group will read the scripture together and identify key events, characters, and props. Then they are to create a short skit to enact before the entire group to explain the story. Tell participants that their bodies serve as props and characters. (Example: One person might be a broom tree or a well.) Tell them to have fun even as they remain true to the assigned passage. They have fifteen minutes to prepare.

When time is up, invite participants to return to one large group. Invite each small group to present its skit. Applaud each performance. After all performances, discuss:

- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.
- What is the main focus of this story?
- Why is this scripture important for us today?
- How are we like Elijah? How are we different?
- What message should we take away from this passage as we live as God’s representatives in the world?
- How does this scripture invite us to focus on honoring the body?

Thank participants for their cooperation in this activity.

③ Eat, Drink, and Be on Your Way

Leader preparation: Collect materials listed under Supplies. The water pitcher, bread, and tree branch serve as a centerpiece on the table. In this activity participants will create a litany and sacred ritual that honors the body based on the message of 1 Kings 19:4–8. (If the group is larger than eight or ten, divide into two groups.) Read the scripture several times until you are comfortable with it.

Supplies:

- Bible
- pitcher of water
- one drinking cup per person
- flatbread cake (pita bread, pancake, or flour tortilla)
- tree branch or fern in vase or lying on table
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Welcome participants to this exploration of 1 Kings 19:4–8. Ask a volunteer to read the scripture. Discuss: *Who are the characters? Why are they significant? What does the scripture teach about honoring the body?* If necessary, read the scripture again and repeat the questions.

Together, using insights from scripture, invite the group to write a litany to be used in a communal and sacred ritual sharing the water and bread. Decide on the order of worship: how the bread will be shared, who will pour the cups of water, who will distribute, where participants will stand or sit, and so forth. Decide upon a common refrain that will be sung or spoken after each petition. There is no right or wrong way—this is a service *they* are creating. Write the order of worship and words to the litany on the newsprint or whiteboard as the group offers them. Remind participants that this ritual is about honoring the body. Write petitions on the newsprint. Share in the ritual together.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Story in the Round (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Participants will read the scripture, summarize it in one sentence, and then circumnavigate the story by drawing a picture of it “in the round.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens or pencils

Read the scripture together. Take a few minutes to discuss, using these prompts:

- What is happening?
- Who are the main characters?
- What does the woman say and do?
- What does Jesus say and do? What do the disciples say and do?

After this careful exploration of the story details, take the discussion deeper with questions like these: *How is this scripture relevant for our lives today? How does this scripture empower us in honoring our bodies?*

Pass out paper and pens. Invite participants to draw a large circle in the center of the page (it should fill the entire page). Encourage participants to come up with a one-sentence summary of this passage and write this sentence around the outside of the circle. Now have them draw a picture within the circle that represents the one sentence summary. Tell them that they will only have 5–10 minutes. When they are finished, invite them to share their pictures and summary sentences. Thank participants for their cooperation and creative insights.



5 “The Public Fountain”

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Using the questions below for guidance, spend time examining the artwork as you consider the experience of the child. Does this reading change your feelings about the artwork? Say a prayer of blessing for the artist, the child pictured, and the gift of the Holy Scripture.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Public Fountain,” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1033816467?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- Bible
- pitcher of ice water, cups for every

Arrange the room so that all participants may comfortably view the artwork. Invite participants to spend a few moments in quiet reflection on “The Public Fountain.” Encourage them to utilize their senses as if they were the child in the scene. What do they smell? Hear? See? Feel? Taste? Where are they located? After a few minutes invite participants to share their reflections while respecting the views of others.

Ask them to view the artwork again as you read John 4:1–42. How does hearing the scripture affect their perspective on the artwork? In what ways does this picture relate to honoring the body? How is Jesus’ analogy of “living water” represented here?

Pour a cup of water for each participant. Invite everyone to drink the water slowly, savoring each swallow as you close in Prayer: *Spirit of the Living God, be made known to us in this water. May the well of salvation run deep within us as we go forth refreshed to share your goodness and good news. Amen.*

6 Fill My Cup, Lord

Leader preparation: Read John 4:1–42. Consider the woman and her neediness. Consider Jesus and his neediness. What was offered by each character to the other? How were their respective gifts received? In this activity, participants will compare and contrast scripture with a hymn. Through discussion and study, participants will write a new verse for the hymn.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymn: “Fill My Cup Lord” by Richard Blanchard (tune: Fill My Cup), <http://hymnal.calvarybaptistsv.org/7.html>

Welcome participants to this session of Honoring the Body. Invite them to sit around the table and read John 4:1–42 together. Discuss how this particular scripture honors the body of Jesus and the body of the woman. How does the message honor the body for all God’s people? Pass out the lyrics of the hymn. Play and sing the hymn together. Discuss how the hymn reflects the message of the scripture.

Divide the large group into smaller groups of three. Encourage each small group to write one more verse for the hymn using words that specifically suggest honoring the body. Sing the new verses to the hymn..

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Walk the Talk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 4:1–42. Consider what the woman might have told her friends, her family, and the town’s people after she left Jesus. How have you shared your faith with others? What did you say? In this activity, participants will be encouraged to share their faith in a public display of footprints suggesting ways to “walk the talk.” Secure permission to make a wall display in a prominent hallway, fellowship room, or narthex.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper (various colors is okay)
- pens or markers
- scissors
- tape or sticky tack

Invite the participants to sit around the table. Read the scripture together. Create possible dialogues between the woman and her neighbors. Consider what the woman might have said to her friends, her family, and the town’s people after she left Jesus. How did she use her body to honor God? Invite participants to share words that might encourage others to follow Jesus.

Have participants trace their feet on two sheets of paper, one foot per sheet. On each footprint have them write a few words about what Jesus means to them. Cut out the footprints and create a display that “walks” along the wall so church members may read them. (Extra footprints may be made as time allows.) Thank participants for sharing their faith in “walking the talk.” Encourage them to share their faith in Jesus with someone new this week—a co-worker, friend, family member, or stranger.

8 Time Line for Life

Leader preparation: Read John 4:1–42 until you know it well. If possible, read the text in several different translations. You can find different translations at Bible Gateway, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>. Consider how the scripture concerns the spirit and the body of each character. In this activity participants will write a timeline of their lives, including the past, present, and future of their physical and spiritual existence.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- spool of adding machine tape or cash register tape cut into 36" strips
- pens

Have the group read the scripture together. Focus on the main characters one at a time. Discuss Jesus:

- What do we know about him from this story? How old is he? What is his vocation?
- What do we know about the woman? How old might she be? What is her vocation? What about her personal life?
- What does the scripture tell us about their bodily health? Spiritual health?

This encounter with Jesus changed the woman forever. When she went on her way, she was committed to new life in Christ.

Like the woman and Jesus, we have a past, a present, and a future. We have a physical being and a spiritual being. Invite participants to diagram their lives in a timeline. Pass out the 36 inch strips of cash register tape. Tell participants to write their date of birth on the far left; on the far right have them put their “date of death”—if they could choose. Divide the rest of the space into ten-year increments. In each decade, write significant events such as baptism, siblings born, family moves, braces on teeth, confirmation class, first job, accomplishments, graduation, education, jobs, careers, marriage, deaths, religious experiences, church associations, and so forth. These should all be life-shaping events. This is a private individual activity, and they will not be required to share, although some may. Finally, between today’s age and the possible age of death ask them to write significant events that they hope for or want to happen. Include significant faith events.

Throughout the activity, encourage participants to consider how their lives honor the body that God has given them. As participants take home their time lines, encourage them to revisit them throughout the week, praying that God guide them in body and in spirit.

9 Defining Moments

Leader preparation: Events in our lives help shape us and define who we are. Often these events catch us unaware but can change our lives forever. Sometimes we are fortunate to notice; other times we miss them. In this activity, participants will create a calendar of celebrations to help honor the body throughout the coming year. Read the activity guidelines. Obtain a copy of the book from a library or from an online bookstore such as Amazon.com. Review scripture passages. Pray that God open your eyes to the presence of everyday miracles.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Book: *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* by Byrd Baylor, pictures by Peter Parnall (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986).
- personal calendars: day-planners, cell phones, iPads, and so forth
- stickers or stars for those with paper calendars

There are times and events in our lives that shape us and define who we are. Often these events come at us unaware. Think back over 1 Kings and John 4 concerning Elijah and the woman at the well, respectively. (If necessary, reread these passages as a group to refresh memories.) *What were the defining moments for Elijah? For the woman? What symbols might be used to represent these moments?* (Broom tree, jar of water and bread for Elijah; water jug, well, Jesus for the woman.)

Invite participants to sit comfortably as you read *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*. Show pictures. Ask participants what surprising and special events have shaped them. (Examples: meeting their life partners, the rainbow that appeared at a time when someone needed it most, a stray puppy that wheedled its way into a participant's life and heart.) Ask how was God present in these events, and how taking note of these special occurrences relates to honoring the body.

Invite participants to open their calendars. At random, have them select one day per month for the next year and mark it. This should be a "normal day" and not a holiday, birthday, or other special anniversary. If they are using an electronic device, they can put a smiley symbol or some other special marker on each day. If they are using a paper calendar, give them a sticker to mark one day per month. Explain: *Over the coming year you are taking charge of celebrations in your life. Whenever you come upon a marked day, you are to do something to make it special: take a walk on your lunch hour, go out to dinner, do something for a friend, dance in the rain—whatever! Make it a Sabbath moment of celebration. Give thanks to God for the miracles that occur around you constantly and take note! You honor the body by recognizing God at work in and around you.*

Reflect

Our bodies are as marvelous as they are mysterious. In many ways they are still uncharted territories waiting to be explored and discovered. As you navigate the coming weeks, months, and years, remember that you are a beloved creation of God; your body is a sacred vessel.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

As adult learners come in all shapes and sizes, they also bring a variety of experiences with scripture. For some, this may be a first encounter, while others may be steeped in Bible learning and experience. All are welcomed here as equals. Together learners read and experience scripture with open eyes, hearts, and minds. The study of scripture requires patience and practice as new ideas and understandings are revealed. Encourage learners to engage in all activities, mindful that each brings new opportunities to grow in faith as they honor the body revealed in the texts.

About this Exploration

Through careful study and prayer, we discern scripture's guidance for faithful living. From the creation of human beings in Genesis to the Gospel accounts of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Bible references and celebrates the human body. The body is a source of wonder in the Psalms, of delight in the Songs of Solomon, and of hope in the New Testament. We learn of God's tender embrace of humanity, made in God's very image. We discover bodies of all ages, abilities, and healthiness—multifaceted and diverse. While scripture cannot be used as an inerrant blueprint for modern living, it presents the opportunity to continually evaluate and reimagine the miraculous and amazing vessel that God not only gives but co-habits with us. Scripture is a living, breathing source continually growing and changing as it empowers persons in all ages and of all ages.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:1–25
Romans 12:1–8

Leader Preparation

Find a quiet place to sit outdoors or near a window with a good natural view. Ponder the visible life forms. Look at your hands; consider the work they do and are capable of. Imagine the hand of God skillfully melding and molding the life forms you see. Open yourself to the playful and joyful creative power that resides within you—a God-given manifestation of the Divine. Be ready to engage learners in spontaneous activities to honor the body.

Pray: *Creative Majesty, let us celebrate the joyful, useful body you give to each one. In our diversity may we find unity in the joy of being uniquely and wonderfully made. 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 Paper Plate Portrait (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: In this exploration participants will consider the unique characteristics of each individual in God’s world. Take a few minutes to study yourself in a mirror. What facial characteristics define you? How do you see God’s image reflected in you? Gather supplies. Participants need to sit in a circle for the activity.

Supplies:

- dinner size paper plates or an 8½ “ x 11” paper for each person
- markers

Welcome participants. Invite them to be seated in a circle. Pass out a paper plate or piece of paper and a marker to each participant. In Genesis 2:1–25 we learn that we are created in the image of God. In this activity, we honor in a fun way the facial characteristics that God gives. Tell participants to follow these directions.

- Write your initials in a corner on the back of the paper or plate.
- Draw your facial shape. Use the whole space to make a large representation of your face (round, square-jawed, heart-shaped, oval or other).
- Pass the paper plate to the person on your right.
- On your new sheet of paper/plate, draw your eyes.
- Pass the paper/plate to the right. Draw your nose.
- Pass the paper/plate. Draw your mouth.
- Pass the paper/plate. Draw your ears.
- Pass the paper/plate. Draw your hair.
- Continue until a complete face appears on the plate.

Invite participants to find their initialed paper plate. Share responses. Close in prayer: *Holy God, thank you that we are beautifully and wonderfully made and that each of us is your reflection in the world. As we leave this place, may this activity remind us that every face is unique and special. Help us to look upon the faces of all people through your eyes of love and acceptance. Amen.*

2 Modeling in Clay

Leader preparation: Locate supplies and prepare space. Read Genesis 2 out loud several times until you can read it like the story it is. Find classical music to play quietly in the background. In this activity, participants use clay to model life forms as inspired through the reading of scripture.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- modeling clay
- (optional) self-hardening clay
- plastic tablecloth or wax paper for each person to roll clay upon
- classical music to play in background, such as Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRxofEmo3HA&feature=related>), and the means to play it

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

Have the music playing as learners arrive. Welcome all to this exploration of scripture in the faith practice Honoring the Body. Ask participants for a summary of the creation story as they remember it. What did God use as God created? Yes, dust! (Or dirt or clay.) God liked playing in the dirt! It is a fun image. As the story goes, out of the dust of the earth God molded and created life forms before breathing into them the very breath of life.

Invite the participants to play like God. Let the words of scripture and the music inspire them. There is no right or wrong way to mold in clay. Their creation can be entirely new (new species are found every day on this planet; every newborn is a new creation), or it can be something that already exists. What they create and how it looks is entirely up to them. Read Genesis 2:1–25 at least twice as the music plays. Then play music as they work silently in clay. Please keep quiet to allow each person space to create without interruption.

Allow 10–15 minutes for the clay modeling activity. When you notice the learners finishing, give them a two-minute warning, then a one-minute warning. Turn off the music. If time allows, have learners share creations and reflections on the experience. Be sure that the creations are displayed somewhere for all to see. Thank them for their willing participation in the playful act of creation.

③ All God's Critters

Leadership preparation: Read Genesis 2 and Romans 12:1–8. Consider the handiwork of God in creation of the world and all its inhabitants.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song: “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir,” by Bill Staines, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcG1JNpazN4>
- computer or other viewing device

Have learners sit so they may comfortably view the video. Distribute the Bibles and read Genesis 2 and Romans 12:1–8 together. The Genesis passage was written long ago, probably by a priest or group of priests from the temple. It is a written recording of the creation story that had been kept alive through oral tradition. The Apostle Paul is believed to have penned the letters to the Romans in the first century. It was written before the four Gospels. *How does Genesis relate to Romans? What is the purpose of each writing? How do they relate? Differ?*

Play the video of “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir.” Invite learners to enjoy as they consider humankind’s place alongside other members of God’s creation. After the video, discuss what they saw. *What is the role of the human critter in creation? What responsibilities do humans share for the planet? How can scripture empower and guide us? What actions can individuals take to preserve and protect God’s creation?*

Ask learners to join in prayer, each adding one petition as you go around the circle. Conclude by saying, “And all God’s faithful critters say amen!”

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Instant Massage (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Create a space where participants can stand comfortably in a circle. In this activity, learners honor the body by offering instant massages. Read through the guidelines below. Bow your head; ask God’s healing presence in your time together.

Supplies:

- (optional) soft and soothing background music

Welcome participants to this sacred space created for a time with God and one another. Tell them this will be a physical session when they may honor their bodies through gentle stretches and instant massages. Our bodies are marvelously and wondrously made. We often work harder than we realize with not enough relaxation or rest. Tell participants that this activity engages touch in the form of a group-led massage. If this is an uncomfortable activity for anyone, he or she may choose simply to observe. Ask willing participants to stand in a circle and follow your simple directions. (If you use music, turn it on now.)

- Stand loose with arms at your sides, palms facing inward. With open mouth gently nod head forward, back; turn left and right; repeat.
- Shake hands loosely at sides. Gently reach both hands overhead, stretching right, then left, repeat. Turn to your right so everyone is looking at the back of a neighbor.
- Gently massage the shoulders and neck of the person in front of you (allow a few moments). Turn around and massage the person behind you in the same fashion.
- Turn hands sideways as vertical paddles and gently beat them up and down your neighbor’s spine. Turn around and repeat with the other neighbor. With hands flat open, rub the shoulder blades in a circular motion, moving in and out toward the spine. Return and repeat with other neighbor.
- Turn back to center. Inhale. Lift shoulders up to your ears and hold. Exhale as you drop them down. Repeat. Repeat again. Shake out your hands. Reach one hand behind and pat yourself on the back. Smile!

Thank participants for sharing in this time of stretching and relaxation! Remember: when we honor our bodies, we honor God.

5 “Imago Dei”

Leader preparation: Access the YouTube recording of “Imago Dei.” Play it one time, focusing on the visual accompaniment to the song. Close your eyes and play it a second time, allowing your own images to emerge in your mind’s eye. After viewing the YouTube recording, participants will create an “Image of God” collage together.

Supplies:

- “Imago Dei,” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>
- computer or projection device
- magazines
- artwork board
- scissors
- glue

Welcome the participants and invite them to be seated where they can view the computer screen comfortably. Ask them to think about images of God. *What does God look like? How is God represented in art and in media?* Play the YouTube recording of “Imago Dei.” Ask participants to focus on the visuals and the audio. Discuss. How do representations of God honor the body? What impressions stay with them? Why? Invite participants to close their eyes and listen to the recording an additional time allowing their own images of God to appear in their minds’ eyes.

Divide participants into groups of four or five. Pass out magazines and scissors. Invite participants to cut out magazine images that represent God. Each group creates a collage by pasting images onto the artwork board in a creative fashion. Have groups title each collage “Imago Dei” or “Image of God” with cut-out words and letters. Invite each group to share their collages. Display the finished collages in a public location in the church. Encourage participants to “look for the holy” this week as they watch for people or things that remind them of *imago dei*.



6 All God’s People

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell. Read Romans 12:1–8. Consider the spiritual and bodily gifts God has given you. Offer a prayer of gratitude for these blessings. In this activity, learners reflect on Rockwell’s painting as they consider their personal attributes and characteristics. Look for the hymn “Take My Life” in the hymnal your church uses.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-unto-others-april-1-1961.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell>
- hymn: “Take My Life and Let it Be,” by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>; lyrics, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/t/m/tmlalib.htm> (look in your church’s hymnal for this hymn)

Invite participants to sit where they can easily view the artwork. Have them close their eyes and take a few deep, cleansing breaths—inhaling and exhaling slowly. Invite them to open their eyes and spend some moments viewing the artwork as they consider these questions:

- Who is pictured?
- What is each character doing?
- What are the complexities of those presented?

Invite participants to focus on a person that they most identify with today. After allowing three minutes of silence, invite participants to share reflections of the artwork.

- How does it make them feel?
- Who were they most represented by today?
- What is that character doing, feeling?

Invite participants to read Romans 12:1–8 silently to themselves, and then ask these questions:

- What is Paul saying?
- What is the relationship of this scripture to the Rockwell artwork?
- Where do you fit into the picture?
- What gifts do you claim? How do you use your spiritual gifts? Your physical gifts?

Invite participants to watch the YouTube video of “Take My Life” as they sing along with the song sheet you have provided. Join in singing or saying the words together as your closing prayer. Thank learners for the time you have shared together.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Snapshots of Susana (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Romans 12:1–8. Consider the sacrifices Paul speaks of. How have you given of yourself to God? In this activity participants will consider ways to honor the body as living sacrifices for God. Read “Snapshots of Susana” and the questions that follow.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- story: “Snapshots of Susana” (story follows)

Pass out Bibles and read Romans 12:1–8 together. *How are we to present ourselves before God? Why? What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?*

Read aloud “Snapshots of Susana,” and invite participants to listen closely.

It was late afternoon when Linda noticed the gathering storm clouds. She glanced at her watch. It was time for school to let out. Her nine-year-old daughter, Susana, would be walking home at any minute. Not only would Susana be caught in the storm, she would probably be walking alone as other parents would be picking up their children on such a stormy afternoon. Linda rushed from her house and was driving toward the school when the first raindrops began to fall. She was three blocks from the school when she saw Susana up ahead. Susana was alone, skipping resolutely through the rain, head bent against the wind as the thunder began to boom and the lightening began to flash. Then Susana did something that amazed Linda. When there was lightening, Susana stopped, turned around, looked up, and smiled. As Linda drove closer, she saw her daughter do this three more times.

Linda honked, stopping the car so that Susana could climb inside. “What were you doing?” her mother asked. “Oh,” replied Susana. “God was following me and taking pictures of me to keep me safe. I wanted to be polite, so I stopped to smile.”

Invite participants to respond to this story:

- Is Susana’s attitude the right one?
- A risky one?
- Have you had moments when you thought God was “taking pictures” of you?
- How did that make you feel?

Susana knew herself to be a child of God, infinitely connected at all times. How do we use our bodies to connect with God each day? (Hugs, care for other, tending garden, folding hands in prayer) Thank participants for sharing the time with you. Encourage them to consider meaningful ways to honor their bodies through service to God this week and beyond—and don’t forget to smile when God takes a picture!

8 Playing with Creation

Leader preparation: In this activity participants will create computer generated puzzles or games inspired by words and images from scriptures for congregational use. The puzzles and games will be shared with the congregation through the church newsletter or worship bulletins. Work with the newsletter editor and/or pastor to place the games in the desired venues. Ask participants to bring computers or, if you have one, schedule the use of the church computer lab. Internet access is required. Practice creating your own puzzle or game to bring as an example.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- website: “Puzzlemaker,” <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com>
- computer printer and paper
- paper and pens
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Pass out Bibles, paper, and pens. Read Genesis 2 and Romans 12:1–8 together. What images come to mind from Genesis? Romans? Encourage participants to write down responses to use later in the activity. What words have import? What is happening in each scripture? Who are the key characters? Have learners navigate to the “Puzzlemaker” website.

Invite them to be playful and joyful as they navigate this site and choose a game or puzzle to create for the congregation using the words and insights they have gained from today’s study. Collect puzzles and games to publish. Thank participants for engaging in this scripture-based activity.

9 My Bucket List

Leader preparation: Honoring the body means honoring the one life that God gives to each of us. How we use the time we have is directly related to the way we honor God. In this session, participants will create a bucket list of the top twenty-five things they would like to do before their lives are over. Find a copy of the film *The Bucket List* with Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. Decide whether you will view the entire movie together or the particular selections suggested.

Supplies:

- movie: *The Bucket List*, <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/the-bucket-list/>
- newsprint
- pens or markers

Our lives are a gift of God. Certainly circumstances occur that are beyond our control, but we also have choices to make and opportunities to seize. As we learn in the creation story, God created woman and man. God called the creation “good.” God blessed humankind with the knowledge of good and evil. As adult learners, we have life experiences behind us—some we have chosen and others we have been given.

Watch the film or film segments together.

Creating a plan for our lives helps keep us on the path to wellness and wholeness. Ask participants to create a list of the top twenty-five things they hope to accomplish and experience in the life they have remaining. While this activity is meant to be creative fun, it is also a serious exercise to choose what matters for our lives.

Have participants start with number 1 as the most important goal and go from there. Remind them that this is a personal list, not their partner’s, their spouse’s, or their child’s. Consider that the sky is the limit—money is not a limiting factor. When all are finished, encourage them to share the list with their significant others and perhaps encourage them to make their own bucket lists.

End the session by praising God for the blessings given and those yet to come. May participants’ honor the body God has given them.

Reflect

God continues to create new life every day. In honoring the body, we demonstrate our gratitude for the life God gives. In our respect and recognition of other beings and life forms, we show God our willingness to partner in the care of this marvelous planet. As you go through your life, be mindful of the creating power of God continually at work in you and the world.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Sometimes there are too many leaders and not enough followers. At other times, there are too many followers and not enough leaders. Discipleship causes us to take a hard look at where we currently stand in our walk through life as Christians. Discipleship is not static; it is moving forward, expanding and living as examples of Christ's love in the world. Adults may resist the idea of their lives as testimony, but how we live each day is a witness to our abiding faith and dedication to Christ. Adult learners come with a wide variety of assumptions about discipleship. Together you will learn new insights and grow together, relying on the witness of Christ and the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before.

About this Exploration

When Jesus said to the first disciples, "Come, follow me," he was speaking not only to their hearts and minds, but also to a reorientation of their entire bodies. He expected a physical movement from one place to another and a commitment of their whole person to a new way of living. All Christian disciples are incarnations of God's love and compassion. For modern-day disciples, following Jesus remains an embodied task—one rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle as well as belief. As disciples we are still invited to follow Jesus with our whole selves, engaged body and soul, by God's grace and love. As we care for and with our bodies, in the daily practices of eating, movement, resting, and relating to other God-created beings, we offer new and profound models of Christian discipleship as an embodied practice for others to embrace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 71
Mark 5:21-43

Leader Preparation

Consider what it means to answer Jesus' call, "Come follow me." The response is different for each adult learner. Through discussion, participation in activities, and personal discernment, learners are challenged to go forth empowered to serve God in new ways. Discipleship is a vital, challenging, exciting requirement of Christians. These activities offer a variety of learning opportunities to accompany the diverse interests and abilities of adult learners. As a faith practice, discipleship brings new life, breadth, and meaning to Christ's call.

Prayer: Holy God, Loving Christ, Living Spirit, be present in me, in each activity, and in every adult learner as we share in our time together. May we become true disciples. 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 Personal Examination (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 71 out loud to yourself. Consider your life and your body. When have you been strongest, weakest, neediest, and most assured? How has your body changed throughout your life? How have you used your body for discipleship? In this session, participants will choose a body part to contemplate as God's gift of creation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens/pencils

Read the psalm together. Discuss:

- How do our bodies change throughout our lives?
- How is this helpful and detrimental?
- Each body part contributes to the whole in differing ways through the years. What stages of life are represented in the psalm?

Pass out paper and pens. Invite participants to choose a body part (hand, foot, eye, mouth, or other) and draw that body part. Then have them write descriptors for that organ during each stage of life—what is has been and what it yet will be, including ways to use that body part to honor God as a disciple in daily life. Sharing is optional, if time allows.

Prayer: Holy Creator, mother and father of all that is and is yet to be, thank you for the magnificent bodies in which our spirits dwell. Help us to remember that each part of our body is necessary, significant, and marvelous in myriad ways. May we honor our bodies in the way we live each day to further Christ's witness on earth. Amen.

2 Life Stages Quadrants

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 71. Note specifically the life stages mentioned by the psalmist. Consider your life and how you have grown and changed. Gather supplies. Pray that God be with you and the participants during this session.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- one sheet of 18" x 36" newsprint per participant
- markers
- masking tape

Have participants read Psalm 71 together out loud. Encourage them to listen for the stages of life represented and described. Invite each participant to read a sentence or verse until the entire psalm has been read. Discuss what stages of life they heard. *How does the psalmist distinguish between them? What is the psalmist telling God? What is the overall message of the psalm?*

Distribute the newsprint and markers. Have participants fold the newsprint in half and then again. Unfold it to show four quadrants. Number them. In the first quadrant write "Birth to 13 years;" in the second quadrant "Youth 13–21 years"; in the third quadrant "Adult 21–now"; and in the fourth quadrant "My future years."

- 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.

Participants now fill each quadrant with descriptors (characteristics) typical of that particular age. (Examples: first quadrant—weight at birth, eye and hair color, freckles, learning to walk and talk, attending school, riding bike, playing with siblings, and so forth.) In each quadrant have participants write ways they were engaged in discipleship in those respective years. After 5–10 minutes invite participants to tape their newsprint on the walls around the room. Invite participants to view all the displays and, if there is time, to reflect together on what they see.

Prayer: Holy God, our life is a passage from birth to death. Throughout the journey you are with us. Help us to rejoice in the past, accepting our failures and learning from our mistakes. Give us hope and courage for the future before us as we strive to serve you in all we do. In all ways let our bodies and our lives bring honor to you as living examples of Christ's love in the world. Amen.

3 The Only Life

Leader preparation: In this activity participants will compare scripture to a modern day poet's view of a life journey. Locate a copy of the poem "The Journey" by Mary Oliver. It is a popular modern poem that can be easily found through an online search or in your local public library. Mary Oliver is a winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Read the poem. Read Mark 5:21–43. Consider the questions posed below.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- poem: "The Journey" by Mary Oliver, in *New and Selected Poems Volume One* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 114; http://www.panhala.net/Archive/The_Journey.html and www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNqSWiYWDaw
- note cards
- pens
- (optional) computer with Internet access and projection capability

Read Mark 5:21–43 together. Discuss: *Why do the leader of the synagogue and the woman go to Jesus? What gives them the power to defy the odds? What if they had not gone to Jesus? When have you been in a situation where you begged God for your life? (Ask for examples from those willing to share.)*

Read Mary Oliver's poem, "The Journey." If possible, project it so others can read along, and then discuss the following questions:

- How does her poem compares to the scripture?
- How does following our own path honor our bodies?
- How does following our own path bring glory to God?
- How does this scripture and/or this poem inspire you to share your faith with others?
- How is taking care of self both a selfish and selfless act. What makes such an action holy?

Pass out note cards and pens. Ask participants to consider one life-choice they have made that has been significant for them that they are willing to share anonymously. Tell them to write this choice on the note card. Let them know that you collect the note cards and read what each card says as a petition in the closing prayer.

Prayer: *Holy God, thank you for the opportunities you grant in life. As we celebrate the gifts of our bodies, we honor you through the choices we make as faithful people. Hear these life choices that have made all the difference for us, and, we pray, for your world: [list petitions from cards]. Thank you, God, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. May all we do bring glory and honor to you. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 About Discipleship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity learners will read and discuss the description “About this Exploration” from the attachment. Reread the description and contemplate what discipleship means for you. Make copies of Attachment: Activity 4, “About This Exploration.”

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 4
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Distribute Attachment: Activity 4, “About this Exploration.” Read it together. Divide the group into three teams. Give each team one sheet of newsprint. Invite them to discuss and discern the message, writing bullet points on the newsprint (give them extra pages as needed). After ten minutes call the groups back together. Each team assigns one member to serve as spokesperson to bring their discussion points back to the group. After the teams have worked and reported, then invite the whole group to reflect on the process, asking: *What new understandings did this reveal about discipleship? How does the church membership exhibit discipleship? How does this exercise empower you to be a disciple for Jesus?*



5 Life’s Balancing Act

Leader preparation: Display the artwork, “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” in a central location where all participants will be able to view it easily. Read Mark 5 and the following directions. Gather supplies. This activity involves physical activity and requires careful placement of resources to provide safety for each participant. Participants serve as spotters for one another throughout the activity. Each learner participates as he or she is able. Have beam and blocks in an open area where participants have space to navigate safely.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=wheelchair+and+tightrope>
- Bibles
- 8-foot-long 4” x 6” piece of wood
- two cement blocks,
- two sturdy tables

Life is full of challenges. These challenges can be mountains or molehills, depending on the circumstances and our frame of mind. Invite participants to spend time with the artwork. After a few minutes, ask the group what they think the artist’s intended message was. *What do the tightropes represent? What might the*

person in the wheelchair be feeling? How can discipleship be compared to a tightrope? Other ideas?

Read Mark 5:21–43 together. *What made the difference for the people in these stories? How did their faith change their perceptions their lives? What did they do later, or how did they witness as disciples?*

Relying on faith in God, we are often physically able to do things we had not imagined. Honoring our bodies for God includes using them to their fullest capacity for discipleship no matter how we are individually enabled. Faith can help us to move beyond limitations to use our bodies in new and amazing ways even in challenging circumstances.

Indicate the piece of wood lying on the floor. Tell learners it is a balance beam representing the life of discipleship. Invite participants who are able to walk across the beam in single file. Put one cement block under each end of the beam. Ask participants to walk the beam again. Stand the cement blocks on their ends, supporting the beam, and invite participants to walk the beam. Finally place the ends of the beam on two tables (about two to three feet off the floor). Ask if there are any volunteers to walk it now. Why is it harder now? Discuss how discipleship may become more difficult even as we increase in faith.

God goes with us through good times and hard times. We honor our bodies when we use them to their fullest potential trusting in God to go with us—on the high beam and the low beam. As you go about your life this week, consider ways that your faith helps you to use your body to its fullest potential as a disciple for Christ.

6 We're in This World Together

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 71. Reflect on the passage using the following questions. Creativity and cooperation are attributes that honor the body of Christ. In this activity, participants work together for the good of all. Gather supplies. Tie the ends of each rope together, making four different-sized circles.

Supplies

- 4 ropes of different lengths: 5', 10', 15', 20'
- large open space for the activity
- Bible

Read aloud Psalm 71. Ask: *What is the message of the psalmist? What is the role of the speaker? What is God's role? How does God react to the righteous? Who does God keep? What happens to those who do harm?*

God wants all of us to work together so that all people can be safe and happy in life at every age. Invite the group to rescue one another by helping everyone in the group. Place the longest rope circle on the floor. Ask participants to get inside the circle formed by the rope, without a single body part being outside the circle. When they are inside the circle, they will be safe. Once they have achieved that successfully, ask them to get inside the circle formed by the 15' long rope, and so on, until they get into the smallest circle. As the circles get smaller, it gets increasingly difficult for them to get inside, and they will need to get creative and cooperative to complete the task.

Invite reflections on the experience. What happened when the rope ring got smaller? What did they have to do to get everyone in the smallest circle? How

is a rope ring like our planet? We honor the body of each one when we help one another to live and thrive.

Choose one of the ropes for your closing prayer. Invite everyone to hold onto the rope as you pray. Invite each person to offer a prayer for someone in the world as you go around the circle.

Dear God, help us make the world a welcoming place for all your creation. Today we promise to honor all creation as we remember [the people in Haiti, the victims of hurricanes, the polar bears in the arctic, the homeless, and so on]. We want to live as your righteous people. Amen.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Sing to the Lord (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look through your church's hymnal or song book. Consider the hymns/songs that are most meaningful to you. Why? In this activity participants will select a hymn/song that empowers them in their walk as disciples for Christ. Singing is one way to honor our bodies as we use our voices in prayer and praise. Lay your hands on the hymnal/song book and pray that God's spirit be a joyful and melodious presence in your time together.

Supplies:

- hymnal/song book for each participant (If your congregation uses more than one, a variety works just as well.)

Ask the participants to consider the musical portion of church worship. Hymnody is an integral part of most worship services. Hymns praise God, tell stories, and reinforce key concepts of faith. Ask participants to consider what hymns empower them as disciples for Christ. *How does singing, playing, or listening to music honor our bodies?*

Pass out the hymnals. Give time for all to skim through them. Point out ways hymns are referenced: title, first line, scripture reference, meter, and composer. Invite participants to look through hymnals/song books to choose one that empowers them in their walk with Jesus. After a few minutes, invite participants to share their choices with the group and describe why these are meaningful. Encourage singers who are willing to sing their choices.

8 Café Special: Mark's Sandwich

Leader preparation: Sit quietly. Take a few deep, cleansing breaths. Consider a time when you needed help—perhaps desperately. Was it needed for yourself or a loved one? Remember the feelings you had. What brought relief? How did your faith help you? In this activity participants will consider two stories from Mark. In each story the characters presented are desperate for Jesus' help. Create a small centerpiece with a cloth and candle. Scatter bandages around the base of the candle. Write the small group questions on the newsprint or whiteboard. Read the activity and gather supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- space to break the participants into three groups
- 3" x 5" note cards, pens
- candle, cloth, bandages, and matches
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) sandwich cookies, such as Oreos, for a snack

Light the candle. Have learners sit in quiet contemplation. Give listening points: Mark used a literary technique when he “sandwiched” one story within another. Listen for the two stories. Consider the plight of the characters. Note Jesus’ responses. Read Mark 5:21–43 out loud.

Divide the group into three small groups. Assign each group one character: Jairus, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jesus. Ask groups to reread the scripture and to evaluate their character, using the following prompts. They will have 15 minutes.

- What are the character’s feelings?
- Why does the person do what he or she does?
- What are the character’s actions?
- Why does Mark use this technique?
- How do you feel about your character?
- Assign a spokesperson to share your conclusions with the group.

Call the group back together. Ask each group to report on its character—Jairus first, Jesus second, and the woman third. Ask what new revelations they have and what the essential messages in this passage are. How is the body honored by Jesus? By the others?

Pass out note cards. Say to participants: *Someone you know or someone in your church is currently facing a life crisis. Begin now to hold that person in prayer. Write that person’s name on this card. Think of a way you might offer additional assistance: send a card, take a meal, offer a ride for medical treatment, simply visit to be present, and so forth. Write these ideas. At home, place this card where you will be reminded of your mission down every day. Jesus comes through the compassion we offer. Discipleship requires we honor the body of self and others—the body of Christ. Remember Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman; Jesus comes with a healing power beyond our physical comprehension.*



Children of God

Leader preparation: Obtain copy of the artwork “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt. Hang this artwork where it may be easily viewed. A few weeks in advance, schedule a guest speaker. Provide the speaker with clear guidelines for the presentation. Give the presenter a copy of “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 4, used in Activity 4 to help him or her connect this Exploration of Honoring the Body with the kind of work he or she does. If desired, consult with your pastor to determine a speaker who might be most timely for your congregation. You might consider opening this activity to include other guests from the congregation. Ask group members to help supply refreshments. Contemplate the artwork. Consider the children of the world.

Note: This activity is designed to be the final activity for the Discipleship Exploration.

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 4
- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- guest speaker: PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays—do an online search to find nearest chapters); Big Brother and/or Big Sister; YMCA or YWCA (Young Men or Women Christian Association); local youth shelter (Alternative Center for Girls; Ruth Ellis Center, for example); social worker from local youth or juvenile detention center
- refreshments

Ask participants to spend time viewing the artwork. Ask: *What is going on? How do the colors make you feel? How does this artwork relate to honoring the body? How does this picture involve discipleship? How is caring for children or parents an act of discipleship?*

Explain that the human body is centrally important to any understanding of discipleship; we avoid it at our own risk. Introduce the guest speaker, who is deeply engaged in ministry through his or her work, and provide maximum time for the presentation. If time is available, also allow for questions from the participants.

Prayer: Loving Creator of all people, young and old, weak and strong, however abled, we thank you for this time together. Thank you for the knowledge imparted by our speaker. We ask that you continue to bless their work. Help us to live each day with the certain knowledge that we, too, are your disciples. Every action we make can help further the arrival of your realm on earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reflect

God loves you. God created you to be a part of this world—a part of the great party of life. Go forth empowered to use your individual gifts as best as you are able. Be confident God is well pleased with you. You are a disciple for Jesus Christ. Amen!

Attachment: Activity 4

About this Exploration
Honoring the Body
Discipleship

1. When Jesus said to the first disciples, “Come, follow me,” he was speaking not only to their hearts and minds, but also to a reorientation of their entire bodies. He expected a physical movement from one place to another and a commitment of their whole person to a new way of living.
2. All Christian disciples are incarnations of God’s love and compassion. For modern-day disciples, following Jesus remains an embodied task—one rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle as well as belief. As disciples we are still invited to follow Jesus with our whole selves, engaged body and soul, by God’s grace and love.
3. As we care for and with our bodies, in the daily practices of eating, movement, resting, and relating to other God-created beings, we offer new and profound models of Christian discipleship as an embodied practice for others to embrace.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Adults come with various perceptions of tradition. These can be positive or negative depending on individual experience. For some, traditions are a source of predictable comfort. For others, traditions are perceived as confining and rigid. Teaching and learning about Christian traditions offer a fresh look at the history, heritage, and praxis of the church. Studying existing traditions and engaging in new experiences help adult learners to grow in their understandings and expand their perceptions. Traditions are an integral component as adults consider ways of honoring the body. As a leader, your attitude and willingness to engage new ideas are powerful attributes to bring to this Exploration.

About this Exploration

Tradition presents a mixed perspective on the body. Part of tradition upholds the body as created by God and proclaimed as "good." Hebrew law contains regulations to keep the body safe and healthy, and Hebrew praise includes joyous movement. Jesus shared God's presence in bodily form—touching, laughing, walking, eating, speaking, and exploring. Through Jesus we see the body as "the temple" of God's Spirit. The body is cherished during Sabbath time and engaged fully during worship through song, dance, touch, and more. The same tradition also sees the body as "evil" and opposed to the Spirit, leading individuals and groups to abuse it and attempt to limit its impact on the Spirit. Because this part of tradition does not agree with the teachings of Jesus, it is important to go beyond its influence and seek to honor, feed, celebrate, and engage the body on our spiritual journeys.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Song of Solomon 4:1-7;
5:10-16
Luke 7:36-50

Leader Preparation

This Exploration offers a variety of opportunities to engage in Christian traditions. Some may be well-known; others offer new experiences. Anointing is one ancient tradition that may be unfamiliar to some. Carefully and prayerfully consider each activity as you plan for these special times of learning and engaging. Trust that God will work in and through you as you navigate these activities with the learners.

Prayer: Dear God of ages past, present, and yet to come, be present in our time together as we explore traditions old and new. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 How Beautiful (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:10–16. Think about the elegant imagery of these verses. In this activity participants evaluate scripture’s relationship to honoring the body.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, pens or pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Welcome participants to this faith practice of honoring the body in the Christian tradition. Invite them to sit around the table or tables. Divide the group into pairs or groups of three. Give each team one scripture to read. On a sheet of paper make two columns. The left column lists the body parts identified, and the right column lists descriptors or adjectives for each respective body part. Allow five minutes for the groups to work.

When time is called, invite groups to call out their results as you list them on the newsprint or whiteboard. Discuss what these passages tell us about the human body, about human relationships, and about honoring the body.

In Genesis 2 we learn that God created male and female. The human body is a holy vessel, beautiful in God’s sight. Throughout the faith practice of honoring the body, we explore how honoring the body brings glory and honor to God.

2 Church Tour

Leader preparation: In this activity participants will tour the church building to identify ways that the physical plant takes into account the various representations of human bodies that come to worship, learn, and live in community. Have copies of “About this Exploration” (at the beginning of this exploration) for all participants. Tour the church to prepare yourself using the questions and guidelines posed following the supply list.

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 2, for each person
- church map for each participant
- pens or pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Distribute “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 2, to each participant, allow time to read it, and then explain that this is the context for our time together. Since the beginning of our faith, God’s people have gathered as communities to worship. Through the years these worship spaces have had various characteristics. Each community’s culture and values are exemplified in the kinds of spaces in which they worship. Invite participants to tour the building from top to bottom, visiting all areas, including restrooms, classrooms, storage rooms, office, entry, sanctuary, basement, and so forth. In each area they are to assess how the space honors the human body. For example: Is the chancel area accessible only by stairs? Are drinking fountains and restrooms easily used by all ages, even those who are being potty trained? Consider how the space attends to the senses: touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. In what ways does the space accommodate

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

different learning styles, such as visual, auditory, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinesthetic, and musical?

Pass out maps of the church building. Divide the group into twosomes or threesomes. Encourage participants to go to as many places as time allows—especially visiting places where they have never been before. If accessibility is an issue for some, be sure they have a partner who can help them or can report on a particular space for them. Depending on the size of the physical plant, the tour might take 10 to 15 minutes. Agree on a return time. Have each group start in a different location so that all areas of the building will be covered in the allotted time.

Encourage participants to look at the spaces as if seeing them for the first time, considering these questions: Would I feel welcomed here? What is the comfort level of this space? Would children, or older persons, or persons with physical or mental limitations find this place safe and welcoming? What are the positive attributes of the space? How might the space be improved?

Before you begin the reporting, invite responses regarding how the church plant reflects the “About this Exploration” statement.

③ Anointed and Blessed

Leader preparation: Find or purchase a small vial of essential oil or have a small dish of light olive oil. Read Luke 7:36–50. Consider the questions posed below. Put yourself in Jesus’ place. What would this woman’s action mean to you? In this activity participants read scripture to discern how anointing is one way to honor the body and then join in a brief service of anointing and blessing.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- oil in small dish or vial for anointing
- soft cloth for wiping hands

Anointing is an ancient Christian rite, symbolic of healing, forgiveness, and wholeness—and welcome. Invite participants to close their eyes as you read Luke 7:36–50. Tell them to visualize all that is going on. Now, invite someone else to read as you all close your eyes and listen for the words spoken by each person in the scripture. Have someone else read a third time so you can each imagine the touch and feel of the anointing woman.

Discuss the group’s reactions to the scripture. Why is the anointing significant here? In what ways are the powerful and powerless people redefined in this passage? What does anointing mean to the woman? To Jesus? To participants?

Invite participants into a moment of silent prayer. Encourage them to ask God for a specific need for the day, such as forgiveness or healing or redirection for their life.

Then invite participants to stand in a circle. Offer a brief prayer asking God’s blessing through the anointing oil. Pass around the vial and have each person place a sign of the cross on the next person’s forehead or hand saying, “I anoint you in the name of God the Creator, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You are loved. You are a child of God. Amen.” (You may need to practice this statement a few times so that it is familiar to all.)

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Christian Tradition Exploration (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the “About this Exploration” paragraph from Attachment: Activity 2. In this activity, participants will compare and contrast ways that the body is cherished or abused in the name of faith.

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 2
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pens

Read in unison “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 2. Invite the participants to consider that the body discussed here is the united body of Christ. Divide learners into groups of three. Ask them to use the paragraph to make two lists, one about Christian traditions perceived as honoring the body (hymn singing, pastors wearing robes, baptism, hats covering heads, bowing for prayer, and so on), and another list about Christian traditions perceived as dishonoring the body (working on the Sabbath, selling liquor on Sunday, wearing inappropriate clothing to church, gambling, and so forth). Set a five-minute time limit.

Draw the group back together. Share responses and list them on the newsprint. Ask how we can be sure what we do honors God without dishonoring others. In what ways have participants’ perceptions changed through this exercise? Invite them to share this discussion with their family, friends or co-workers during the coming week.

5 Take My Life

Leader preparation: Read Song of Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:10–16. Reflect on the portrayal of human love and attraction. Make preparations for the group to sing “Take My Life and Let It Be.” In this session learners will compare and contrast scripture to the hymn and discern ways that our bodies reflect our faith and God’s love. Gather supplies and prepare space so that participants may view the YouTube video.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymn: “Take My Life and Let it Be,” by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>; lyrics, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/m/tmlalib.htm>
- computer with Internet access and/or projection device

Read Song of Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:10–16 in unison and discuss ways the body is depicted. How does the body honor God in these verses? Introduce the hymn, and discuss ways that “take my life” is depicted in the hymn. How does the hymn honor God? Ask participants to think of ways dress, body adornment, and body art can be used to honor or dishonor God. How does one’s location, environment, and culture influence these choices? For example, dressing for hot or cold climates may determine how much of the body is exposed. How did Jesus dress? Why don’t followers of Jesus dress like him? How do/should Christians adorn themselves? What are some current cultural fashions that may honor or dishonor the body? Discuss positive and negative ramifications of each. How do

we make choices for ourselves? How do we honor the choices of others? (Be sure to bring in other cultures, for instance, where there is no set dress code.)

Each person has a responsibility to honor God through honoring his or her body. How to do that is as varied as the number of individuals that populate the earth.

6 You Were There

Leader preparation: Read Luke 7:36–50 and focus on the characters. In this activity participants will be asked to identify with one of the characters to determine how honoring the body is demonstrated or denied. Consider the preparations you would make if Jesus were coming to dine at your home. Write questions on newsprint or a whiteboard ahead of time. Gather supplies and prepare for your guests, the participants.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Luke 7:36–50 together. Invite participants to visualize each of the main characters. *What does each one say? What does each one do?* Now divide the group into three subgroups. Have them separate to work together in three locations apart from the other groups. Give newsprint and markers to each group. Explain that they will have approximately 10 minutes to work.

Assign each group a character from the scripture: Pharisee, Jesus, woman. Each group rereads the scripture from the assigned perspective, answering the questions written on the newsprint or whiteboard as that character might. *What do I think? What do I do? What do I feel? How am I honoring Jesus? How am I honoring myself? How do my actions glorify God?*

When time is up, invite each group to share its responses. Have them post their newsprint sheets for all to see. In closing, remind participants that we all have a responsibility to honor the other and our own bodies. We cannot always rely on societal norms or our peers; in some cases, they will be wrong.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Encourage participants to think how their words and actions honor the people of God they encounter in the coming week.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Love Letter from God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:10–16. Consider the love and adoration that occurs as one beloved describes the other. In the faith practice of honoring the body, we discover God’s spiritual and physical love for all people.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- writing paper or stationery, envelopes with postage, pens

People are God’s beloved creation, each with unique qualities and characteristics, including physical manifestations. God created each of us. How we take care of our body is one way we honor and glorify God.

Remind the participants that this faith practice Exploration is about honoring the body as God's unique creation. Invite them to consider their own bodies and the specific details with which God blesses each of them. Have the women read Solomon 4:1–7 and the men read Solomon 5: 10–16.

Pass out paper, pens, and envelopes. Invite each participant to write a letter to him- or herself from God using the Solomon passage as a guideline. Explain that this letter is addressed to you from God. It is meant to be a letter of love as a parent would write to a child or as a partner would write to a beloved. Remind them that all unique individual attributes are given by a loving God. Even the aspects of self we might not find pleasing are pleasing to God. Write the letter in loving acknowledgment of God's work in you. Feel free to ask God's guidance for you and your body. Ask participants to seal the letter and address it to themselves. Tell them you will mail the letter to them in a few weeks (give a specific date).

8 Service of Anointing

Leader preparation: In this activity participants study the anointing of Jesus found in Luke 7:36–50. This will help to prepare a service of anointing to be shared with the entire congregation. Talk with the pastor, the worship committee, or other appropriate bodies to coordinate the time and date for a short service of anointing to take place during or following worship. Gather supplies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- a vial of essential oil or olive oil to be used in the service
- Bible concordance for reference
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

While anointing with oil is an ancient tradition in the church, it is not widely experienced today. Ask if anyone present has been anointed. Ask anyone who has to describe the experience. Explain that many pastors carry vials of oil with them to hospitals or to those considered near death. Jesus' disciples were encouraged to go forth to baptize and anoint the sick. In Luke 7:36–50 anointing is used as a seal of forgiveness. In many churches baptism by water is followed by the sign of the cross with anointing oil being marked on the forehead of the one baptized. Kings and prophets were anointed to lead as servants of God.

Read the scripture together. Discuss. *Why does the woman anoint Jesus? What is the reaction of the other guests? Why? What is Jesus' reaction? Why?* Invite volunteers to use the concordance to look up other passages that include anointing. Read these aloud.

As a group design a short service on anointing that would include all people. Worshipers can be invited to come forward or to one or more stations to receive the sign of the cross on their forehead or hand. The pastor may teach about anointing in the sermon and suggest a communal prayer of healing and forgiveness. The prayer for the service may also be written by this group. A brief exploration of anointing will also be necessary. Words of blessing will need to be spoken as all persons receive the oil on their foreheads, such as these: "With this oil, you are forgiven and renewed. Amen." Or "In the name of the Loving God, the Living Christ, and the Renewing Spirit, you are blessed. Amen."

9 “Celebrate the Body” Dinner with Guest Speaker

Leader preparation: Plan ahead with participants. Decide on a time and place for an “Honor the Body” dinner celebration. Invite a guest speaker to share expertise in their work that honors the body (see suggested speakers in the supply list). Read Luke 7:36–50. Consider what it would mean to have Jesus arrive at your dinner celebration. How would you honor him?

Supplies:

- guest speaker such as a massage therapist, physical therapist, or yoga or Pilates instructor
- preparations for dinner and a pre-arranged space
- table settings and dishes that honor the body
- Bible
- an extra table setting at an empty chair in honor of Jesus

Remind the participants that Jesus often gathered with friends, disciples, and others for meals. Read Luke 7:36–50. Invite the participants to plan a celebration feast that will honor the body. Imagine the kind of meal that would be fitting for Jesus. What healthy and nourishing foods would be desired? Each participant is asked to bring his or her own table setting and a healthy dish to share. Discuss whether the meal will be vegetarian, locally grown, representing a variety of ethnicities, or potluck, with each participant bringing a favorite dish, maybe a favorite comfort food.

Decide on the time and date. Decide on guest speakers to invite (see guidelines in the supply list). Ask volunteers to offer a dinner grace and a closing prayer. Another volunteer may wish to cover the tables and bring centerpieces. Everyone will be engaged in clean-up. Make sure that each participant has some responsibility for this dinner.

On the set date gather to pray and eat together. Invite the speaker to join in the meal as learners share experiences from this Honor the Body faith practice. Following dinner, invite the speaker to provide a 30–40-minute program on the topic of honoring the body. Thank everyone for joining in this special activity. Close with prayer.

Reflect

The human body is an integral part of many traditions within the church. Baptism, confirmation, ordination, communion, and passing of the peace all engage the body. Wrap your arms around your body and give yourself a big hug as you say: “[Your name], you are my beloved child. I am with you always through the end of the age. Amen.”

About this Exploration Honoring the Body Christian Tradition

Tradition presents a mixed perspective on the body. Part of tradition upholds the body as created by God and proclaimed as “good.” Hebrew law contains regulations to keep the body safe and healthy, and Hebrew praise includes joyous movement. Jesus shared God’s presence in bodily form—touching, laughing, walking, eating, speaking, and exploring. Through Jesus we see the body as “the temple” of God’s Spirit. The body is cherished during Sabbath time and engaged fully during worship through song, dance, touch, and more. The same tradition also sees the body as “evil” and opposed to the Spirit, leading individuals and groups to abuse it and attempt to limit its impact on the Spirit. Because this part of tradition does not agree with the teachings of Jesus, it is important to go beyond its influence and seek to honor, feed, celebrate, and engage the body on our spiritual journeys.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Adults come with varying experiences of service and mission within the church. Many may feel inadequate to share their faith in overt service. Others may have had several opportunities in working openly for Christ. In this modern world adult learners also may find the concept of Sabbath difficult. In honoring the body God requires both service and rest. Introducing experiences of mission may start with tasks that can be easily completed in short time frames and with minimal levels of commitment. Introducing experiences of Sabbath will mean real engagement in the practice. Honoring the body requires attention to details in context and mission of the church. This Exploration of context and mission engages the mind, body, and spirit for God's work.

About this Exploration

Since our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God's grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons. We are invited to help others see God in themselves through the presence of God in us. When we love, serve, nurture, and care for one another by respecting and honoring our body and other's bodies, we live out the healthy wholeness for which God created us. Considering the various and diverse contexts in which all live, we learn to choose well between caring for or abusing the body, even as we consider Christian responses to healthy and wholesome as well as violent and abusive living.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 23:10–12
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration adult learners put belief into action. Opportunities for study, prayer, and service unite to engage the learners where they live. They will come with differing abilities and experiences, and together they will leave this Exploration with new understandings of context and mission. Be ready for real growth as you and the learners engage the activities together.

Prayer: Our Mother, Father God, thank you for the gift of life. As we explore the faith practice of honoring the body, guide us to new understandings of how we might serve you as we serve one another and all creation. 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 With These Hands (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the “About this Exploration” description. Consider when, where, and how you have engaged in loving, serving, nurturing, and caring for another. In this activity learners begin with prayer that God might guide and bless them individually and as a group as they seek to honor the body through service. Prepare the opening and closing lines to the petitions offered by learners.

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 1
- chairs arranged in a circle
- 2” x 8½” strips of paper (one per person)

Welcome learners to this Exploration of context and mission. Read together “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 1. Discuss what does this statement mean to the group. *What is challenging about it? What is exciting or engaging about it?* Ask them to consider times when have they been engaged in loving, serving, nurturing, and caring for another. *How did you feel?* Consider times when others have engaged in loving, serving, nurturing, and caring for participants. *How was that experience?*

In this Exploration of honoring the body, we engage in service that upholds the entire body of Christ. Explain that this session will end with prayer for the hands of each participant. Pass out slips of paper. Tell them to write “With these hands, I ____.” (For example, “With these hands, I will serve the young mothers of the church.” Each should fill in the blank with some service to the body of Christ. Explain that you will collect the papers and read them aloud as prayer petitions while participants hold hands in prayer. Pray together using the petitions. End with, “. . . and all God’s people say ‘Amen.’”

2 Sabbath Word Map

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 23:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. What is the overall message? Why does God rest? Why does God desire that we rest? In this activity, learners will use understandings gained from scripture to aid them as they draw a word map of “Sabbath.” Gather supplies and prepare the space so that learners may work in small groups.

Supplies:

- newsprint (18” x 36”)
- colored markers
- Bibles
- word map worksheet such as can be found at <http://www.eslflow.com/Visio-brainstorm-worksheet-cluster-diagram.pdf>

Together read Exodus 23:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. Ask what the overall message is. *Why is Sabbath necessary for God? For us? For other creatures?* Review ways that Sabbath is described in the scriptures. Divide the group into teams of four. Each team receives one large piece of paper and colored markers to create a word map. Give directions and give them 10–15 minutes of work time.

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

Word Map Directions: In the middle of the paper write the word SABBATH in large letters. Using arrows, circles, and different colors, write other words that come to mind as each small group considers Sabbath, the scriptures, and learners' individual lives. Continue adding words in relationship to one another until the paper is filled. Note the final shape and, using markers, create a picture that encompasses the entire word map. Give a one-minute warning after nine minutes.

When time is called, tape word maps to the wall and invite each group to share their experience.



3 "Out of Work"

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork "Out of Work" by Käthe Kollwitz. Create a space where all may view the artwork clearly and comfortably. Spend time in your own contemplation of the work of the artist. Pray for each person depicted in the scene.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Out of Work," by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Invite participants to sit where they can comfortably view the artwork. Ask them to close their eyes and take a few deep, cleansing breaths. Ask them to quietly contemplate the scene before them. Do not tell them the title of the painting until they have had time with it. After some minutes, tell them it is titled "Out of Work." *How is the body represented by each character? How is the body honored or dishonored? Why did the author use these colors?*

After some minutes have passed, suggest that art invites us to new experiences that draw us out of ourselves and sometimes deeper into ourselves. Ask participants to use the artwork as a catalyst for a story. Go around the group and have each person add one line to the fictional tale. Encourage them to name the characters represented and explain what is going on. Continue in this fashion with each person adding information until the story comes to a conclusion. Ask participants to share their reflections on the experience. Invite the group to share some alternative endings. What are some ways the church can be present for those who are hurting or experiencing need? How does honoring the experiences of others build up the body of Christ?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 The Sabbath Walk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 23:12 and consider God's commandment to rest. The Sabbath is a generous gift, but it is also a requirement of God. In this activity participants will experience a Sabbath walk of rest and solitude.

Supplies:

- Bible
- space for walking outdoors or inside the church

Read Exodus 23:12 to the group. When God finished creating, God took a break; God rested. It is hard for us to take time off from our busy lives. The fact is, we are not that important! Life—the job, the day, the world—will go on without us.

The message for us in the scripture is: If God can rest, so can we. In fact, God “requests” this of us in the commandment: on the seventh day you shall rest.

There is an old story about a Native American tribe that went on a long journey. Day after day they marched steadily toward their destination. Suddenly, and seemingly without notice, they would stop walking and sit down to rest. Sometimes they would make a camp, staying for a few days before resuming their travels. When asked why, they explained that they needed the time of rest so that their souls could catch up with them.

Invite the participants to take a Sabbath walk to give our souls time to catch up with us. While the walk of the Native American tribe was to reach a certain destination, our walk has no destination; it is simply a time of Sabbath. Explain there will be a set time of 30 minutes. At the end of that time, they will return to this space.

Walk slowly and silently, respectful of the space of others. Do not hurry. There is no place you must go. Let your senses guide you. If something interests you—a flower, a crack in the sidewalk, a view from a window—slow down, observe, linger. Take time to smell, listen, touch, taste, and see. Consider this time a gift that is precious and will never come again. Have no expectations; simply be present in the moment. When you are inclined to stop, stop. When you feel the urge to move, begin again.

At the end of 30 minutes, return to this space. Observe what has happened to your body, your mind, your spirit, and your sense of time. If time allows, have participants share their reflection on the experience.



5 Mother and Child

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt. Hang the artwork where it may be easily viewed by participants. In this activity learners consider ways to honor the body through Sabbath practice. Learners conduct interviews with a child or youth of the church to share their faith and teach about Sabbath. Consult with the pastor or Christian education leader to set up a time when youth or older children can be interviewed; this may happen before or after worship one Sunday. Set up a controlled space where adults may sit with children in a one-on-one situation in a public space at church.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother,” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- Bible
- paper and pens

Invite learners to be seated where they may comfortably view the artwork. Ask them to take a few minutes to contemplate the picture. Suggest that they note the colors, the subjects, the expressions, the body positions. Discuss their impressions. What do the colors represent for them? How does this picture make them feel? What might be the artist’s intended message?

Have volunteers read aloud Exodus 23:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. How does the picture relate to the message of these scripture passages? Sabbath rest takes many forms; we can rest with one another. God also requests that we teach our children how to live as faithful Christians. Honoring the body through Sab-

bath time is an important lesson to teach. Pass out blank sheets of paper. Tell participants that on [insert date here] space and time has been created where they can interview children and/or youth using these guidelines. Develop a list of questions that each adult will ask, such as: What is Sabbath? Does your family have special events that only take place on Sunday? What makes Sunday special? Discuss possible responses and additions with opportunities for interviewers to share why Sunday is important to them. Have participants take home the questions to prepare their responses and testaments for the interview day.

6 Living in the Now

Leader preparation: Consider what the term “Sabbath” means to you. How do you honor Sabbath in your life now? In this activity learners will write a dynamic translation of Exodus 23:10–12, incorporating modern language to bring the meaning forward to contemporary time as they discern the faith practice of honoring the body.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens
- (optional) accessible translations of Exodus 23:10–12 such as *The Message* or Today’s English Version

Ask what Sabbath is. How do participants honor Sabbath time currently in their lives? Pass out Bibles and read Exodus 23:10–12. Discuss what the message is. The illustrations used date to antiquity and address learners of a previous age. Read another translation of the same passage. *How is this different? The same?*

Invite learners to write a dynamic translation of the Exodus passage. This will be a paraphrase of what the scripture means using their own words. Each person rewrites the scripture using examples that he or she thinks will speak to the modern reader. Set a 10–15-minute work period. Give a two-minute warning as you see writers finishing.

When everyone is done, ask for volunteers to share the new translations. Reflect on the experience together. Encourage learners to use this technique whenever they encounter scripture that seems difficult to understand. Bringing the story forward with modern language and supplying modern names for ancient ones is a way to increase understanding, interpretation, and application of scripture for the time in which we now live.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Family Dinner Guided Imagery (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Adult learners come to this Exploration with varying understandings of Sabbath. Some will come from families who worshiped together. Others may have little experience with organized religion. In this activity learners will share stories of family dinners. The dinner table is one place where faith is shared and family relationships solidified.

Supplies: None

Invite participants to sit comfortably around the table. Ask them to consider this table. What activities commonly take place around tables? Invite participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on floor, hands in their laps, and eyes closed. Have them take a couple of deep, cleansing breaths. Tell them to imagine or remember a story that fits the directions you are about to share.

Think of a family meal that is an especially happy memory. Remember how the table was set and who was gathered there. [Ask learners to mentally go around the table and visualize the face of each person.] How old is each remembered person? What expressions does each wear? Consider the table. How is it decorated? What food is being served? What is the reason for this gathering? What day of the week? What holiday might it be? Consider the sounds. What does each learner hear? Is there laughter? Are the voices loud or soft? Does everyone speak? What aromas are associated with the food? Who is the oldest present? Who is the youngest? Who is seated at the head of the table? Where is the person remembering seated? Was a prayer offered? By whom? Savor the meal for a few more minutes as you think about the conversation and interaction of those present. When all are ready, invite them to open their eyes and return to this room.

Invite learners to share their reflections on the experience. How is their memory of this meal related to Sabbath? How can we create Sabbath in our daily experience with family? Invite learners to consider this activity as they go about their week. Encourage them to make time for family Sabbath as well as personal Sabbath time. Christians exist in community, not in solitude. Jesus often ate with friends, disciples, and even Pharisees, tax collectors, and sinners. The dinner table is one place where faith is shared and rest is received. We are called to love and care for the other. One way is to help create time for Sabbath with those we love. The family dinner is a good place to begin.

8 The Best Screen Saver Ever—Planning a Party

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 12:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. Consider God’s commandment to rest after a time of work. In this activity learners plan a time of Sabbath from all screen technology. Check the church calendar for open dates and meeting spaces for such an event. Reflect on activities that involve others, but do not utilize technology. Gather supplies. Pray that God blesses your time to create a meaningful time of fellowship and interaction for members of the greater congregation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “card” tables
- various board games that can be played in an hour, such as Sorry, Apples to Apples, Scrabble, and so on (and tables to play them on)
- decks of cards with rules to some games, such as Old Maid, Hearts, Gin Rummy
- list of potential meeting dates, times, and spaces

Invite participants to sit around different tables. Pass out Bibles and read the scriptures together. Ask them what are ways that we rest. What are some recreational activities we enjoy? How many choose television or computer time for recreation? How often do they use their cell phones, iPods, or other technological devices during the day?

Some experts estimate that the average American spends six hours of screen time each day; this includes computers, phones, television, and so forth. Spending time in community is important for Christians and the health of all human beings. We need face-to-face encounters to socialize and relate. Explain the task at hand: to plan a screen saver party where members of the church come to hang out together and socialize over pre-arranged games and activities. Choose a date, time, and meeting space together. Discuss games to bring and activities to play. Decide upon refreshments and enlist volunteers to bring them. Have volunteers advertise in the church newsletter, e-mail contacts, and worship bulletins. Art-works may also be made.

Pray: Loving God, you know our lives are busy and that busyness often overtakes us to the point of exhaustion and to the detriment of our personal relationships. You command us to rest and to play. Help us to create a time that is fun and safe and builds up the community for your work. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

If you have time remaining, play games together.

Visits of Compassion

Leader preparation: Watch the video of “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry.” Using the questions following the supply list, reflect upon God’s presence throughout your life. In this activity, learners will consider God’s ever-present guidance as they visit persons who have become home-bound or institutionalized. Talk with your pastor to determine which members of the church to visit.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry,” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>
- list, with contact information, of potential members to visit

Invite participants to sit where they may easily view the video. Play the video. Discuss when they have felt God near. *When did God feel distant? Who are the people that helped, guided, nurtured, and loved them?* Discuss how God’s love is demonstrated through our actions.

Explain that we are going to extend the Christian hand of love by making visits to the home-bound or those institutionalized. It is preferred that learners visit someone they do not know well or have never met. Plan the visit outline together. A common visit might begin with this or similar introduction: “My name is ___; I come on behalf of (church name).” Instruct participants to then share a few things about themselves, a psalm or Bible passage to read, or what they’ve been learning in honoring the body. They must let the person they are visiting talk as well. Appropriate questions include “How are you feeling today?” “What can you tell me about yourself?” “What is your relationship to the church?” Explain that the visit may simply be about sitting and listening. Plan to stay 30–60 minutes. They should close the session with a prayer; perhaps the Prayer of Jesus (the Lord’s Prayer), where the person joins in or perhaps a prayer that the visitor has written. They should be sure to include any requests from the person being visited.

Encourage learners to continue to find ways to reach beyond their comfort zones to minister to others. Assign visitation lists and share in a group blessing as they depart.

Option: Plan a time to gather again to share their experiences.

Reflect

Study your hands. Consider the people they have held, touched, and ministered to—even fed. Fold them now in prayer. As you visualize each learner, consider the times you have spent together. Ask God to bless each one as they continue to grow in mission and service.

Attachment: Activity 1

**About this Exploration
Honoring the Body
Context and Mission**

Since our bodies are temples of God’s Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God’s grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons. We are invited to help others see God in them through the presence of God in us. When we love, serve, nurture, and care for one another by respecting and honoring our body and other’s bodies, we live out the healthy wholeness for which God created us. Considering the various and diverse contexts in which all live, we learn to choose well between caring for or abusing the body, even as we consider Christian responses to healthy and wholesome as well as violent and abusive living.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

There's an old saying, "You don't enter heaven in a hearse pulling a U-Haul." We get one life and one body. How we take care of ourselves is directly related to longevity and quality of life. With life experience behind them, adults may find the future to be an insecure place. Aging will mean further losses and bereavement. Aging also brings wisdom and opportunities to share knowledge and experience. Honoring the body includes recognizing the gifts and limitations of each age of life. God blesses us in every age. God gives us time to rest. As adult learners join in these activities, revelations for future opportunities and visions of new realities may emerge. Each day of life is pregnant with possibility at every age.

About this Exploration

The strength gained through honoring the body empowers those who follow Jesus to lead and serve. The fullness of the body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. Rather than discovering distinction and condemning brokenness, Christians are called to remember our common creation—*imago dei*, God's image. In that creation, we celebrate the unique abilities of every person, discovering opportunities to grow, feel, love, and express the fullness of their individual humanity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the *imago dei*.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 37:1–14
Matthew 22:34–40

Leader Preparation

Dry bones put on flesh and dance in the desert. Jesus' commandments to love open opportunities for new relationships. The sun rises each day, and new light bathes the earth with warmth. It is time to begin anew, rejoicing in past experiences and welcoming new surprises for learning and personal growth. As you embrace these activities with joyful anticipation, the enthusiasm you bring will engage the learners. Prepare to sing, dance, and be startled through new discoveries as you move through these activities together.

Prayer: God of the young and aged, the future beckons and you declare it is good. Bless our time as learners as we anticipate the future and seek your vision. 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 Breathing Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Ezekiel 37:1–14. Consider your body. Without breath, it is simply a carcass of flesh and bone. In this activity prayer and breath unite in the practice of silent meditation. Rehearse the instructions several times so you can guide participants in a time of silent meditation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- comfortable space for participants to sit

Welcome participants to this time of exploration. Invite them to consider their body as they take a deep breath, hold it for five seconds, and let it out. Without breath the body is simply a carcass of flesh and bone. In the ancient Hebrew of Ezekiel's time, the word *ruach* (roo-uh) was a synonym for breath, spirit, and wind. In the beginning of creation, a wind from God—God's spirit, *ruach*—swept over the waters. It is *ruach* that fills our bodies with life. The blood that courses through our veins is mostly oxygen—or *ruach*.

Invite the participants to join in a breathing prayer to honor the body and praise God. Each breath is a time of petition. Invite each person to think of a mantra to repeat during the prayer. A mantra is a specific word or phrase repeated over and over again.

Mantra suggestions: Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me; Loving God, Living Christ; alleluia; amen; or a syllable such as Ohm, hmmm. As the prayer starts, participants will inhale on the first part and exhale on the second for example: inhale on alleluia, exhale on amen.

Invite all who are able to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, and hands loose in the lap. Inhale deeply, hold breath for 5 seconds and exhale slowly. Do this three times before entering a time of centering prayer. Each inhale is accompanied by the chosen word or phrase, and each exhale completes the phrase at a pace comfortably for each individual. (Demonstrate aloud even though participants will do so silently.) Tell them the prayer will be timed to last ten minutes. During that time, the repetition continues. Explain that this is an ancient prayer practice that frees the mind and heart for a new experience of God. Tell them not to worry if their minds wander. God is at work. When time is up, you will close together with a final cleansing breath.

Share reflections on the prayer process. Encourage further use of this prayer in their personal prayer life at home.

2 Dance of Celebration

Leader preparation: Read Ezekiel 37:1–14. Contemplate the marvelous machine that is our body. Find a recording of "The Hokey Pokey" dance and appropriate playing device. A second option is to find a children's dance CD, where it is usually included. Arrange the room so that there will be space for participants to dance The Hokey Pokey as a celebration to honor the body.

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

Supplies:

- Bible
- “The Hokey Pokey,” <http://www.gardenofsong.com/hokeypokey.html>
- space for participants to dance safely

Invite the participants to listen as you read aloud Ezekiel 37:1–14. Ask them to consider the body as a marvelous machine made by God. Ask how our bodies are useful for work. For rest? For play? For praise?

One way to honor the body is by using it for joyful celebration of praise and dance. Invite participants to stand in a circle, as they are able, and join in following the prompts of the music as you dance “The Hokey Pokey.” Encourage participants to laugh and have fun as they rejoice in using all the parts of the body. If some persons are physically challenged, encourage them to raise their hands or move in whatever way is comfortable and safe for them. This is a time to honor the body as we dance in praise to God! If there is time, when the dance is over, invite participants to talk about their experience—or their memories associated with the Hokey Pokey.

③ “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry”

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the hymn “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry.” Note the intimate portrayals of the body. Human beings are social creatures. Interaction, communication, and touch are keys to our survival. In this activity, participants will identify and explore how touch is integral to our survival as human beings and as Christians.

Supplies:

- hymn: ““I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry,” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>
- computer or projection device
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pens

Show the video as you ask learners to simply enjoy absorbing the music and visions. Invite participants to share their reflections. Play the video a second time; this time ask learners to note specific representations of intimacy and human interaction. Write responses on the newsprint or whiteboard. Pass out paper and pens. Break the group into twos and threes. Ask each small group to list ways that touch is an important part of the Christian experience (for example: passing of peace in worship; laying on of hands at confirmation). Give them five minutes to think; then record responses on newsprint.

This Exploration of Future and Vision is about honoring the body. How does honoring the body relate to the future of the local church? How does honoring the body relate to the vision for all Christianity? What cultural influences may threaten Christian practices of honoring the body? (For example, texting and e-mail; lack of face-to-face interaction, poor church attendance) What cultural influences may enhance honoring the body for Christianity? (Technological advances in medicine and communication, civil marriage laws for all people, accessibility for handicapped persons)

As a group consider how your congregation may spread God’s love in ways that welcome others into the body of Christ. What new tradition might you begin to engage others? (Perhaps door keepers to open doors as worshipers arrive, parking spaces for families with babies and toddlers, passing of the peace, making the worship space accessible, American Sign Language interpretation of services,

and so on) *Option:* take these suggestions to the pastor and/or appropriate governing bodies.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Future and Vision Exploration (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read “About this Exploration” in the attachment. Consider the image of God, *imago dei*. What does it mean for you? In this activity learners discern and draw a personal *imago dei* as they consider God’s presence incarnate in themselves and in creation. Gather supplies and prepare the learning space.

Supplies:

- “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 4
- pens, pencils, or highlighters
- paper and crayons
- song: “Imago Dei,” by Jill Christian Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>

Distribute copies of “About this Exploration,” Attachment: Activity 4, along with highlighters and pens. Ask the participants to read it silently and to use the highlighter to mark all the action words. Then ask them to mark all the nouns using a pen. What is *imago dei*, the image of God? How is the image of God related to this Exploration of Future and Vision.

Pass out paper and crayons. Encourage learners to draw a picture of an item, place, or person that represents the image of God for them. As they work, play the song “Imago Dei.” After 5 to 10 minutes, invite them to share and explain their pictures.

Close in Prayer: *Holy God, we pray for a world where your Image, the image of God, becomes a reality for all. We pray that your divine spark, the divine presence, be seen and recognized throughout all creation. Amen.*



5 “Back Bone”

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork “Back Bone.” Place it in a prominent place in your meeting space so that all participants have an unobstructed view. Read Ezekiel 37:1–14. Study the artwork as you consider the role of the human skeleton for daily living.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Back Bone. c. 1997,” by Tony Cragg, <http://www.art.com/products/p12210191-sa-i1581812/tony-cragg-back-bone-c1997.htm?sorig=cat&so rigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=back+bone+cragg>

Invite participants to sit where they can view the artwork. Have them study it for a few moments. Ask participants to share their feelings about the picture. *What does it mean? What was the artist trying to portray?* Have participants continue to focus on the artwork as you read Ezekiel 37:1–14.

Ask: *How does hearing the scripture change the meaning of the picture for you? What would a valley of dry bones look like? Consider the bones in your body. What function do they have? Why is the human skeleton important? When bones are broken what is required to mend them? What role do replacement joints and bones play in our world today? Bone marrow transplants can mean new life for certain individuals suffering from diseases, such as leukemia.* Invite participants to share individual experiences with bone breaks, transplants, or replacements. Discuss how understanding our bones honors our bodies and brings glory to God.

Hold hands as you close in Prayer: *Holy God, truly we are mysteriously and marvelously made. Our bodies are a living testament to the power of your love in creation. As the blood courses through our veins, as the breath of life moves within us, let your Spirit bend us always to rejoice in the miracle that is the human body. May the actions of our bodies always be pleasing and acceptable to you, O God. Amen.*



6 “The Golden Rule”

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the artwork “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell. Study the artwork until it becomes familiar to you. Offer a prayer of blessing for each character portrayed in the artwork. Create a welcoming space where all may view the artwork clearly and comfortably.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Golden Rule,” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-onto-others-april-1-1961.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell>

Welcome participants and invite them to be seated where they can easily view the artwork. Begin with prayer: *Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, you command us to love our neighbor as ourselves. You know us well, Lord; this is often hard for us to do. As we consider the art and share our experiences, open our eyes to the divine spark that resides in every being. Amen.*

Ask participants to consider the artwork, carefully noting each character. After a few moments invite each participant to choose a character that best represents him or her today. Ask in turn why each person chose this character from the artwork. What is each feeling? What are his or her needs, joys, fears? Encourage participants to share their reflections. How does loving the neighbor honor those pictured? How does loving the neighbor honor the body of Christ? How might this picture inspire your congregation to strive for greater inclusivity?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Who Is Your Neighbor? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 22:34–40 several times. Focus on the great commandments that Jesus gives in verses 37 and 39. Think about a neighbor who has had a significant impact on your life. What made that person’s action special? How did the action honor you and your body? Be prepared to share.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 22:34–40. Ask others to name the two great commandments. (Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.)

Invite participants to sit comfortably with both feet flat on the floor, hands lying loosely in their laps. Invite them to take a couple deep, cleansing breaths in and out. Ask them to close their eyes as they think about neighbors they have known who have made an impact in their lives. After allowing time for reflection, tell a story from your personal reflection and invite others to do the same.

Discuss who the neighbors to the church are. How does the church relate to its neighbors? How might the church community honor its neighbors through acts of kindness, hospitality, and communication? Brainstorm together and plan a welcome Sunday for neighbors or plan a community car wash where neighbors get their cars washed for free.



8 The Love God Gives

Leader preparation: Review Ezekiel 37:1–14 and Matthew 22:34–40. Consider a tree in winter, bare dark branches seemingly devoid of all life. Then, suddenly, one day in spring a bud breaks forth, then another and another. Soon the entire tree is abloom with quaking, vibrant green leaves. New life bursts forth. In this activity participants compare and contrast scripture and the story of Corrie ten Boom as they create a future and vision action plan to love the neighbor.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Corrie ten Boom, A Witness for Christ,” Attachment: Activity 8
- a bare branch
- tablecloth
- candle and matches
- hymn: “This Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJJ1TwC-upE&feature=related>

Create a centerpiece on the table with the bare branch, tablecloth, and candle. Light the candle, and invite participants to pray with you: *Holy God, Loving Christ, Living Spirit, be present with us here. Send your Spirit upon us that we may grow together in love as we read scriptures, share stories, and learn of your plan for us. May all we do honor the body of Christ gathered here. Amen.* Then sing together “This Little Light of Mine.”

Read Ezekiel 37:1–14 together. Point to the bare branch. Tell learners to consider a bare branch in winter that blooms in the spring, filled with life. So is the passage from Ezekiel about the new life that blooms forth in the desert. Taken literally or metaphorically, in both the tree branch and the dry bones, new life comes forth seemingly out of nowhere granted by the grace of God. Read Matthew 22:34–40 together. *How is Jesus’ commandment related to the new life offered in Ezekiel?*

Pass out Attachment: Activity 8. Ask volunteers to join in reading the story out loud. Ask for reflections on the story. In what ways do participants find the story believable or unbelievable? Why? What is remarkable about this story? Ask participants to think of a person or persons that they find difficult or impossible to forgive. Tell them to close their eyes as you lead them through guided prayer.

Imagine that the person(s) you despise or find difficult to forgive is standing in the palm of your hand. Hold your hand out in front of you, lift it up, still imagining that person in your palm. Now picture a light surrounding him or her, shining all about, radiating from

and through the person. Picture the light as a beam from God. Hold the person there and ask God to take the meanness and hatred from your heart, transferring it to the loving power demonstrated in the warmth of the light. Ask God to surround you in light as well. Feel the warming rays, squint at the brightness that is so strong that you are momentarily blinded. Remain in the light as you notice the one or ones in your palm being raised heavenward, as if ascending by magic. Bless them on their way and ask God to take them and forgive them even if you cannot. Ask God to open your heart to the possibility of the powerful love that forgiveness brings. See the ones disappear into God's light. Lower your hand gently. Take a deep breath as you feel the burden of hatred lifted from you. Gently retreat back to this space. When you are ready open your eyes.

Encourage learners to use the visioning prayer as they continue to work toward forgiveness. Remind them that God forgave humankind for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus forgave his tormentors. As Christians, we are called to forgive. The future and vision of life depends upon our ability to live as Christ in the world, obeying the great commandments. Thank learners for their participation today.

9 Health and Hygiene for the World

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 22:34–40. Consider the commandments of Jesus in verses 37–39. Write these commandments on newsprint. In this activity participants will create an opportunity for church-wide engagement in a mission project through the arm of your denomination that promotes service and mission in the world. Many denominations call this office Global Ministries. Consult with the pastor and/or appropriate church bodies to discover the appropriate office to sponsor this project.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computers and web access for each participant (a digital projector makes this accessible for all), or copies of information from the appropriate website, for example http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=kits_hygiene

Read Matthew 22:37–39 together. Discuss current ways the congregation lives out these commandments through mission and outreach activities. Explain that they have an opportunity to lead the church in a mission drive to benefit church world service. Visit the Church World Service website together to view opportunities for reaching out beyond the local congregation to help others of the body of Christ, or have copies of specific missions from Church World Service to distribute. Explain which mission opportunities the pastor and/or various boards would like them to consider. As a group, choose a mission to support. Discuss how such a mission activity honors the body.

Create and institute a plan to engage the congregation utilizing the church newsletter, e-mail communication, church bulletin, and worship announcements. Divide tasks among participants. Who will write a newsletter and/or e-mail communication? Who will make lists to be included in the church bulletins? Decide on collection dates. How will items be collected—individually, or as complete kits? Set up collection locations. Who will package kits to mail? Ask the pastor for a date to bless the collection during a Sunday worship service. Set a goal. How many kits will be created by what date?

Thank learners for their participation in this project that honors the body through helping others as a part of Christ's future and vision for the church.

Reflect

Consider the time you shared together. What were the happiest moments? What were the most challenging lessons? What did you learn about honoring the body? Do you feel empowered to face the future? Picture the faces of each individual in the group as you offer a prayer for their future as God's beloved. Give thanks for the time you shared.

Attachment: Activity 4

About this Exploration
Honoring the Body
Future and Vision

The strength gained through honoring the body empowers those who follow Jesus to lead and serve. The fullness of the body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. Rather than discovering distinction and condemning brokenness, Christians are called to remember our common creation—*imago dei*. In that creation, we celebrate the unique abilities of every person, discovering opportunities to grow, feel, love, and express the fullness of their individual humanity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the *imago dei*.

Attachment: Activity 8

Corrie ten Boom: A Witness For Christ

Author Corrie ten Boom relates the story of her life during the Nazi occupation of Germany in World War II. Her family joined the Holland underground by helping countless Jews escape imprisonment and death. At first the family resisted because they believed the underground's activities were wrong in the sight of God as they stole, lied, and even murdered to save the Jews and other Christian sympathizers. Eventually the evil events happening in their neighborhood—the furtive arrests and atrocities against their neighbors—convinced them to get involved in the midst of the grave danger they faced every day. One day “a friend” reported them to the local German police. Corrie, her sister Betsie, and her father were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

Corrie's father died ten days after incarceration. Corrie and Betsie lived on, and their daily struggles are detailed in horrifying detail. What comes through even these darkest experiences is their constant and sincere devotion to love everyone. They led daily devotions using a Bible they managed to keep hidden from the guards. Corrie was ever amazed at Betsie's ability to love not only their fellow inmates, but to also love the captives. When questioned, Betsie answered by saying that the prison warden and the young women serving as guards over them had been taught to hate. “If they can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love! We must find a way, you and I, no matter how long it takes . . .”

Consistently, Betsie prayed for the oppressors, that they might find love and know forgiveness. Betsie died shortly before the camp was liberated, and her lifeless body was stacked upon a staggering heap of other lifeless women. When Corrie returned home, she carried on Betsie's dream of rehabilitation for all people. Once when leaving a speaking engagement, Corrie came face to face with the former SS guard who'd been in charge of their camp. He thrust out his hand to shake Corrie's and to thank her for the message of forgiveness she had given—a message he said had also saved him.

Corrie writes: I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness . . . As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His (God's). When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.