

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Youth in this age group find themselves sorting out personal roles and self-image, relationships, talents and goals, life commitments, and their newly emerging attitudes and feelings about faith. They can be very group focused and influenced by peers. At the same time they can be testing out and expressing a life-long journey of exploring and engaging the faith by connecting a number of faith practices to the experiences in their own lives in school, at home, or among friends. Through this process, they'll be given opportunities to hear and share stories that not only increase confidence in their own abilities to learn and make decisions, but which also help shape their future lives of faith.

### About this Exploration

Throughout our whole lives we have the opportunity to discover our gifts of ministry. As we listen attentively to God's call and affirmation, identify our own passions, gifts, and skills, and participate in community where gifts are celebrated and shared, our gifts shape the unique ministry we have as we serve God and God's people. The process of discovery may involve prayer, community, scripture, nature, solitude, silence, and openness to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. We may be surprised by the Spirit, as well, and discover new and unexpected gifts along our journey.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**Ezekiel 2:1-5**  
**1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**Leader Preparation**

For older youth the idea of gifts of ministry can be very wide-ranging, from traditional church-related activities to more out-of-the-ordinary ones like caring for the homeless, serving as docents in a nature preserve, or delving into history and tradition in order to revisit centuries-old gifts that are being given new life in a modern age. Likewise, there is a wide spectrum of involvement, from parent-influenced participation to a more independent, self-initiated approach that inspires risk-taking, trying out new things, getting involved in team or group programs, and volunteering. Keeping this diversity in mind, the focus will be on discerning their individual interests and needs. Using the many different faith practices available in this Exploration, youth may continue on their own journey of discovering gifts of ministry.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for all young people, and for the many varieties of different gifts they have been given that will help them to help others. Thank you for the ability to work with and among them. Give us the gift of openness as we hear their stories, learn of their individual gifts and abilities, and work together to discover new ways of ministering and caring for all the people in your amazing world. Amen.*

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**

 **1 Envision a Mentor (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** When it comes to the exploration of one's gifts, it's tempting to look at people who've had a helping hand from family members, or an older, wiser person with experience guiding or advising others. "If only I had a mentor like that, I might be able to capitalize on my real talents . . ." is an often-heard comment. Not having a flesh-and-blood mentor, though, doesn't have to be an impossible challenge. This activity may help group members realize that through envisioning and creativity, a person can get valuable insights from an exercise in which an "imaginary" mentor shares observations and suggestions about a person's gifts for ministry that can be every bit as helpful as those offered by a real advisor. In our lives of faith, there is a counselor we rely on to guide us on our journeys of ministry who actually functions in that precise

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils

Start the activity with a discussion of what it means to be a mentor. Ask the group the following questions.

- What is a mentor, and what role would he or she play?
- What might they say or do in guiding someone?
- Does anyone currently have someone in their life that helps them as a mentor would? What is that experience like?

Have them think about the possibility of "imagining" a mentor who knew them extremely well and could help them explore their gifts for ministry. Pass out paper and pens or pencils, and invite them to each come up with a mentor of their own. Suggest that it could be a historical figure, or a well-known person from the present, or someone lesser known or "invented" as a mix of different acquaintances. Have them jot down some notes on what this mentor would say to them, such as "You have a gift for caring for someone," "You make good use of limited resources," or "You work well with your hands."

As a wrap-up, read the passages in which Jesus describes the Holy Spirit, John 14:25-26 and John 16:12-14. Point out that the Advocate or Helper that Jesus describes is one whose job it is to speak the truth and to teach followers how to follow in Jesus' footsteps of ministry. In this light, Jesus or the Holy Spirit is the "ultimate" mentor to whom people of faith can turn.

 **2 Words and Music**

**Leader preparation:** God's wonders are not limited to Bible verses and traditional prayers. The Apostle Paul recognized this truth when he told the church at Corinth that they were not lacking in any spiritual gifts. When God provides gifts for people to use in doing ministry, the variety in itself is a gift. This activity employs words and music to help the group realize that different types of gifts, even those considered less conventional (or those left unnamed in scriptures), are all very valid ways to share God-given abilities to help others. To prepare for this session, obtain a recording of "One Spirit of Love" by Andra Moran and "Wild Angels" by Martina McBride.

## Session Development

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

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

### Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “One Spirit of Love” by Paul B. Svenson (©1987/2011 Dad’s Song-book Music LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission, [www.dadsong-book.com](http://www.dadsong-book.com)); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBg80JaNJ1M>
- “One Spirit of Love,” Attachment: Activity 2
- song: “Wild Angels” by Martina McBride; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7Z9lvUz2DI>; lyrics, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/wild-angels-lyrics-martina-mcbride.html>
- music player

Invite a youth to read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9 to the group. Use the following questions to talk together about what the text means, and how it connects with their lives, to their sense of call to ministry, or to the world in which they live.

- What kinds of “speech” or “knowledge” might Paul be referring to?
- What other kinds of spiritual gifts does he have in mind?
- What about a God-given strength to sustain someone to the end?
- What are different gifts that are not so usual or conventional? Name a few. What about music?

Distribute the sheet music of “One Spirit of Love.” Invite a participant to read the lyrics of the first verse. Then play a recording of the song. After the song, invite other group members to read the rest of the lyrics. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions.

- What new ideas for gifts do these words suggest that are not typical or traditional?
- What examples can you suggest?

Distribute the “Wild Angels” lyrics. Play the recording of “Wild Angels,” inviting the group to follow along with the lyrics. After the song, ask them the following questions.

- How does Martina McBride’s song hint at yet another dimension of gifts for ministry?
- How do you think the preserving of relationships in the face of worldly challenges might also be a gift?
- What might be some illustrations of unusual or unexpected God-given gifts that help people “keep alive” in today’s world?

Invite the group to read the last verse of “One Spirit of Love” in unison and then play the song once again. Ask the following questions.

- How do you think these two songs intersect?
- What might you discover about gifts for ministry by hearing these two pieces as a pair?

### 3 Newspaper Needs

**Leader preparation:** Many people are overwhelmed about all the tragedies, disasters, and bad news we see every day in the news media. Another way of understanding these stories, however, is through the lens of a disciple. In other words, if a story told of a devastating earthquake, how would the disciple respond? In this activity, group members will be asked to select a number of stories that suggest “needs” of various kinds. They’ll imagine what some solutions could be, using the particular gifts of people they know, either in the group, or outside the group, such as a famous political leader, a notable business person, and so forth.

**Supplies:**

- newspapers and/or news magazines containing stories about disasters or other bad news
- bulletin board, easel, or someplace to attach story clippings
- push pins or tape
- self-adhesive note paper
- pens or markers

Ask the group to share any stories they know about recent catastrophes or “bad news.” Explain that events such as these present needs or opportunities for ministry. Invite the youth to find articles in newspapers or news magazines of such events, share the story with the group, and display the articles as you have chosen. After the articles are posted, invite the youth to consider what gifts of ministry they might have that could meet some of the needs presented in the stories. Invite them to suggest the names of others who could bring special skills or abilities to these situations as well. Help them to realize that every such instance of “bad news” is actually an opportunity to help God transform tragedy into triumph by applying human gifts of ministry to the situation.

As youth brainstorm the gifts that they or others can offer, write down the specific gifts and the name of the person possessing them on a sheet of self-adhesive note paper and attach it to the corresponding article. Some gifts may apply to more than one situation, so you could make multiple notes to attach to each appropriate article. Wrap up the activity with praise for the gifts the youth shared, letting them know that they’ve just served in the role of modern day “disciples,” being sent out to serve or minister to others using their own God-given gifts. Like the earliest disciples, they, too, will be demonstrating an ability to heal, spread Good News, house the homeless, feed the hungry, and work for justice.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Gifts of Community (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Our faith is something that is based on community. It’s no wonder that gifts for ministry also come from, or are designed for, community. Just as God created the world to be a place where numbers of people live together, work together, play together, and share together, the gifts of ministry are also intended to be given and received with the greater good of all people in mind. This activity may help the group discover some of the types of gifts that build community through a fun exercise that not only adds to their knowledge, but also visually demonstrates the connections and links that are created when a community works together.



**Supplies:**

- ball of yarn, string, or twine
- two rows of seats, enough for all the participants, each row on opposite sides of the meeting space
- “Gifts of Ministry that Build Community,” Attachment: Activity 4

Separate the participants into two groups, and have them take seats on opposite sides of the meeting space, facing one another across the room. Distribute copies of “Gifts of Ministry that Build Community” to the group. Explain that a person from one side will read a “ministry need or opportunity” from the left column of the printed sheet, and then a person from the other side of the room is to respond, picking an appropriate ministry gift from the right column that would address the need. Other team members are allowed to brainstorm together, if needed, to help come up with response.

As the needs and gifts are matched, the ball of yarn is to be unwound and passed back and forth across the room—the person stating the need or opportunity holds onto one end, and then the person responding grabs hold of the other end. As the next item is read, the yarn is passed in turn to new participants (while the original “needs” person still holds his or her end). The object is to create an intersecting, crisscrossing “web” that links all the members of the group with one another across the room. The web will grow more complex as more needs and gifts are shared, until ultimately everyone in the “community” is connected.

At the conclusion of this activity, point out that the act of discovering and matching all these gifts has symbolically brought the group together, linking them in the same way that a community experiences when gifts are shared.



**5 Spinning the Wheel of Gifts**

**Leader preparation:** Sometimes it seems as if God’s gifts arrive in a very spontaneous, unexpected, and random manner. Other times, it seems as if there is a divine plan at work in which gifts are purposefully put in place. It is surprising, yet also strangely predictable, that gifts are given in response to some human need that exists. So a gift for compassionately listening, for example, coincides with the presence of a friend or stranger who has a story to tell and could use our care and attentiveness. This activity employs the “random chance” of God-given gifts, along with improvisational conversations, to create a role-playing exercise in which group members are asked to imagine themselves as both users and receivers of ministry gifts.

To prepare for this activity, construct a simple 22-inch diameter wheel from a circle of cardboard or poster board, and mount it on a background like a corkboard or foam core (with a small pin-sized hole at the center of the circle) using a pushpin or nail. Out of the unused cardboard create an arrow or pointer, to be attached at the center, which reaches from the center of the circle to the perimeter, to will serve as the spinner or “selector” for the items shown on the face of the “wheel.” The group will fill in the spinner in the activity.

**Supplies:**

- prepared 22” spinner
- “Spinner Creation,” Attachment: Activity 5

Have the group brainstorm ideas for twelve different gifts to write on the face of the circle, like numbers around a clock face (see example pictured on the attachment “Spinner Creation”). The members of the group will all take turns

spinning the wheel to “receive” a gift of ministry. The “gifted” member, in turn, chooses another member of the group to act as the person being ministered to or cared for. Encourage them to imagine situations or circumstances in which the particular gift selected from the wheel would be useful. Then, using that scenario, act out an improvisational dialogue in which the one with the God-given gift uses his or her gift to minister to the other. Questions that could be asked after this role-playing activity include:

- How did it feel to receive the gift you did?
- What are some other things you can do with a gift like that?
- What it feel like being ministered to with that gift?
- What might be other ways the gifted person could have responded to your need, using his or her gift?
- Did you feel well cared for? Why or why not? How would you have changed the dialogue to improve on it?

### 6 Gifts Questionnaire

**Leader preparation:** Part of the challenge of identifying what kinds of gifts one may have is the incredible variety of possibilities. Some gifts are more obvious than others, but often “hidden” gifts are more difficult to uncover, unless others help in the process of discovery. This activity will provide group members with a beginning point for that kind of help, through a “Spirit-given” gifts questionnaire that uses modern testing techniques and scoring procedures. It will assist them in clarifying the types of gifts they may have and narrowing down their choices for further consideration. To prepare for the activity, go to the website “Spirit Given Gifts” and download the fourteen-page questionnaire (in PDF format). Copy pages 4–9 (“Questionnaire”), page 11 (“Scoring Sheet”), and pages 12–14 (“Interpretation and Application”) for each participant. For more information, visit the website “Spirit Given Gifts,” <http://www.spiritgivengifts.com/>.

#### **Supplies:**

- “Spirit Given Gifts Questionnaire,” “Scoring Sheet,” and “Interpretation and Application” from website “Spirit Given Gifts” <http://www.spirit-givengifts.com/> for each person
- pencils or pens

Explain that there are tests people use to help them decide what things they’re good at, or what careers to go into. Sometimes these tests are given in high school; other times, they may have the opportunity to take them at an employment center, a community college, or a university. Practical workplace skills are not the only things that can be tested for, however. Introduce the “Spirit Given Gifts” questionnaire that helps people determine talents of a different kind—gifts for ministry. Hand out the questionnaire, and have the group fill out the test portion. Then hand out the scoring sheets so they can tally up the results. Finally, provide them with the “Interpretation and Application” guides, encouraging the group to share what the questionnaires revealed about their individual gifts. Ask them how they felt the results matched up with their own self-knowledge and interests.

Sending & Serving Activities

 7 Rebel Rouser (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Receiving a call to ministry—or figuring out how to use the gifts one has been given—is not always an easy job. The Bible is filled with stories of prophets being given seemingly impossible assignments by God, leading them to wonder how they will ever be able to accomplish their goals. This activity uses one particular example from Ezekiel as a conversation starter to discuss the challenges of ministry, and how they might be addressed. Group members will brainstorm specific ideas to help each other when difficult circumstances are encountered. Ask a group member to role-play a rebellious or troublesome character without letting the rest of the group know they are playing a part.

Explain the role: He or she will be asked to give a brief talk to the rest of the group about the negative role television characters play in one’s faith journey and he or she is to refuse defiantly with additional back-and-forth statements and displays of stubborn refusal. It may be helpful to give this person advance notice so he or she may prepare for the role.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- newsprint and markers

Announce to the group that the group member who has prepared will give a presentation about the negative role television characters play in one’s faith journey. Play out the back-and-forth dialogue with the participant as he or she plays his or her part of a defiant youth. Let the act go on for a few minutes, and then tell the group that you and the participant were role playing. Thank the youth who played the role.

Invite someone to read the Ezekiel 2:1–5 to the group. Discuss how the prophet may have felt about God’s recruiting him to work with the rebellious, problematic people of Israel. Ask the group what they might have done in similar circumstances and how they might handle the job. Invite the group to brainstorm ways that some of their own gifts for ministry might be met with people or situations that make it difficult to perform. Use the newsprint and markers to record suggestions of things that could be said or done to help in situations like these.

 8 Sew Simple

**Leader preparation:** Many times, people expect that gifts for ministry always have to involve dramatic, ground-breaking, trailblazing ventures that require enormous amounts of time, talent, or money. That really isn’t the case. God can call someone to do a relatively simple job, and equip him or her with very modest, ordinary, everyday types of skills. This activity uses the humble art of sewing as a hands-on illustration that ministry gifts come in all colors, shapes, and sizes. Through the learning process, as well as the conversation that accompanies the sewing, group members may feel empowered to offer whatever gifts they have, no matter how small or commonplace. If helpful, supplementary information on the song “Simple Gifts” is available on Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple\\_Gifts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple_Gifts). If necessary, familiarize yourself with how to sew on a button so you can lead the group. There are step-by-step instructions on button sewing on the video “Sewing Tip #2: How to Hand Sew a Button,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQRq-7InTE>, or at the website “How to Sew on a Button,” [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4604\\_sew-button.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4604_sew-button.html).

**Supplies:**

- sewing needle (medium-sized, so the eyes aren't too difficult to thread) for each person
- thread, several spools of different colors
- button, for each person
- scraps of fabric
- song: "Simple Gifts," Shaker song (tune: Simple Gifts), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYi9Vr8bHJY>
- "Simple Gifts," Attachment: Activity 8

Begin the activity by asking the participants to name the simplest types of ministry gifts they can think of, such as touch, words of encouragement, gardening, sewing, visiting, and so forth. Continue the discussion with these questions:

- In God's eyes, are any of these "lesser" than others?
- How can these gifts be used to share God's love and care with others?

Bring out the sewing materials, and invite everyone to thread a needle and sew a button on a piece of cloth. Assuming there are some in the group who are more experienced, they can help show the others how to thread a needle or sew a button. If necessary, show the youth how to sew on a button. As the group is sewing, have someone read the lyrics of "Simple Gifts." If someone happens to know the tune, the group can join in singing the one verse. Invite them to share their impressions of the words through these questions.

- What kind of "turning" do you suppose the song refers to?
- How would you define "true simplicity"?
- Is the act of sewing a "simple" gift? Why or why not?

After the button sewing has been completed, ask the group to come up with different ways that the gift of sewing can be used as a ministry gift. Some examples may be: creating stoles, banners, or other special fabrics for churches; quilting groups that produce gift blankets for shut-ins or others in the community; a craft venture that makes sewn goods for sale to raise money for a special cause.

- What other ideas can the group come up with that employ sewing as a ministry?
- Is there some way that the buttons sewn by the group can be put to some use or donated to a caring cause?
- Following up on this experience, what are some other simple gifts that the group members will now be inspired to share?

## Shower Gifts

**Leader preparation:** Getting married can be an occasion for generous gift giving, both at the wedding and beforehand, in bridal shower parties held in honor of the bride-to-be. For a person thinking about his or her intention to engage in ministry, a similar "gift giving" takes place, but not in the same exact way. Instead of receiving physical objects and merchandise, the individual is instead given all sorts of talents, abilities, resources, and blessings that can't be purchased online or through a gift registry. This activity offers a creative way of viewing ministry as something comparable to a wedding, complete with a "ministry shower" to start the festivities.



### Reflect

Are there still new, unknown gifts for ministry that are awaiting discovery? What are some new twists on “old” gifts that can be tried? How will God ultimately use the gifts employed in this place to care for others? And how will these same gifts enrich our own lives?

#### Supplies:

- greeting cards for the shower announcement
- simple decorations to make the group’s meeting space more festive
- food and beverages
- camera (optional) to record the party

Tell the group that their new job is to be a “shower planner.” They are to throw a party to celebrate their own entry into ministry. They are to come up with a theme, brainstorm presents for one another (all of which will be “gifts of ministry”), and then have an actual shower. For example, one possible approach could be a “Message” theme, in which each guest is assigned a letter from a phrase such as “Holy Spirit,” or “Blessings.” The group members have to think of gifts beginning with their assigned letter, write them on pieces of paper, fold them, and place them in envelopes (marked boldly with the particular letters). The gifts will then be given to one another during the party, along with a short “speech” saying why that gift was chosen. If a camera is not available, have one of the members record the comments, to be given to each of the ministry guests afterwards as a memento.

Attachment: Activity 2

# One Spirit of Love

♩ = 89  
Muted strum  
Light Reggae Feel

Paul B. Svenson



1. Ma - ny are the won - ders of God ma - ny  
2. Some will be the tea - chers of life some the  
3. Li - ving as the bo - dy of Christ and the



doors o - pen wide ma - ny roads that are still un -  
prea - chers of love some the fa - thers and some the  
heart of the earth and the hands that will break new



tra - veled Ma - ny are the gifts that we share  
mo - thers Some will be the ones who will care  
gro - und Cel - e - brate the gifts from with - in



ma - ny bur - dens we bear ma - ny  
some will li - sten and share serv - ing  
now its time to be - gin God's -



my - ster - ies still un - ra - veled  
God as they serve each o - ther  
peo - ple can turn the world a - rou - nd now!



**CHORUS** Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love



Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

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Attachment: Activity 4

### Gifts of Ministry that Build Community

Match the ministry need or opportunity in the left column that best matches or most closely connects with a corresponding gift in the right column by writing the correct number in the blank.

**Ministry Needs/Opportunities**

1. learning
2. common life
3. connecting with God
4. disaster
5. collaboration
6. relationships
7. cross-cultural, cross-town help
8. walking
9. children
10. groups
11. seniors
12. media
13. homelessness
14. unemployment
15. ecumenical
16. summer
17. four-footed friends
18. housing
19. music
20. sewing crafts
21. ecology
22. advocacy
23. health
24. young adults
25. cross-denomination
26. food
27. origami
28. special needs
29. New Year
30. transportation

**Examples of Gifts that Address Needs/Opportunities**

- \_\_\_ a. mission projects overseas or in your own country
- \_\_\_ b. blessing of the animals on St. Francis Day
- \_\_\_ c. social justice programs, forums, speaker series
- \_\_\_ d. Vacation Bible Schools, outdoor services
- \_\_\_ e. pilgrimage for peace, CROP walks
- \_\_\_ f. Christmas caroling, community concerts
- \_\_\_ g. reading & discussing God’s Word together
- \_\_\_ h. Habitat for Humanity, fuel assistance
- \_\_\_ i. thrift shops, electronics recycling
- \_\_\_ j. parish nursing programs, free clinics, blood drives
- \_\_\_ k. Thanksgiving or Good Friday gatherings
- \_\_\_ l. recreation centers, after school programs
- \_\_\_ m. paper crane folding to pray for peace
- \_\_\_ n. car pooling, ride sharing, bicycle-friendly facilities
- \_\_\_ o. prayer shawl ministry, quilting for a cause
- \_\_\_ p. emergency support, aid, volunteer programs
- \_\_\_ q. sharing food, fellowship, resources
- \_\_\_ r. bringing complementary talents and skills together
- \_\_\_ s. forging links person to person, church to church
- \_\_\_ t. Meals on Wheels, hospital and nursing home visits
- \_\_\_ u. community preschools and day care
- \_\_\_ v. First Night programs, highway refreshment stands
- \_\_\_ w. Olympics, workshops, family support groups
- \_\_\_ x. faith and film forums, family flicks
- \_\_\_ y. shelters, soup kitchens, food pantries, clothing drives
- \_\_\_ z. praying together
- \_\_\_ aa. pulpit sharing, common worship facility
- \_\_\_ bb. community dinners, food drives, refreshment stands
- \_\_\_ cc. divorce, grief, parenting, 12-step programs
- \_\_\_ dd. job networking groups, resume workshops

Attachment: Activity 5

### Spinner Creation

Think of 12 gifts of ministry, and write them around the face of the spinner, as though it were the face of a clock.



Attachment: Activity 8

## Simple Gifts

“Simple Gifts” was written by Elder Joseph Brackett in 1848 while he was at the Shaker community in Alfred, Maine.

‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free  
‘Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
‘Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gain’d,  
To bow and bend we shan’t be asham’d,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come ‘round right.

### Simple Gifts

*Joseph Brackett, Jr., 1848*





# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Although some research shows a mixed trend in Bible reading among 13- to 17-year-old youth (depending on the Protestant denomination, some are reading less, some more), other studies report an overall Bible readership that's on par with previous years. Another factor to consider: at this age, youth no longer depend on parents for everything, so adults' views about faith, the Bible, and spiritual practices are less and less accepted as "Gospel truth." Instead, opinions of peers, teachers, and messages received from news media and entertainment channels are beginning to replace family-influenced interpretations of religion or church traditions, including the usefulness or credibility of the Bible. Meanwhile, emerging technology such as social networking is changing teenagers' need to stay connected with their faith; for some, Facebook is becoming more important than fellowship.

### About this Exploration

Scripture provides many examples of people discovering God-given talents that help them not only in their own lives, but also in ministering to or caring for others. As Solomon discovered, gifts such as knowledge and a discerning mind are to be valued more highly than riches, long life, or power. Scripture, along with the community, inspires and affirms people in recognizing the different gifts they possess. Gifts of ministry allow people to play important roles in this world, in faith-related settings as well as in homes, workplaces, schools, and places of recreation.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**1 Kings 3:3–15**

**Mark 1:14–20**

## Leader Preparation

For older youth, activities based on scriptures may seem a little challenging at first. That's why helping them become involved in the planning, discussions, rule setting, problem solving and collaborative faith exploration at a number of different levels is important. Leaders can do this by encouraging youth to engage in the various activities through subtle, diplomatic guidance, without overly directive supervision. Remember that everyone learns in different ways, so keep options open and vary the opportunities for participation so all the members have a chance to contribute.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the ability to engage the words of the Bible in new and creative ways. Help us to keep an open mind and an open heart regarding the messages we explore. And encourage us to find new meanings and new insights through our serious conversations, our inventive playfulness, and our connection-forming fellowship activities. Guide us in using our own gifts for ministry to read and hear the words of scripture, transform them through our unique perspectives, and ultimately bring new life to them in this world. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Modern Day Solomons (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Solomon asked God for an understanding mind, rather than power or wealth. God told Solomon that this was a wise choice. As we know, it did help him to be a better king for his people. In our modern world, there are numerous people who could be considered a Solomon in their particular field or profession. In this activity, the group members will be asked to imagine what gifts these modern-day Solomons might ask God for, and how the gifts would help them do a better job, or more importantly, to minister to other people.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Have the youth turn to 1 Kings 3:3–15, the passage describing Solomon's conversation with God about the gift of wisdom. Invite them to read the text and think about what they would do if they had been in Solomon's position. Ask them if they would have asked for the same gift of an understanding mind.

Shift the focus to modern-day counterparts of Solomon. Ask each person to name people such as community leaders, scientists, athletes, musicians, teachers, and so forth, whom they admire. Engage the youth in conversation about these people using the following questions.

- What kinds of gifts do you think these people might wish for?
- What types of gifts do you think they would not want to ask for, such as power and wealth in the Solomon story?
- What do you think the people of today's culture would think about their choices?

Invite the youth to imagine themselves in the roles of the people they've named. Ask them what kinds of gifts would they want, and why. Ask them to share how these gifts would help them in ministering to other people.

### 2 The Talent Fund

**Leader preparation:** In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells the story of ten servants who were given money to look after. Some invested the money wisely and earned a profit for themselves and their master. One, however, out of fear, did nothing with the money and instead earned punishment for his lack of initiative. By this example, Jesus emphasized the importance of making good use of one's resources, whether monetary or otherwise. Capitalizing on the talents message, this activity asks the group to make similar decisions regarding their own gifts in order to discover how to better share God's resources with others.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Have one or more persons from the group read aloud Luke 19:11–26. Begin the discussion with a few questions:

- What is the story about?
- What message does one get from the conclusion (line 26)?

### Session Development

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

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

- How does that translate to today’s world of stocks, bonds, and futures?
- What could one do with the kind of talents or resources that can be described as “gifts for ministry”?

Tell the group that their job today is serving as commodities traders. They’re in charge of “The Talent Fund.” Using the newsprint or whiteboard, list some of the individual gifts of group members. Ask them all to brainstorm ideas for investing these particular gifts. Have them consider these questions:

- What are specific ways that one can double or multiply a single gift so that it becomes even greater or more valuable than before?
- How does one make the best possible use of gifts so that they can be shared with more people?

Wrap up by mentioning to the group that by believing in one’s gifts and using them wisely, it is possible even today to receive more.



### 3 Gift Wrestling

**Leader preparation:** Exploring or receiving a gift isn’t always such a simple process. In the story of Jacob wrestling with God (or an angel), Jacob was seeking a gift or blessing, but in order to receive it, he had to undergo an experience that left him with a lifelong injury. In today’s world a gift may require a great deal of planning, investment, and hard work beforehand. It may bring with it not only blessings, but also unanticipated challenges or sacrifices later. This activity uses both artwork and conversation to explore the complex nature of gifts given for the purpose of offering ministry to others.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Vision after the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=37962&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401)

Select one of the group who has a talent for acting to serve as sports announcer, and have him or her read the Genesis 33:22–32, dramatically describing Jacob’s wrestling match as if it were a modern day sports event. Explore the idea of “struggle” with the group with the following questions.

- Do accomplishments, or new skills, always come easy?
- What kind of work often goes into the process? Ask members to come up with things they wrestle with, like learning math, or mastering a new language, or overcoming personal limitations.
- How can new ideas, views, or beliefs be a source of struggle?
- Can thoughts expressed in a sermon challenge us to wrestle with and re-examine our own opinions?

Have the group look at “Vision after the Sermon.” Giving them the title of the piece, and discuss the different things they see going on in the picture.

- Who are the people?
- What are they doing?
- What’s going on in the background?
- Is this a calm, peaceful scene or a very dynamic, action-packed one?
- If this is how Gauguin pictures the response to a sermon, what sort of controversial topics might have been talked about in the sermon?

- What kind of results might come from a sermon like that?
- Could they be viewed as “gifts” that produce changes or benefits down the road? How so?
- How does this art connect with the passage about Jacob?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Surprise Package Swap (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Much is said throughout the Bible about the giving and receiving of gifts. Sometimes the gifts are surprises, like manna from heaven; other times, they are intentional gifts to win favor or to offer hospitality. This activity focuses on the unexpected type of gifts from God, often called “gifts of the Spirit.” The group will be asked to imagine a variety of these gifts being given to them via a surprise package or present, as a way of providing them with the resources to do ministry. The big difference is they’ll be asked to exchange the “gifts” they’re given with others in the group, not only to share the gifts but also to help everyone realize what it might be like to have these gifts and what they can do with them.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- gift-wrapped box
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Have the group read Genesis 24:10 and 50–53, and 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 and 27–31. The first passage tells of Abraham’s servant being sent with gifts to find a wife for Isaac; the second one is the well-known letter from Paul about spiritual gifts. Talk briefly about how gifts are used in the Bible. Ask the group to recall stories in which God gave “gifts” to people. For example:

- manna in the wilderness
- the promised land
- Paul’s spiritual gifts of love, peace, charity, and so forth
- or instances where people gave gifts to each other

Mention how God-given gifts can be used to provide talents or resources for ministry, and discuss the following.

- Do all people have the same gifts, equally? Why or why not?
- How does one handle having different gifts than a close friend or family member?
- Are there other gifts besides the ones Paul describes? Name some.

Then introduce the “mystery gift” and have youth take turns describing what specific “gift for ministry” the box contains for themselves. As each participant tells of his or her gift, record their description on the newsprint or a whiteboard. After all the participants have spoken, the “swap” begins. Read the list of gifts aloud, and have participants pick a gift from the list that they didn’t originally have, and tell the group why they’d like to have that gift and what they would do with it.



Wrap up by pointing out that not everyone has the same gifts, and that to envy another for his or her gifts is not as helpful as recognizing the other person's gifts and assisting them in discovering new ways the person can use the God-given talents. This activity can not only help the individuals in the group realize how valuable their gifts are, but also give them some ideas on how to use them, based on what their "swap" partners have suggested.



### 5 It's All Relative

**Leader preparation:** One of the most basic ideas in the Bible is God's desire for humankind to be in relationship, not only with God, but with one other. Gifts of ministry that help make that happen can be find expression in all sorts of ways, some rather traditional, and others more unusual. This activity is designed to use a piece of art, "Sisters in the Wind," as a conversation starter for discovering the wide range of "relational" gifts that not only deepen bonds between people, whether family, friends, or strangers, but also aid in better understanding the heart of God.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: "Sisters in the Wind" by Ethan Hubbard, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)
- paper for each participant
- pens or pencils

Have the group read aloud Ruth 1:6–18 and talk a little about the relationship between Ruth and Naomi using the following questions.

- How close do you think the two women really are, as mother and daughter-in-law?
- Why would one promise to follow the other, considering they are not related by blood, but by marriage?
- Do you think in-laws or friends develop a stronger connection than family members? Why or why not?
- What happens when family members are absent, or not part of the picture?

Display "Sisters in the Wind" by Ethan Hubbard and ask the youth to describe what they think is happening in the scene. Ask them if they think these could be sisters by birth or sisters through friendship and why they think so.

Lead youth into a discussion of what a relationship involves and how one's faith can be a source of support, inspiration, or guidance when it comes to building relationships. Have them consider what specific kinds of ministry gifts might be helpful in that regard using the following questions.

- What traditional gifts can be used to nurture relationship? (Suggestions may be preaching, teaching, interpreting, healing, and so forth.)
- What other kinds of less conventional gifts would also work? (Suggestions may be music, drama, yoga, artwork, athletics, and so forth.) Encourage them to be as creative as possible in envisioning these types of gifts.



Give the youth paper and pencils and instruct them to draw a family web, placing themselves in the center and drawing lines of connection to other family members.

- In your own family, what are some ways you feel connected to siblings, parents, or other relatives?
- What are things you share in common? Have them draw double lines to the various members and jot down common traits, interests, talents, and/or tastes.
- Can differences also be a means of connecting? As the popular expression says, “opposites attract.” (Have youth draw a wiggly line to the various members and jot down these items.)
- How do you think God feels when relationships are built or strengthened? Why so?
- How do you think God has equipped you with particular gifts to accomplish that?
- What’s one thing you can do to nurture a relationship today?

## 6 Gift Anatomy

**Leader preparation:** The Apostle Paul is famous for his comparison of the church with the functioning of a human body. In particular 1 Corinthians 12:4–31 dealt with different types of spiritual gifts, and how they were supposed to work together for the common good. The human body as a symbol for this process is still very meaningful today. This activity puts some “flesh on the bones” by asking the group to think about how specific ministry gifts can actually be linked or related to individual body parts. By working together as a group, and through the labeling of a life-size picture of a human body, they may discover just what it means to be a Christian body and how exercising one’s gifts for ministry is something that often occurs in a group or collaborative setting.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- 6’ sheet of craft paper for drawing an outline of a body
- markers
- tape

Have volunteers take turns reading 1 Corinthians 12:4–31 to the group. Talk a little about Paul’s “human body” passage and how his description connects with them as a way of illustrating the collaboration process for a church or other faith group. Ask whether any of them have felt like they were a part of a larger “human body,” working together as the hands, feet, mouth, and so forth, on a real body.

Have the youth make a life-size “body of Christ” on the sheet of craft paper by tracing an outline around one of the group members, either lying down on the floor or standing against a wall. Invite them to brainstorm together what kinds of gifts of ministry this body might have, and where on the drawing, associated with which body parts. Have them add call-outs or labels with markers. For example, label the hand as a writer of letters, the arms as givers of hugs, the head as thinking through problems, and so forth. As they’re working, they could also talk about their own faith journeys, and how they might have had a first-hand experience of using a particular body part for ministry.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 People Fishing (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** There's a popular saying: "It's not what you know; it's who you know." When looking at gifts for ministry, a better way of rephrasing this might be: "It's not what your gifts are, but who they'll be used to benefit." When Jesus called the first disciples, promising them that he would "make them fish for people," he knew that each had different gifts and talents—which ultimately would have a bearing on the people they themselves would introduce to the faith. According to tradition, one disciple's gifts led him to minister in India; another was the "rock" upon which the church in Rome was founded. In this activity, the group will put a creative "face" on some of the people they might feel called to "fish for" and share their gifts with.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- "Sample Fish Drawings," Attachment: Activity 7
- pens or pencils

Have a group member read Mark 1:14–20 to the group. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions.

- What do you think Jesus meant by "fishing for people"?
- What kind of people?
- How do you think different people respond to different messages?
- How do you suppose the different gifts of individual disciples might have been a factor in who they fished for, and what kind of results they got?

Hand out copies of the attachment "Sample Fish Drawings." Invite the participants to think about their own distinctive gifts and how those gifts might be used to minister to particular groups, individuals, cultures, vocations, geographic areas, and so forth. Have them draw creative "faces" on the fish pictures to represent either their own "character" or "personality," or that of a person or group for whom they will be "fishing" and sharing their ministry gifts with. For example, they may draw an artist fish wearing a beret, musician fish with guitar, and so forth. They may also wish to label their drawings. Encourage youth to talk about how their gifts are connected with, or suited for, the "fish" they've drawn. Invite them to consider what kinds of gifts they see in fellow group members that would help guide them in a specific direction towards a particular group or ministry.

### 8 Picture Your Gifts

**Leader preparation:** It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words. For those who are about to venture forth into the world to use their gifts for ministry, pictures can be helpful in adding a different dimension to the process. People experience life in a variety of ways; some may find words and written materials more to their liking, while others are "hands-on" in how they approach new situations, or perhaps even visually oriented. This activity will use digital photography as a vehicle for not only assisting in the sending and serving process, but also providing a visible, permanent physical reminder of one's gifts, as determined by self-discovery as well as affirmation by others.

**Supplies:**

- paper and pencils
- card stock, folded in half, for each person
- digital camera(s)
- computer with photo software and color printer or photo printer
- 4" × 6" photo paper for each person
- markers
- glue sticks or photo adhesive

Have all the participants pair up with a partner. Using the digital camera(s), direct the partners to take pictures of each other. Have each person develop a list of seven gifts for ministry that he or she has. Each person is also to come up with a similar list of seven gifts that they feel their partner has. While the youth are creating their lists, print out the photos that have been taken and attach them to card stock. Give the pictures to the youth and have them write their names and their gifts on the cards. Have everyone share what gifts they and their partners came up with in a brief discussion.

- How will these gifts be helpful as you are sent out into the world to minister to others?
- Which of the gifts that your partner says you have are a surprise to you, and why?

**9 Gifts—The Final Frontier**

**Leader preparation:** From the Genesis account of creation: “God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars” to promises that God would make the descendants of Israel as numerous as the stars, to the mysterious star announcing Christ’s birth. Stars (and space) have long held a fascination for people of faith as a symbol of God’s infinite power and grace. When it comes to the granting of spiritual gifts, God’s generosity can be equally immense.

In this activity, the group will have an opportunity to shine some “star” light on the gifts of ministry they’ve been given, in order to go out in turn and multiply these for the benefit of all. To prepare, gather photos of the solar system, constellations, and galaxies from the web or from illustrated astronomy books found at a library. Also, if helpful, do some background research on stars, constellations, and mythology at website “Windows to the Universe,” <http://www.windows2universe.org/mythology/stars.html>.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- pictures of the solar system, constellations, and galaxies

Start off with a discussion of how stars and the heavens are described in the Bible. Offer some background information to help the group by mentioning the Genesis account of God’s creation of the earth, sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 1:1–5 and 14–19), or God’s promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5).

- What kind of impression does one get about the infinite nature of the universe, and God’s role in shaping it, from our faith traditions?
- Where else do the stars play a big role in the Bible? What about at Jesus’ birth?

### Reflect

Think about how various scripture passages can provide a literal meaning, but also offer inspiration for creative new ways of experiencing God's truth. What are some of the inventive discoveries that group members had? How was a closer relationship forged between members as the result of reading the Bible together, conversing, singing together, or viewing artwork? Say a simple prayer to God for all the new experiences that came about during these activities.

- If one could focus a star's light on some of the varied ministry gifts found among members of the group, which ones would they choose to highlight, and why?
- Which ones can they envision being multiplied to become as numerous as the descendants of Israel?

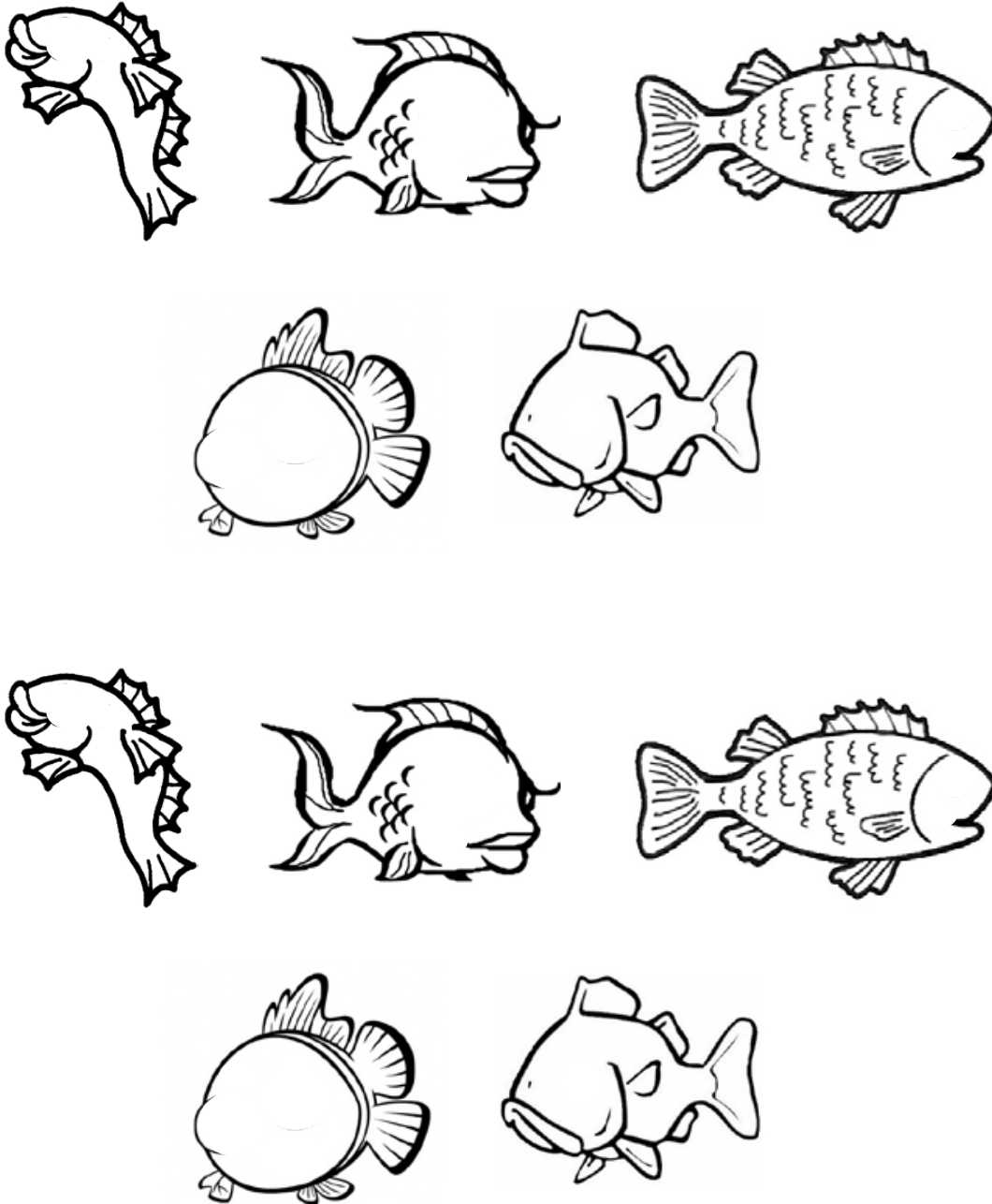
Using the galaxy pictures as inspiration, ask the group members to imagine how many stars there are, and likewise, the infinite number of ministry gifts in the world, represented by multitudes of small groups like this one. Close the session with a short meditation as follows:

Close your eyes and imagine your body traveling upward, into the skies, into space, and beyond. Picture the planets, meteors, and stars flashing by, the infinite galaxies, and the immensity of God's universe, all around you. Now turn around, and begin traveling back to earth. Be aware of the perspective—in the grand scheme of things, the planet earth is just a small speck. But despite this, God still cares about each one of its inhabitants—and the gifts for ministry that have been named today are all ways that God continues to work with us and among us, equipping us to grow our gifts just as Abraham's descendants were multiplied, until they are as numerous as the stars.

Attachment: Activity 7

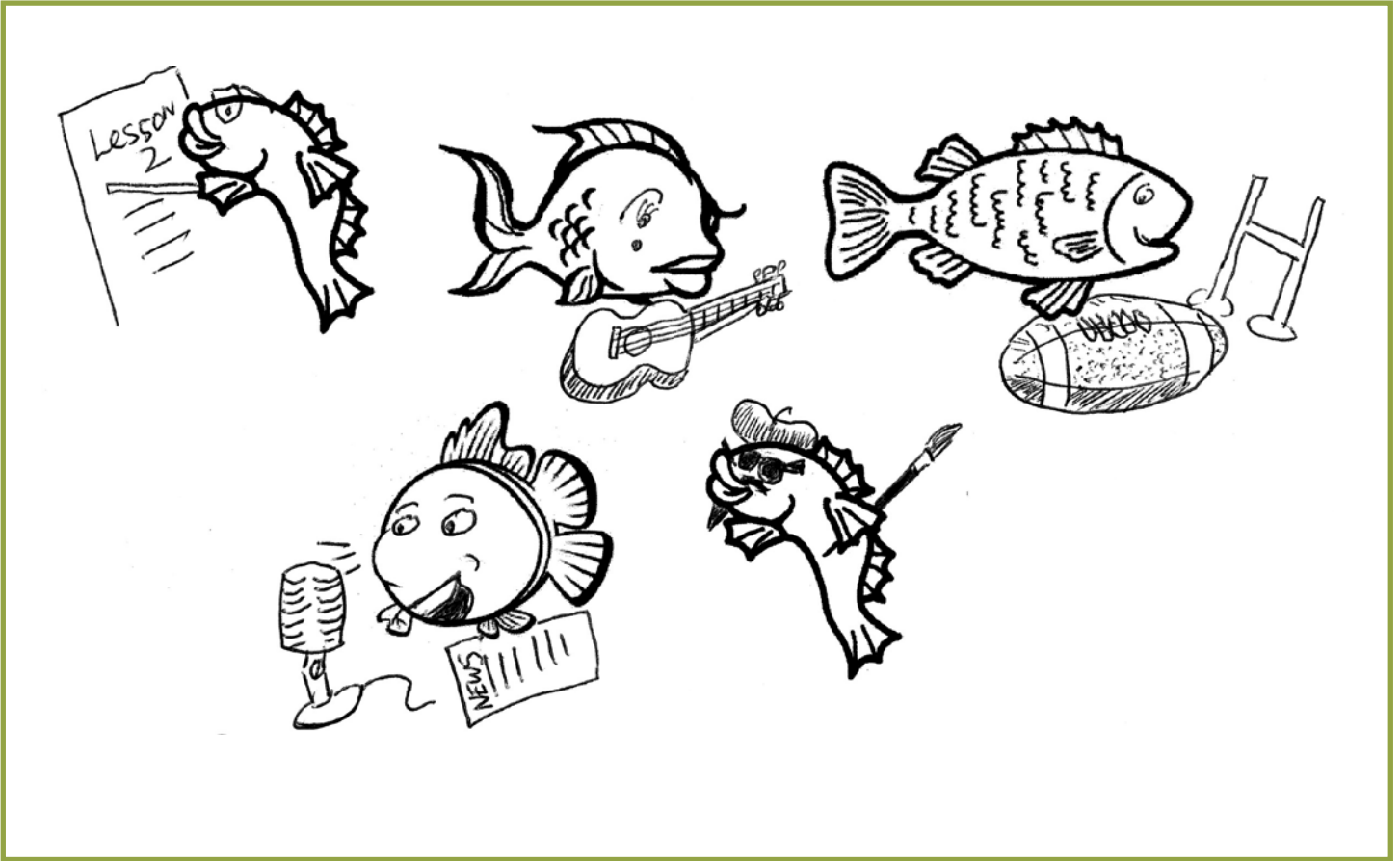
### Sample Fish Drawings

And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1:17)





Attachment: Activity 7 (Continued)



# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

With the kind of energy and passion that this age group possesses, being a committed disciple will come quite naturally. Yet these young people also have questions, concerns, and doubts that have come from their experiences in a complex, confusing world. Given the gifts of wisdom, confidence, and courage that come with age, they'll discover how their own God-given abilities can be used to help others, becoming a powerful force for change in today's world.

### About this Exploration

Jesus extends the invitation to "come, follow me." We are asked to trust that our gifts, talents, and interests may be used by God for the ministry that is before us. We are not asked first to learn more or begin afresh in order to be noticed by Jesus, but rather to hear the Spirit's call and come just as we are. Through this invitation we are encouraged to place our confidence in God, who is able to work through our open hands and hearts that are offered to the church, community, and world. If we have doubts about our abilities or qualifications, we can be encouraged by the countless Biblical stories that remind us that God always chooses and uses the "least of these." Come, let's follow!

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Jeremiah 15:15–21**  
**Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### Leader Preparation

Recognizing that all people are different, it's important to keep in mind that some group members may be more receptive to straightforward informational methods, while others are better reached by hands-on activities, games, participatory or interactive techniques, and so forth. Throughout these wide-ranging activities, look for opportunities to help the group members discover new gifts and new things about themselves that may just serve as the "seeds" for their growth and development as the newest generation of disciples.

*Prayer: Dear God, teach us to love one another for who we are, whatever our gifts may be, and whether we're disciples in the "traditional" sense, or members of today's generation who seek to go in new directions. Celebrate with us in our similarities, encourage us in our differences, and help us share our energy and passion with one another in ways that make your power more real every day. 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

#### ① Calling All Disciples (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The amazing thing about ministry is that God's selection of disciples (and the gifts given them) is always surprisingly limitless and unhindered by rules, societal roles, or conventional measures like test scores or good conduct. Jesus himself demonstrated that through his choice of twelve disciples from ordinary walks of life, including fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, and others. In this activity, group members are asked to put together their own "dream team" of disciples from very unlikely places and vocations. Then, given the potential gifts of these unusual disciples, the group will brainstorm ministry directions, miracles, or other ways that their "dream team" can further God's plan.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pens or pencils

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 9:9–13 and 18–26 to the group. Note that this starts off with Jesus unexpectedly calling a tax collector to be a disciple, which was unheard of by religious leaders of his day. Ask the group for their impressions of Jesus' choices for disciples.

- What made Jesus' recruits for discipleship unusual, or different? Why were people like the Pharisees so critical of these choices?
- What kind of people would you have selected, and why?
- What do you suppose Jesus' intention was, by his calling such unlikely candidates? How does it reflect the belief that all people deserve God's grace?

Using paper and pen or pencil, as well as markers and newsprint or whiteboard, have the group brainstorm their own "dream team" of disciples, coming up with potential candidates that include people of today's world. These could be disciples who have come from very diverse, uncommon, or unconventional first careers. For example, one team might include: a man who donated a kidney for a friend, a woman business leader who's president of a small company creating environmentally friendly lighting products, an attorney, an employee at a manufacturing plant, a used-car salesperson, someone who works for a non-profit that helps children from disadvantaged inner city neighborhoods, and so on. Working from a simple profile of these recruits, make some guesses as to what kinds of gifts for ministry they might add to the team—and how these specific gifts would play out in ministry opportunities, miracles that could be performed, or new directions for sharing their faith with others.

#### ② When and Where

**Leader preparation:** Depending on time and place, gifts of ministry can be different. Specific occasions, situations, locations, and even the timing of the gift givers' or gift receivers' actions or presence can all be factors shaping the experience of God's blessings. This activity may help the group create and use commonplace objects not only as cues to increase their mindfulness of how gifts often vary, but also as inspirations to adapt their own gifts in different settings. Make a set of blank calendar pages for all twelve months of the year. They can be

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

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

photocopied from existing calendars, or printed using computer templates. Make a clock face from poster board, dinner plate-size for each participant.

### Supplies:

- prepared blank set of calendar pages for each person
- prepared blank clock face for each person
- sticky notes of different colors, shapes, sizes
- 12" × 15" sheets of poster board
- maps of local area or region
- pens, pencils, markers

Lead the group in a brainstorming discussion of the varied times and places that ministry gifts can be offered, and how different situations may shape the nature of the gift. For ideas, the group may wish to consider things like time of day (waking, eating, bedtime, traveling time, snack breaks, meetings, shopping trips, waiting room time), seasons of the year, occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, graduation, farewells and goodbyes, such holidays as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Thanksgiving or New Year's Day), church holidays such as Easter and Christmas, and so forth.

To take the group from discussion to actual practice, have group members work on individual "time" or "place" projects of their own choosing. Some may wish to create a customized calendar and others may design clock faces, or sticky-note boards, or even highlighted area maps showing gifting opportunities. Emphasize that whatever creative project they choose to do, it should be something that will serve as a constant reminder to them to be aware at all times of the potential for using one's gifts to care for others. A calendar, for example, could contain notes that ask them to seek out volunteer possibilities, or to use a particular gift (cooking a Thanksgiving turkey for a local shelter or a shut-in).

### **3** Wood Work

**Leader preparation:** Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, was a carpenter, reason enough to trust that God's plan does include the gifts of all kinds of people, both mighty and humble. Woodworking—like metalworking, contracting, bricklaying, electrical work, plumbing, landscaping, car repair, farming, and countless other vocations—is a very honest and honorable way to earn a living. In this activity, a simple woodworking project that doesn't produce much more than sawdust may help the group see that even the most ordinary offshoots of one's labors, or one's gifts for ministry, can indeed have an important role in the big picture of Creation. To prepare, go to the online article "Uses for Wood Shavings" and read the article about uses for sawdust.

### Supplies:

- a variety of woodworking tools, such as planes, files, saws, sandpaper, carving tools, and so forth, that are used for cutting, shaping, and smoothing
- blocks of scrap wood, such as 2" × 4" ends, short planks, and so forth (not plywood or other wood products that are part wood, part glue)
- a box of plastic zipper lock sandwich bags
- stick-on labels
- brush and dustpan to sweep up and gather the sawdust and wood shavings
- article: "Uses for Wood Shavings," [http://www.ehow.com/list\\_6709718\\_uses-wood-shavings.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6709718_uses-wood-shavings.html)



Ask the youth who Jesus' earthly father was and what they think Jesus learned from him. Invite the youth to share any experiences they have had with wood-working. If they haven't had any hands-on experience themselves, invite them to talk about the results of woodworking projects they've seen others do, such as family members or friends.

- What kinds of things are made with wood?
- What sort of tools are used?
- Besides the actual project, what else is produced in woodworking? What kind of "waste products"?

Bring out the tools and scrap wood, and encourage everyone to try his or her hand at sawing, carving, sanding, or whatever they feel inclined to do. Have them save whatever sawdust or shavings they produce—grab handfuls of it and put it into the plastic sandwich bags. They can write their names on the labels and affix these to their bags. Then mention that while many people consider sawdust to be useless, there actually are practical applications for it. Give them copies of "Uses for Wood Shavings," and suggest that they might want to take their bags home to try some of those uses. Make connections with the wood-working project and ministry gifts. Ask them to consider if their gifts also have unexpected "uses," too. Invite them to share how their own particular gifts may not always seem to have "practical" applications. Suggest that God does find uses for all of them, no matter how humble, ordinary, or unusual.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 School of Giftology (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One of the best ways of learning about something is to teach it to others. The subject of gifts for ministry is no different. At the very beginning, one's talents, skills, and abilities may tend to be more like undeveloped ideas. As the journey of discovery continues, through research, conversations, or personal experiences, the seed of the idea begins to grow and blossom. Seeking out other avenues for sharing the gifts, like teaching them, will certainly add depth to the process and even help one to collect more insights, background knowledge, and practice using the gifts.

This activity uses role-play to help the group members engage in such a process by teaching one another, as they pool their gifts to develop a rough outline for a school-type program designed to teach about gifts of ministry, or "giftology." To prepare, gather a few sample course catalogs or online descriptions of study programs, available from community colleges, universities, private instructors, or academies. You might find these online through an Internet search.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- pens or pencils
- course catalogs or summaries of courses of study
- "School of Giftology Programs," Attachment: Activity 4

Announce to the group members that they are in charge of a school or college where the main focus is on gifts of ministry. As the planning team, they are to collaborate on the creation of materials to be used by this school to recruit



students. They will need to come up with a name for the school, and put together a brief summary of the areas of study and typical classes to be offered. Hand out copies of “School of Giftology Programs” as a guide. These can be more traditional academic courses, or enrichment/extracurricular offerings of the type often found at a community college or a small academy. Guide the group by asking the following questions.

- What particular gifts of ministry do they feel are important to teach?
- How would they go about putting together lesson plans?
- What kinds of coursework would best teach or refine these gifts?

Encourage them to discuss the thinking behind their ideas and choices. When they’re finished, they can summarize their school’s approach, specific areas of study, fieldwork opportunities, and a general description of the instructors on the faculty, fields of expertise, and so forth.

### 5 God’s Utensils

**Leader preparation:** Paul’s second letter to Timothy uses the idea of a set of “utensils,” useful to the owner of the house and ready for every good work, as a symbol for humanity’s role as God’s helpers, who are used in a variety of different forms of ministry. In this activity, the participants have two ways to explore this concept of serving as God’s tools—an improvisational hands-on exercise and the experience of joining together in a song that expresses the same thoughts.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” African American spiritual (tune: I’m Gonna Live); lyrics, [http://www.hymnary.org/text/im\\_gonna\\_live\\_so\\_god\\_can\\_use\\_me?tab=about](http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwxmCROAkXc>
- accompanist, or computer with Internet access
- a variety of different kitchen utensils, enough for all the members of the group

Have someone read 2 Timothy 2:14–26 to the group to start the conversation. Consider the following questions.

- Who is the owner of the house that Paul mentions? Who are the “utensils”?
- What kind of “things” was Paul referring to when he mentioned “cleansing” the utensils?
- How do Paul’s examples have parallels or similarities in your own life? How are they relevant today?

Hand out the collection of kitchen utensils to group members, and have them make some comparisons between the various tools and examples of gifts that are used in ministry.

- What ministry gift could be compared to a whisk or egg beater?
- What about a spoon? Or a knife?
- How do you think it might feel to be a “utensil” in God’s household?

Either have the group sing the verses of “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” or watch the video “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me.” Go over the lyrics, verse

by verse. Have participants suggest new verses, based on their own particular gifts that would be helpful to add. Ask them what other ways can they think of in which they could serve as “God’s utensils” in sharing ministry with others. Sing the song once again.

## 6 Gifts of Struggle

**Leader preparation:** The prophet Jeremiah complained about an unending pain, which he said came about as the result of things he did for God. Yet, as many people of faith believe, God doesn’t actually bring about suffering—but God is there with us in our struggles and pain to comfort, reassure, or support us, helping us ultimately to turn tragedy into triumph. In Jeremiah’s case, God’s answer was giving him the strength to prevail, like a “fortified wall of bronze.” Obviously, discipleship sometimes *does* come with challenges attached. In this activity, participants will be invited to share their own experiences of struggle, and like Jeremiah, create a prayer to bring their pain to God. Obtain a copy of Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” as a visual representation of someone experiencing pain and struggle. Make a copy of the picture for each person, leaving about a third of the page blank for writing space.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- pens and pencils
- prepared picture of “The Scream” by Edvard Munch, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Scream.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Scream.jpg)

Have a youth read Jeremiah 15:15–21 to the group. Talk about the pain and struggle that Jeremiah expresses, showing them a copy of Edvard Munch’s famous painting “The Scream” as a visual focus for the discussion.

- What did Jeremiah say in this passage? Who was he talking to? What was the response?
- Why do you suppose we sometimes suffer even when we’re being disciples, ministering to others with the gifts we’ve been given by God?
- Can you share an experience you’ve had, trying to do what you feel God asked you to do, but felt that you suffered for it as a result, and wanted to say, “God, I don’t want to do this anymore”?
- What did you learn from this experience?

Hand out copies of “The Scream” with blank space for writing. Invite youth to follow in the footsteps of Jeremiah by writing a prayer telling God about their experience, what it felt like for them, and concluding by asking for God’s help. Have them write their prayers on the blank section of the handout.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 All Excellent Gifts (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Since the earliest days of the church, there have been debates about whose gift is better than someone else’s. The Apostle Paul weighed in on this issue in his First Letter to the Corinthians, in which he concluded that no gift is more honorable, nor is one member of the greater body of Christ more important than another.

In this activity, participants will be asked to look at Paul’s letter and consider their own different kinds of ministry gifts in light of his advice. Then they’ll work together as a “smaller” body of Christ to create a prayer or litany based on 1 Corinthians 12, affirming their belief that all of the gifts of ministry they’ve received are equally valuable in God’s eyes.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

To begin conversation, have the group debate the question “Is one ministry gift better than another?” Read 1 Corinthians 12 to the group inviting them to follow along. Paul offers his feelings on the subject. Continue the discussion with these questions:

- What different gifts does Paul mention in the text?
- In this modern age, what other gifts could be added to this list?

Use the markers newsprint or whiteboard to list some of these gifts. Pick a few specific gifts, either from Paul’s list, or ones suggested by the group, and pose this question: *Where would we be without the gift of . . . ?* Then lead a discussion with questions such as these:

- Why would the world be a less loving place if this gift were not present?
- How do some of these gifts work together to complement one another?

On another sheet of newsprint have the group collaborate on a closing prayer or litany that puts into their own words the thoughts found in Paul’s text. For example, “We thank you, God, for the gift of knowledge.” Responses might be: “All excellent gifts come from you, God.” Or “This is Your more excellent way.” That will send them on their way with a new appreciation for how their gifts were created to help everyone work together in God’s service.



### 8 Three Disciples

**Leader preparation:** Russian author Leo Tolstoy’s “The Three Hermits” tells the story of three simple souls who gave a bishop an amazing bon voyage gift—the realization that faith was more than formal religious training. The hermits, like disciples in biblical or even modern times, had somehow discovered a kind of miraculous faith that brought them into a closer relationship with God than even their teacher, the bishop, possessed. In this activity, the group members will be encouraged to talk about their own faith journeys, reflecting on how their individual gifts, like those of the hermits, can similarly serve as a parting present not only for themselves but also for others.

**Supplies:**

- “Essay on ‘The Three Hermits’ by Leo Tolstoy,” Attachment: Activity 8

Have the group read the essay on “The Three Hermits.” Chat briefly about their impressions of the story. Clarify, if necessary, the hermits’ prayer “three are ye” as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Some questions that might be helpful include:

- Why do you suppose the bishop felt he had to teach the hermits something about religion?

- Before the bishop arrived, how did they demonstrate their discipleship? How did they do so after he left?
- What ministry gifts did the bishop possess? What gifts did the hermits have? How were they different?
- What are some ways in which their gifts complemented each other's?
- Who actually wound up being the disciple, in this story? How?

Invite the group members to share their own stories of faith discoveries and putting their gifts to use.

- What are some occasions when you shared your gifts and received an unexpected or surprising response?
- How about times when you received a gift in return? Explain.
- What kind of parting gift could you imagine giving to someone, as a way of personally living out your faith as a disciple? (Suggest that participants think of gifts they could give to each other.)

### Gift Guide

**Leader preparation:** Many have said that the Bible is a “guidebook,” filled with all kinds of helpful information, words of wisdom for living our lives, and inspiration to keep going even when things don’t go exactly as planned. Although not “organized” in the same manner as an Audubon field guide or a wilderness survival book, it nonetheless contains a wealth of practical knowledge for people of all generations, all cultures, and all stages of ability, from beginner to advanced. This activity gives participants a chance to create a unique guidebook of their own, which is designed to help them find their way on this lifelong hike through God’s world of ministry gifts.

#### Supplies:

- 6 sheets of 8½” × 11” paper for each participant
- 2 sheets of cardstock or a small, inexpensive notebook for each participant
- stapler
- digital camera(s)
- computer and photo printer
- photo paper
- pens, pencils, markers
- glue
- scissors
- old magazines
- sample guidebook from Audubon Society or other organization to use for design and layout ideas

Distribute the paper and art materials to the group with instructions to use them to create their own guidebooks. The big difference is their guides will be used not to recognize plants or wildlife but to help identify ministry gifts. They are to come up with names, descriptions, benefits or uses of particular gifts, visuals, and other information, and compile these in the style of a guidebook. Encourage youth to use the cameras to take pictures to illustrate gifts of ministry, or find other appropriate pictures in magazines. If they wish, they can even create their own drawings, showing how the gifts are used in the world. As they work on the guides, they can share ideas and brainstorm with one another.

## Reflect

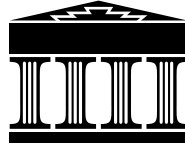
Discipline takes a little work. It's not easy to put ideas about faith into action. What have you or the group members discovered about the job of discipleship? What are some rewards or advantages that come with it? In a world that asks "What's in it for me?" how have these activities helped to transform the "me first" attitude to an other-centered focus following Jesus' own example, so that we instead ask "What can I do for you?" How did this experience help to shed more light on everyone's gifts for ministry?

Once the books are completed, it's time for the participants to actually go out into the world, equipped for whatever situations or surroundings they may find themselves in, ready to use their gifts for the benefit of others.



Attachment: Activity 4

## School of Giftology Programs



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*Where Gifts of Ministry are Given, Received, Practiced, and Shared*

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General Areas of Study

Courses Offered

Fieldwork Opportunities

The Instructors

*Cultivating care givers and empowering ministry since the year A.D. 1.*

Attachment: Activity 8

## Essay on “The Three Hermits” by Leo Tolstoy

There’s an old Russian story, told by author Leo Tolstoy, of a bishop who had to journey to an island to make a pastoral visit to three hermits. As the church’s representative, he was supposed to “bring religion” to these three simple souls who had no formal schooling and little in the way of worldly goods. The bishop thought that the poor hermits didn’t even know how to pray, since all they did was lift their arms up toward heaven and repeat, “Three are ye, three are we, have mercy upon us.”

The bishop was a little worried about his mission. What in the world could he say to these hermits that would make any sort of a difference in their lives? So, he decided to teach them the Lord’s Prayer. It wasn’t easy . . . they had a lot of trouble learning this long, formal verse . . . which he figured they didn’t even understand very well, anyway. Later, when his boat returned to bring him back to the mainland, he said goodbye with a bit of disappointment—for he felt he hadn’t really accomplished that much.

As it got dark and the boat was out on the high seas, the bishop looked back and suddenly saw something strange. Something—perhaps another boat—was following them, apparently trying to catch up. So they gave orders to stop the boat, and to wait for their pursuers. It turned out to be the three hermits, walking across the waves in their bare feet, like Jesus walking on the water. The bishop and all the crew members of the boat were astonished.

As the hermits came on board, one of them said to the bishop, “We hoped we could reach you, before you got too far. We forgot the words of the prayer. Could you please teach it to us again?” The bishop, realizing what had just happened, crossed himself in awe and told the hermits that they should simply continue their own simple prayer, for they had no need of his teaching. And then they went away, just as they had arrived, walking back across the water.

**Attachment: Activity 8** *(Continued)*

As this miraculous sight vanished into the night, the bishop reflected on the experience. He realized that he had gone to them, thinking that he, as a bishop, had the superior religious knowledge. *He* was supposed to be the teacher—yet these three simple hermits had taught *him* far more about the true power of faith than he'd ever learned in church!

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

For youth of this age, a growing concern is the roles they'll play in the adult world, which is seen in their trying on different hats and personas, or checking out a wide range of possibilities for how they'll live their lives. So how they express their faith, or what they choose to do to share their gifts, becomes not only another question to tackle, but also a potential source of conflict. As a result, traditional ministry practices can be either wholeheartedly accepted or unexpectedly rejected. Previous generations' faith experiences may no longer be relevant for them, so they may seek out new, unconventional, or even surprising or radical ways to talk about, share, or put into practice their newly shaped beliefs.

### About this Exploration

Faithful Christian practices encourage a communal awareness that God calls, nurtures, and blesses the use of our gifts to strengthen God's work in the world. Our understanding of this partnership with God is always emerging. Traditional gifts, such as preaching, hospitality, music, and caring may be demonstrated in ways recognizable since ancient days. Christian tradition may also be informed and evolve to include modern forms of expression such as social media, video, legislative advocacy, and more. No matter the era or tradition, gifts of ministry are grounded in a desire to minister with and on behalf of Christ.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**Isaiah 49:1–7**  
**Luke 10:38–42**

## Leader Preparation

The sharing of gifts for ministry is not a “one size fits all” proposition. A look at the history of different Christian traditions over the centuries easily proves that the infinite range of faith expressions serves a very important purpose—matching specific gifts to particular settings, cultures, or needs. When working with youth of this age group leaders need to remember that having a variety of different ideas, even when they seem like polar opposites, is an opportunity for learning rather than a cause for conflict or misunderstanding. In these activities try to remain open minded, knowing that through the expression of differences we create an opening for the Spirit to work with and among us.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the wide variety of people, gifts, and traditions that help us to share your message in so many far-ranging settings. Help us to see this diversity of ideas and viewpoints as a way to lift up your greatness as we all discover together how to respect and appreciate the different ways people express their faith and engage in ministry. Guide us as we explore new traditions that offer untold possibilities for expanding your ministry in the days and years ahead. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Picture a Church (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The original disciples were a varied lot; they were fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, and one who came from royal blood. People are more than their occupations, of course, and neither people nor churches can be stereotyped on the basis of different characteristics. Besides the disciples’ different vocations, each had individual personalities, talents, and gifts—which, no doubt, played a part in the collective “face” the disciples had, as a whole. If there had been others called instead of these twelve, one could imagine that the stories and experiences recorded in the Bible might have been slightly different. In this activity, the group will be asked to connect the unique gifts found in any gathering of followers with the “picture” of a particular church. By exploring the relationship between the gifts and the “vision” of any given group, they may be able to see that distinctive collections of gifts may determine what a church’s future direction may hold, based on these differences.

**Supplies:**

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Draw a simple picture of a church on the newsprint or whiteboard. Tell the group that this particular church has a membership that includes a cook, a rock musician, a dancer, a business expert, a writer, an athlete, and a seamstress. Use the following questions to talk about this community. As the group brainstorms, jot down some specific ideas regarding what this church might be able to do.

- How would you envision a church like this, in terms of its diverse make-up and potential?
- How would its particular activities, mission projects, or worship traditions be different because of its unique gifts?

Switch to different church profile: a group made up of a gardener, preschool teacher, fashion and jewelry designer, singer, knitter, storyteller, efficiency expert/organizer, and entrepreneur. Use the following questions to talk about this community.

- What different things could this church be able to do, in Christ’s name?
- Would this church look different, or minister to people differently, because of its different gifts? Why or why not?

Brainstorm some more mission, fellowship, or worship possibilities for this second church. Conclude the discussion by turning to a specific local setting—the group members’ own church(s). Ask them to consider the following questions.

- What gifts do they see in their church? Are they all being used?
- How could more be used, to do something different?



### 2 Wisdom of the Elders

**Leader preparation:** In both the New and Old Testaments, a person’s parents, grandparents, and ancestors play an important role in both the present and the future. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain a listing of all of the members of Jesus’ family tree, not only to show his royal lineage (traced back to King David), but also to give some foretaste of what is to come. With family



to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

roots like these, how could he not be great? Beyond simple genetics, however, the knowledge and traditions passed down through generations is a critical factor in how one lives his or her own life today.

This activity, which features a conversation with some seniors from the local community, gives participants a first-hand demonstration of how the “wisdom of the elders” can be extremely helpful in how one views gifts for ministry, and how they will ultimately be put to use. Some advance planning will be required, in order to invite some special guests to this activity—two or three older persons from the community, who are willing to share their thoughts with the group. Give a copy of the attachment “Wisdom of the Elders Conversation Questions” to the guests before the meeting.

### **Supplies:**

- invited guests
- comfortable chairs for the guests
- handicap accessible meeting place (including building and room access, restrooms, and so forth)
- transportation (if needed)
- refreshments (especially with the special needs of the guests in mind)
- “Wisdom of the Elders Conversation Questions,” Attachment: Activity 2 (for each participant, including the guests)

Have the group members welcome their invited guests into the room, and explain that the topic of the day will be spiritual gifts, or more specifically, gifts for ministry: what are people’s views on gifts, and how have views changed over the years. Invite the guests to consider how members of an older generation feel about ministry gifts, compared to younger generations. The group members may take turns asking questions and also do follow up questions as appropriate. The guests may also ask questions of the group members, so that the conversation becomes a good give and take. Refreshments may be served as the conversation begins.



### **3 In-spirit-ations**

**Leader preparation:** The original Pentecost experience, for Christians, was not only the “birth” of the church. It was also the occasion on which the Holy Spirit gave the gift of speaking in tongues to the believers gathered in Jerusalem. As such, it was the most dramatic and far-reaching “gifting” ever witnessed in one place. Translating this kind of a world-changing event to modern times and contemporary believers can be a challenge, but through the use of creative comparisons and nonverbal or visual symbols the twenty-first century follower can gain a new appreciation for how the Spirit works to bring new “light” to an understanding of the faith. This activity may help the group see how their own gifts for ministry are a natural outgrowth of that first Pentecost.

### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- artwork: “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” (Anonymous), [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=37962&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401)

Invite volunteers to take turns reading the Pentecost narrative from Acts 2:1–21 to the group in order to set the stage and provide necessary background for understanding the story. Display “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel,” and ask

for their thoughts about how the artwork tries to express the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Some questions to consider:

- What different symbols used in this painting portray the Spirit?
- How do you suppose the believers responded to this new gift?
- How would you feel if you were the recipient?
- Do the expressions on the faces, as captured by the artist, fully convey the impact of the Spirit's gift? Why or why not?
- What are some other impressions or responses to the artwork?
- How does it connect with you, as a modern believer?

Explain that the word "inspiration" owes its roots to the same Latin word from which "Spirit" comes, *spiritus*, meaning "breath." Inspiration can be defined as "breathing into." Ask the group how they think definition reflects the believers' experience of the "rush of a violent wind" and being "filled" by the Holy Spirit. Call their attention to the flames above the believers' heads. In many Bibles, the flames are described as "tongues" of fire. Invite the group to consider the following questions.

- How might this be compared to the act of speaking in different "tongues"?
- What kind of modern-day parallel can you think of? For example, what about the traditional comic strip symbol for inspiration, a light bulb appearing above someone's head?
- How might your own "gifts" might be similar to the early believers' new-found abilities to speak in tongues or offer prophecies?
- How might they connect God's presence with everyday "inspirations"?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Prophet Lite (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The gift of prophecy may seem like an awesome, humbling responsibility—not something available to ordinary people. Yet, in reality, prophecy comes in all shapes and sizes, much like any other gift for ministry. Some of the more modest varieties can be found in all sorts of settings, from news magazines to churches, nonprofit organizations to governmental bodies, schools to medical centers. In this activity, participants explore some of the many possibilities for using the gift of prophecy in everyday, contemporary settings.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- large flashlight
- a meeting room that can be darkened
- a stool or simple straight back chair

Dim the lights in the room, bring out the flashlight, and have someone sit on the stool to read the passage from Isaiah 49:1–7 to the group telling of God's selection of Isaiah as the "light to the nations," the one who would help raise up Israel. The reader may add dramatic emphasis to the text. Another person could even hold the flashlight or aim it at the reader for a theatrical effect. Ask the group for their reactions to the passage using the following questions.

- What is being said or foretold in the text?
- Who has been chosen to raise up Israel?
- This is a description of the Prophet Isaiah being called by God to take on a special job, a prophet?
- What does he or she do?
- What is your impression of the role of prophet?
- Can you imagine having that kind of a gift?

Invite each participant take the center seat under the “spotlight,” one at a time, and assume the role of a prophet. Explain that his or her job is to demonstrate how a prophet “speaks for God,” delivering the word of God to the people of God. As modern day prophets, they can offer what they think God’s message might be on various subjects. For example, what would God have to say about the environment, or unemployment, or poverty? Encourage participants to be creative in their prophecies, but remind them that some messages can be very ordinary or common place, and not anything like the dramatic ones of Isaiah. Give each group member a shot at the prophet’s seat.



### 5 Doer-bees or Hearer-bees?

**Leader preparation:** A common misunderstanding about ministry gifts is that they all must be extremely active, service-oriented, and doing focused. Certainly, these types of gifts can contribute a great deal to furthering the faith. But there is also an important place for quiet, meditative, reflective, and learning-focused gifts as well. The Bible story of Mary and Martha is a great example. Jesus praised Mary’s choice of simple listening as an approach that is equally valid, an excellent counterpart to Martha’s action-centered methods.

In this activity, the group will have an opportunity to experience the “other side of the coin,” through a demonstration of the more passive, prayerful, discernment-based ways of Christian tradition.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- quiet meeting place with comfortable chairs, floor pillows, and soft lighting
- music player
- music recording of quiet, meditative, instrumental music
- “Guided Meditation,” Attachment: Activity 5
- artwork: “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, <http://www.art.com/products/p15177883-sa-i3715775/gustav-klimt-farm-garden-with-sunflowers-c1912.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=klimt+farm+garden+with+sunflowers>

Have a member of the group read the Mary and Martha passage from Luke 10:38–42 to the group. Invite the youth to discuss their impressions of the story using the following questions.

- What meaning do you take away from this passage? Is there a right way or a wrong way?
- How would you describe Martha’s way? Mary’s way? (Relate their different approaches to a service-oriented versus meditation-focused perspective, or a doing versus listening-and-learning viewpoint.)

- Which way usually gets more attention or publicity? Which way tends to be less understood, less “valued” in today’s world of actions, busy-ness, and relentless accomplishments?
- Is there a time for doing, and a time for hearing? How would you describe the difference?

Display “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, and invite the participants to find a comfortable chair, relax, and contemplate the beauty and simplicity of the artwork. Suggest that they look for parts of the picture that are particularly appealing, eye-catching, or inspiring. Ask them to share whatever thoughts or feelings they might have about the artwork. Have them close their eyes, and enjoy a few moments of silent meditation. After a few moments, start the music playing softly in the background, and lead them in a quiet reflection, using the “Guided Meditation.”

## 6 God’s Call

**Leader preparation:** For individuals exploring a call to ministry, the big question one usually encounters is “How do I know God is really calling me?” Unlike movies, fiction, and biblical accounts that suggest a very dramatic, “thunder-and-lightning” experience in which the person receives God’s invitation in an unmistakable, miraculous manner, many calls to ministry in today’s world are more subtle, modest, and low key. They can be as simple as a nagging thought that keeps tugging at the soul, or the unexpected hearing of a song that poses a challenge to take one’s life in a totally new direction. Music, in fact, as an important part of Christian tradition, can play a big role in one’s exploration of ministry.

In this activity, group members will listen to John Bell’s song “The Summons” (tune: Kelvingrove) and talk about their own feelings about God’s call through a verse-by-verse examination of the lyrics.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- song: “The Summons” by John Bell (tune: Kelvingrove), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo&feature=related>

Ask the group how many of them have felt they’ve received a call to share their gifts through ministry. Use the following questions to explore a call to ministry.

- What does it feel like? How do you know for sure? Do you really know?
- What kinds of questions or concerns are going through your mind?
- When did you first become aware of this sense of call? Was there a connection to a particular person, place, or experience? Could you describe how it happened? Was it sudden? Gentle? Dramatic? Unexpected? Subtle or hardly noticeable?
- What kind of gifts do you feel called to share?

Have the group watch the video “The Summons.” After viewing it, use the lyrics of “The Summons” to talk about the song, verse by verse.

- Who is the first “voice” featured in verses 1 through 4? Whose response is heard in verse 5?
- How does this echo your own feelings about God’s call? Is it similar to what you’ve heard in the song?

- What are some of the things God appears to be asking in the song? Are they the same as what you feel God is asking you to do? Or, if they're different, what do you think God is asking you to do?
- When you first felt a call to share your gifts in ministry, did you know what to expect? How did you picture ministry—what would it be like?
- Do think that by using your gifts, you'll also be changed, as in the song? How so?
- How does one follow up on a "call" experience? After feeling a similar "summons," what do feel your next steps will be?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Rock & Role (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Biblical stories picture God as a rock, or tell of Moses striking a rock to obtain water for the Israelites, or Jacob using a stone as a pillow. No doubt, in the sometimes barren landscape of the Holy Land, there were plenty of ways that ordinary objects like rocks and stones became part of the story, and often a symbol of something greater. This activity uses a collection of stones as an inspiration for group members to create their own stories, which will all involve a tie-in to their gifts for ministry. In other words, the variety of rocks and stones will serve as symbols for the equally abundant gifts they've been given.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- bag or basket of rocks and stones, enough for the entire group

Rocks and stones figure prominently in a large number of Bible stories. Ask the youth if they have any ideas on what the rocks or stones symbolize. Mention that the Holy Land terrain could be characterized as rather rocky and barren, and that God very often works in the least expected, desolate, inhospitable places. Likewise, gifts for ministry emerge not from times of comfort and affluence, but rather those desertlike circumstances when hope is hard to find.

Bring out the collection of stones, and have each group member chose one. Their assignment is to create stories in which their rocks and stones play a role, serving as symbols for the ministry gifts they all have. Participants can name their rocks and use them as characters, or devise tales in which a rock, stone, pebble, or boulder is part of the story. They can also represent something greater, such as a gift of strength that was discovered at a critical time in their lives.

At the conclusion of their storytelling, youth can either take the rocks home as reminders of the gifts they have been given, so that they can regularly revisit and recall them as they go out into the world to live their lives. Or they may put the rocks all together in a pyramidlike pile of stones called a "cairn," used since prehistoric times as a landmark or as a burial monument, or employed for ceremonial, astronomical, or memorial purposes.

### 8 The Gift of a Name

**Leader preparation:** There are numbers of stories in the Bible that tell of someone receiving a new name from God, which often describes a new gift received, or a role that the person is taking on. For example, Abram became



“Abraham,” which means “father of many nations.” The act of naming is a very important and powerful part of the faith. In this activity, participants will be asked to help “name” one another and then join in a short “naming” ceremony, as a way of recognizing their particular gifts for ministry.

### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- “Naming Ceremony” Attachment: Activity 8
- pack of self-adhesive nametags
- markers and pens
- large candle and matches
- small card table

Read Genesis 17:1–8 and 15–22 aloud to the group describing God’s renaming of Abraham and Sarah. Ask the group members if they know of other religions that also feature naming as an important part of their tradition (such as the Native Americans). Encourage them to share any specific details. Divide the group up into pairs. Instruct the pairs to help their partner come up with a new name that reflects their particular gifts for ministry or something they do well (“One Who Persuades Others,” “Caring Heart,” and so forth). They are to write these names with a marker on the nametags provided. Use the “Naming Ceremony” attachment, and hold a brief recognition ceremony in which the new names are bestowed, including the presentation of nametags to all the participants.

## **9 Bringing Our Gifts to Worship**

**Leader preparation:** As far back as Old Testament times, believers brought offerings to God as part of their worship. For some, it might have been something they’d produced or raised, like grain or livestock; for others, it was a personal talent or ability, offered in service to God. Today, followers still do much the same thing, although in many cases money that has been earned through work is now the substitute for crops or livestock. Gifts of ministry, likewise, are brought to God in many different ways.

This activity gives the group an opportunity to create a special sending and serving prayer for a worship service in which their thankfulness to God is expressed, and everyone’s diverse gifts are recognized and dedicated to ministry in Christ’s name. To prepare, it may be helpful to have a musician available to accompany the singing of a closing hymn.

### **Supplies:**

- paper, pens and pencils
- several hymnals for the group to use for reference
- (optional) musical instrument

After a brief ice breaker conversation in which the topic is “worship,” asking group members what kinds of prayers are often found in a worship service, have the group collaborate on the creation of a special prayer of thanksgiving in which their own gifts are to be recognized. The goal is to have at least two gifts per member lifted up in the prayer. Some of the more commonplace possibilities include music, poetry, storytelling, reading, leadership, teaching, fellowship, and prayer. There are many other possibilities as well, such as sacred dance, drama, art, cooking, woodworking, foreign languages, friendship, and so forth.

Following the writing of the prayer, allow time for the group members to reflect on the experience and share how they feel about having their individual gifts

### Reflect

One can thumb through the pages of any Bible and realize that there have been as many different ways to offer ministry as there are colors in the rainbow. Christian traditions, over the ages, have provided a multitude of faith expressions, including music, art, prophecy, worship, teaching, and so forth. As a result of this incredible variety, we recognize that no single group (and no one tradition) can possibly represent all there is to be known or experienced about our faith. Through these various activities, how have you or the group expanded your appreciation for the multifaceted gifts for ministry that individuals possess? What were some of the memorable highlights of these activities? How have these helped you to be open to new ways of bringing ministry to the world?

recognized through prayer in this way. Have them choose a closing hymn to sing by looking through a hymnal and selecting a hymn of thanksgiving, such as “Now Thank We All Our God,” “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” “Sent Forth by God’s Blessing,” or something else similar.

Attachment: Activity 2

## Wisdom of the Elders Conversation Questions

- Picture yourself in the shoes (or sandals) of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, Ruth, or any number of biblical ancestors. How would you describe the God-given gifts you've been privileged to have, and how would you like to pass them on to others?
- In general, how do you view spiritual gifts? What are they for, and how does one use them?
- What settings can they be used in to minister to others?
- Has the value you've placed on them changed over the years? How so?
- Were there certain gifts that were very helpful when you were younger, which are not so important today?
- What types of new or different gifts have you discovered as you've gotten older?
- Did particular gifts come into play at different times in your life?
- What gifts are the ones you most treasure today?
- If you could share some gifts of your choosing, or "give" them to someone for them to use, what would they be, and why?
- What sort of wisdom would you like to share with the group today, as your way of spreading God's love around?

Attachment: Activity 5

## Guided Meditation

Imagine yourself in a peaceful garden . . . a quiet, serene oasis in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the outside world. Close your eyes, and hear yourself breathing. Give a silent prayer of thanks to God for the gift of life . . . the gift of breathing, the gift of a softly beating heart that echoes every other living being's presence, both near and far. Slowly breathe in and out, and cherish every life-giving bit of oxygen that enters your lungs. With every breath exhaled, picture the troubles and concerns and hustle and bustle of the world being sent away.

Or imagine another place of your own choosing . . . a tranquil fishing pond, a mountaintop hiking trail, the reading room of a library, a seashore, a hot air balloon ride, a quiet moment in the outfield, the undisturbed retreat of a home workshop, or the calm, relaxed setting of a sewing room. As you feel yourself relaxing into the restful, soothing surroundings, give a silent prayer of thanks for the quiet gifts of body or mind that bring peace in this favorite personal space.

Allow your mind to wander . . . Think of words that have brought you comfort, recall inspiring messages you've heard from family, friends, teachers, or coaches . . . Or visualize scenes or other experiences that have brought meaning to your life. Remember important things you've learned, or remind yourself of resolutions you've made . . . Imagine a hug . . . holding hands . . . the soft feel of a blanket or a well-worn outfit . . . the simple pleasures of a comfort food or favorite drink.

Expand your vision to those around you, and the world beyond. Contemplate the gifts of others you know. Think of how they bring joy or comfort or reassurance to you, or other people. Consider how sometimes even a quiet moment, or a sitting silently next to a favorite companion, can bring a sense of connectedness and intimacy. Realize that not every second has to be jam-packed with doing, and keeping busy, and frantic activity. Relax your body and your mind and your soul, and know that God is in charge. God is at the wheel, so you can sit back and enjoy the ride.

Finally, breathe in, and imagine all the goodness, all the blessings, all the gifts of God's creation being drawn into your own being. Sit for a moment in awe of this amazing world. Then open your eyes, and resolve to share this feeling of thankfulness, appreciation, and love with all you meet. Go in peace, and spread the good news.

Attachment: Activity 8

## Naming Ceremony

The Leader says, "We are gathered here today with a serious purpose. Each of our group members is to receive a new name that reflects his or her gifts for ministry. This is in keeping with our faith tradition, following in the footsteps of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and many others, who were given special names that described who they were or what was distinctive about them."

Then the Leader, turning to the participants, says to each, "[Name], are you prepared to receive your new name?"

The Participant responds, "I am."

The Leader says, "Then let us begin."

Some type of music plays, either an instrumental ceremonial piece or the singing of "Bring Many Names," "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God," "Here I am, Lord," or some other appropriate song. Then the Leader then asks the group to come forward to a table, where a candle has been placed beforehand.

In silence, all encircle the candle, and the leader lights it with a match or candle lighter. He or she asks the group, "Do you wish us to proceed with this Naming Ceremony?"

If the reply is again affirmative, the Leader asks for the previously prepared nametags to be brought forward, saying:

"On these other pieces of paper, these name tags, which each of you prepared for your partners, are the new names you have chosen for yourselves, with each other's help, and with the leading of the Holy Spirit."

One by one, the Leader reads the names, saying, "To [Present name], you are given the new name of [New name]." With each name, the Leader hands to the respective participant his/her nametag.

Finally, when all the new names have been read, the Leader says:

**Attachment: Activity 8** *(Continued)*

“By these honorable new names you will be known from this point forward. As you enter into the days ahead, know that God is with you, and that your new name is a way that your special God-given gifts are recognized. Now go and share these gifts with all you meet in your continuing pursuit of ministry.”

The group members may shake hands with one another, hug, or otherwise congratulate one another on this newest step in their faith journeys.



# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

For groups of this age, the question of how faith is actually put into practice is a common concern. Missions and other faith expressions need to be relevant and interactive, allowing for genuine and free expression of one's beliefs and ideas. Helping this age group learn about their gifts for ministry comes with the necessity of encouraging freedom and creativity, which means being open to all sorts of questions and new directions, even when they might challenge our own beliefs. Whatever mission ideas they ultimately invest their hearts and souls into will grow out of the context of their very genuine faith.

### About this Exploration

Each of us is like a "letter from Christ," as Paul says, sent to bring hope and healing wherever there is need. In all contexts, there are opportunities for us to share our gifts of ministry in a variety of ways, be it at home, at school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and at church. Over our lifetimes, the diversity of our gifts can emerge and grow, and may change, as we move into new places and spaces in our lives. Trusting that God can work through us right where we are is an exciting way to realize that the Holy Spirit is all around us.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Nehemiah 2:11-20**  
**2 Corinthians 3:1-6**

## Leader Preparation

Realtors say the only thing that's really important is "location, location, location." In reality, location is just one of a number of factors described as "context." A particular mission project's success or difficulty hinges on whether everything fits together—the needs, resources, people, gifts, timing, and so forth. For young people, still learning the practical details of how to do whatever jobs they set their minds to, the challenge becomes seeing all the connections. In a sense, everything is related—the driving force is the relationship we have with others (along with God's subtle role of guidance), which drives how, when, where, and why we do mission. When one's gifts are considered in the overall context of needs and other considerations, then there is a much greater potential for successfully bringing a given ministry to the people who will benefit from it.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being in relationship with us and showing us how to be in relationship with others. The connections we make among ourselves, the places we live and work, the needs of our communities, and the gifts we have to offer are ways that you help us minister in your name. Guide us as we discover new paths to help others in both familiar places and places we've never been before. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Letters of Reference (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Words, while they can be wonderful to play with and convey all sorts of thoughts, are also rather limiting when it comes to expressing one's deepest feelings or a sense of the wonder and awe one feels in trying to describe God or God's work in the world. In this activity, group members may discover the challenges of writing a self-made but modest "letter of reference" that tells of each participant's own gifts for doing mission work. The goal is not to brag or to exaggerate their talents for ministry but to view this "letter" as coming from God. The point of view about one's gifts, therefore, is not one's own, but Someone who knows them very well, from an all-wise, all-powerful, and life-long (past, present and future) perspective.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils

Invite someone to read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 to the group. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions.

- What is Paul trying to communicate to the Corinthians?
- What is he urging them to do—or not to do?
- What do you suppose the reasoning is for what he's advising them?
- Why did he feel the Corinthians needed this kind of a course correction?
- What behavior or actions from them may have prompted his message?
- Were they exhibiting signs of being overly impressed with themselves, thinking they'd accomplished whatever they had done with no help from anyone else, like God?

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to the group. Invite them to compose reference letters for themselves, telling why they would be very well suited for a particular mission assignment. Each may come up with his or her own mission ideas, based on that person's specific talents or interests. Explain the following conditions:

1. The letter is to be modest, not conceited or bragging. It must be written in a very realistic way that recognizes their real gifts for ministry.
2. The letter is to come from God, so the point of view is not that of an employer or other ordinary human being, but Someone who knows you very well in a different, superior sense.

### 2 Unexpected Gifts

**Leader preparation:** In the biblical parable that drives home the point that "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16), the people who are typically considered less well off, or possessing fewer of the world's goods, are lifted up as more deserving of care and preferred treatment. When it comes to gifts of ministry, the same can hold true. This activity helps show how so-called disadvantages can actually be advantages in God's eye, with the result that limitations of all kinds can be turned into gifts for ministry.

## Session Development

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

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

Familiarize yourself with the video “The Butterfly Circus Part 2.” For more information about the film *The Butterfly Circus*, see <http://www.thebutterflycircus.com/>

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “The Butterfly Circus” Part 2, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUBPX28\\_mAE&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUBPX28_mAE&feature=related) (10 minutes)
- paper
- pens and pencils

Tell the group that they are going to see a ten-minute film clip from a movie called *The Butterfly Circus*, in which Will, a man with no limbs, gains a new life as a star performer in a traveling circus that transforms people’s lives. The story is set at the height of the Great Depression. Mr. Mendez, the showman of a renowned circus, leads his troupe through the devastated American landscape, lifting the spirits of audiences along the way. When Will meets the showman, his own life takes on new meaning, as he discovers that he no longer feels disabled and can actually serve as an inspiration to others. Show the video “The Butterfly Circus.”

Lead the group in a discussion of the video, touching on questions such as:

- How did Will’s life change after he encounters the circus?
- Did Will feel he had any gifts to offer before this experience? What about after?
- How are those who are disabled usually viewed in our society? Are their gifts valued as highly as those without disabilities? Why or why not?

Have each youth jot down ideas and answers to the following questions:

- Who are some famous people who have not let their limitations hold them back but, rather, used them as gifts to share with others?
- How do people’s perceived limitations possibly become their route to new life? What are some examples of weaknesses becoming gifts? (Physical limitations, mental health issues, lack of funds, introversion or extroversion, fears, short or tall stature, blindness) How can limitations function as gifts?
- What are some challenges or limitations the group members can name in themselves, which could be turned into gifts for ministry?

### ③ Twelve Days of Spiritual Gifts

**Leader preparation:** During the Christmas season, one of the popular carols often heard is “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” which tells of a dozen gifts being given to one’s true love, including a partridge in a pear tree. Since the song is either English or French in origin, the gifts date back to an earlier time in history.

In this activity, the group is asked to update the song for this modern era by coming up with twelve spiritual gifts that they could give to a significant other. While this may seem like a yuletide-focused activity, in reality it could be done any time of year, with an approach like “Christmas in July.” To prepare, it can be helpful to review the background information on the “Twelve Days of Christmas” song on Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Twelve\\_Days\\_of\\_Christmas\\_%28song%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Days_of_Christmas_%28song%29).

**Supplies:**

- song: “Twelve Days of Christmas,” [http://www.carols.org.uk/the\\_twelve\\_days\\_of\\_christmas.htm](http://www.carols.org.uk/the_twelve_days_of_christmas.htm)
- music player
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Play a recording of the “Twelve Days of Christmas” for the group, and ask for some thoughts on what these gifts might have looked like, what they represented, or how they might have been received. Invite the group to come up with their own collection of twelve presents, with one difference: the gifts are to be spiritual gifts that they would like to give to a good friend or family member. Consider the following questions and record their “Twelve Spiritual Gifts” on the newsprint or a whiteboard.

- What would the gifts be?
- What’s the thinking behind their choices of gifts?
- If one had all day to celebrate each gift, how would you do it?

If the size of the group allows, form two or three smaller groups of participants, and have them think of up to three activities for each day that would help them celebrate and cherish that particular gift for ministry. These gifts and activities could be anything they wish—encourage them to be extremely creative. After they come up with ideas, have them come back together as a group to share their thoughts.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Yard Sale (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The saying “one person’s junk is another’s treasure” doesn’t only apply to yard sales, flea markets, and eBay merchandise. It also represents a biblical truth, that the “last will be first” and that God lifts up the marginalized, overlooked, and those deemed “worthless” by society. The same holds true for God-given gifts for ministry and for the outlets one finds for sharing them. In this activity, participants are invited to use their gifts of imagination, creativity, and helpfulness to enable them to see the potential treasures in odd, used, or unwanted materials, resources, people, and places as a way of offering ministry.

**Supplies:**

- paper—white or different colors
- pens, pencils, colored markers
- small adhesive stickers to serve as price tags
- “Ministry Yard Sale,” Attachment: Activity 4

Invite the youth to talk about yard sales, tag sales, and flea markets using the following questions.

- How many of you have been to one of these sales?
- What kinds of things can be found there?
- How would you describe the sales? the items?
- How might cast-off, used, or “junk” items find new life in somebody else’s hands?



- What might be some examples?
- What would it take to prepare them for reuse? Could that be considered a ministry gift? How so?

Have the group create a different kind of “yard sale,” in which the things being offered are items or resources that can be used to provide a ministry to others. Using the paper, pens, and markers, have the youth either prepare a write-up or draw a picture representing the objects for sale. Put made-up price tags on each of them, and then have a short role-playing exercise in which the group members buy, sell, or trade the various items. Talk about how participants’ own particular gifts reflect the ideas for how to reuse or recycle these things as a type of ministry.

### 5 No Strings Attached

**Leader preparation:** Receiving gifts from God, much like receiving grace, is a free, spontaneous outpouring of God’s love to us. The only expectation is that in return, we turn around and share the gifts with others. That’s it—no other strings attached. This activity, using “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner, focuses on the different ways that people are given opportunities to share their gifts, especially through the act of teaching. Obtain a recording of “Dueling Banjos” by Curtis McPeake, Arthur “Guitar Boogie” Smith, Eric Weissberg, and Steve Mandell.

#### Supplies:

- artwork: “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner, <http://www.art.com/products/p10286254-sa-i677605/henry-ossawa-tanner-the-banjo-lesson.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6ce32fa19f9d47aa58758970c9f0162&searchstring=banjo+lesson>
- markers and newsprint
- “Dueling Banjos” by Curtis McPeake, Arthur “Guitar Boogie” Smith, Eric Weissberg and Steve Mandell; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8reNgcIVFU>
- music player

Have the group look “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Lead them in a short conversation about the scene pictured in the artwork using the following questions and recording their responses.

- What is happening in this picture?
- Who is doing what?
- Why do you suppose it’s being done?
- What do you think God wants us to do with our gifts?
- Could music be considered a gift? How can it be used to help, or minister to, others?
- What can be said about the setting or background in the picture? Simple or complex? Rich or poor? Humble or fancy?
- What does that tell you about where and when gifts might be most appreciated?

Recruit one of the group to play the role of a teacher. If there are certain hobbies or interests the person has, have him or her share a very brief, five minute lesson, from personal experience. For example, if the interest is bicycle repair, what are three things one needs to know about fixing bicycles? Ask if anybody else in the group has similar knowledge to share, either about the same subject or another. Do another five-minute lesson. Follow up with these questions:

- After one person shares a gift, what happens next?
- How does sharing continue in the future?
- Like the young boy in the poster, how will the gift, or the lessons, be passed on to another person?
- Can teachers become students, and students become teachers? How so?

Explain synergy—the process where 1 + 1 doesn't simply equal 2, but, rather, 3 or 4 or 5. Through the collaborative act of sharing, the original gift is built upon and added to, so that it becomes even greater as time goes on.

- How might this happen in the case of the boy receiving the banjo lesson?
- How did it happen with the five-minute lessons given by group members?
- What are the possibilities for future growth, in either instance?

Play the video or recording of “Dueling Banjos.” Point out the similarity to teaching, in which there is a back-and-forth interchange, a gradual increase in that which is shared, and eventually, a demonstration of synergy, when the two musicians come together to play the tune as a duet, and the song gains new life as a bigger, better performance than the original introductory notes. Leave the group with one question to ponder: *How can you take your own gifts out into the world, and by teaching or modeling them, achieve a similar synergetic result?*

## 6 Organizers Unlimited

**Leader preparation:** On various occasions, the prophets in the Bible did more than simply deliver God's messages; they also served as advance scouts, researchers, project managers, recruiters, and founding fathers or mothers. The roles they assumed, or the missions they took on, very often came out of the context in which they found themselves. For Nehemiah, the goal was rebuilding Jerusalem. This activity provides group members a chance to build their own “mission” or nonprofit organization as a way of learning how people's different gifts can be brought together and organized for the purpose of sharing ministry with others.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Have the group members read the passage from Nehemiah 2:11–20, approaching it as an example of how to organize a project or mission. Ask them the following questions.

- What steps did Nehemiah take?
- How might these steps be described these in modern-day terms? (research, scouting, recruiting, project management)
- What would other activities or steps be to take a project like this further?
- What kinds of people, and what types of gifts, would be needed to get it off the ground?

Once the group has a basic understanding of how to organize something of this nature, give them their assignment: to create a mission or form a nonprofit whose aim is to share ministry in a particular place or to meet a specific need. They'll need to consider:

- What's the need that must be addressed?
- What's the location?



- Who are the people affected?
- Why is there such a need?
- What are your goals or “deliverables”—what specific products, services, resources, or facilities will address that need?
- What are the challenges or concerns that must be taken into account? What obstacles, restrictions, conditions, limitations, political considerations, history, and so forth, might hinder your success?
- What are the assets, gifts, resources, and so forth, that you will have (or need to find) in order to accomplish your goals and follow through on your intended mission?
- (if time permits) What kind of brief kickoff speech would you give to get everybody on board, as Nehemiah did?

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Stranded (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Survivors of disasters like tornados, floods, airplane crashes, or shipwrecks very often have a new appreciation for life. To them, life itself is a gift, and something to be shared—in so many different ways. The apostle Paul, himself a shipwreck survivor, was no exception.

In this activity, group members are given a role-playing assignment: to imagine themselves as stranded on an island after a shipwreck. In the process of making decisions about what they can “save” from their vessel, they’ll discover which gifts for ministry are the most important ones to treasure.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite a youth to read about Paul’s shipwreck experience from Acts 27:13–44 to the group. Ask them what they think being a survivor of a disaster might be like using the following questions.

- What would it be like to come through a life-threatening experience?
- Would you have a different outlook on life?
- How would your views change?
- What things might you do differently?

Pose this scenario: *Each of you has been shipwrecked, finding yourself stranded on an island. When fleeing from your sinking vessel, you were able to save only three items to bring onto the island with you. If you had a choice, what would these items be?*

Record their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard. Conclude by asking the group the following questions.

- If you had to pick only three gifts to take into life with you, what would they be and why?
- Why would these be the most helpful to you in offering ministry to others?

### 8 Packing for the Unknown

**Leader preparation:** Specific gifts of ministry often have a connection to the setting in which people find themselves. A gift for teaching, for example, might be very useful in a foreign country where certain ideas need to be communicated or taught, such as an improved way of farming that doesn't overwork the soil after repeated plantings. This activity encourages group members to think of gifts that would be place or context specific, as well as gifts they might be able to offer in settings closer to home.

**Supplies:**

- piece of luggage or suitcase
- index cards
- pencils or pens
- globe or world map
- blindfold

Explain to the group that they're all about to leave on a trip for parts unknown, led by God and accompanied by their fellow group members. Once they arrive at their destination the purpose for the trip will become clear—they're going to be asked to share all their different gifts with the people they meet as a way of ministering with them.

Tell the group that the bags are a symbolic place to "pack" the various gifts of ministry. Ask for some suggestions on what kinds of gifts they might consider packing, ones that reflect their individual talents, abilities, and interests. Have the youth write their suggestions on index cards and place them in the suitcase. Have group members take turns putting on a blindfold and being led to a globe of world map where they point to a random destination, country, or general geographic area. When the destination is revealed, open the suitcase and see if there are gifts that would help the individual in that particular setting.

Invite the group help the person finish "packing" by suggesting particular gifts that may help the person to help others in that locale. For example, a person could be called on to offer their gifts in a third-world country, a blighted urban neighborhood of a large city, an impoverished agricultural area, an under-equipped school, a former war zone being rebuilt, the site of a natural disaster, and so forth. Have them reflect on how their own "real" gifts can be put to use in this way, perhaps even their everyday life.

### 9 The "God" Awards

**Leader preparation:** Often one of the best avenues for raising awareness about gifts is through what society calls promotion, publicity, or public relations—which, in the world of faith, goes by somewhat different names: outreach, story telling, spreading the good news, and so forth. This activity is a way to connect the ways of faith with the ways of the world by using the concept of an awards ceremony as a symbolic sendoff that recognizes the kinds of gifts of ministry that God wants to "promote" or encourage. The group can make this ceremony as simple or as fancy as they wish, as they give out awards for those in their group or those in their neighborhood, while also similarly lifting up individuals or organizations in the greater faith community or the world at large.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- blank award certificates
- markers and newsprint
- pens

Invite volunteers to read the following passages: Matthew 10:42; Colossians 3:24; Matthew 5:12; Matthew 6:4; Hebrews 11:6; and 2 John 1:8. Engage the youth in conversation about “rewards” using the following questions.

- What does the Bible say about “rewards”?
- Are rewards considered good or bad? Why?
- When, where, and how will people be “rewarded” for their service to God and their ministry to others?
- Does the reward only have to happen secretly, or is it okay to receive recognition in other ways, more openly? Why?
- Who is the ultimate “giver” of rewards?

### Reflect

Places, people, needs, timing, and other particulars are all part of what is called “context.” Different gifts for ministry can be more helpful, or less helpful, depending on the specific settings in which they are offered. One’s faith journey—or the success of ministering to an individual or a group—can be greatly impacted by a variety of factors relating to context. How have these activities helped give participants a better perspective on how mission and context need to work hand-in-hand? What new understandings of one’s gifts came out of these experiences? What were some highlights of these activities for you and the group?

Mention that while “rewards” and “awards” are indeed different words with slightly different definitions, they do have something in common. Tell the group that they are being given the job of spokesperson or award presenter for God, in order to recognize people’s accomplishments in the world of faith. Have the participants brainstorm people they know who demonstrate or share gifts of ministry and record their ideas on the newsprint. These could include people in the group, friends or family, neighbors, individuals in the local community, or people or organizations from the greater body of Christ, both near and far, even on the other side of the world. Using the certificates, the youth can write those people’s names and accomplishments and stage a simple “awards ceremony,” in which group members serve as both presenters and as “stand-ins” accepting the awards for those not present.

Have the group reflect on why they chose the recipients they did, what demonstration of faith at work they were inspired by, and what kind of gifts for ministry were at play. Close with a brief group prayer thanking God for the gifts that led to the accomplishments that were recognized, and asking for inspiration to follow in the award winners’ footsteps as they too are sent out to serve.

Attachment: Activity 4

## Ministry Yard Sale

- One closed-up hotel or apartment building, suitable for housing families in need, transitional housing, or emergency shelter.
- An old supermarket, which could be turned into a grocery cooperative or a food pantry, indoor consignment market, or recreation center.
- A vacant lot that could be used for a community vegetable garden.
- A variety of discarded objects (including furniture, toys, electronics) that—with a little cleaning or repair, and TLC—can be recycled and given to people who can't afford to buy them.
- Books, videos, magazines, and other materials that could be the start of a neighborhood lending library.
- A shuttered school that could become a new neighborhood civic center, arts collaborative, adult education or day care center.
- And much more—let your imagination soar!

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group or Setting

Although this group's primary focus right now is school, they're also aware of other concerns, like what the future may hold for them. This has a big influence on how they approach friendships, after school programs, volunteering, and even the role that faith plays in their lives. Some researchers say that the necessity of seeking employment or getting into college can have a direct connection with how deeply youth may get involved in social justice work or community activities, especially when "gaining credentials" may seem more important than doing the work simply for its own rewards. While they also try to make sense of societal trends like high stress, greater uncertainty and risk, and looser connections among families and friends, young people find themselves desperately searching for reassurance about the future. So, they search for it in a wide range of places, including communities of faith that promise to reduce their anxiety, affirm their special gifts, and offer new, positive directions for the future.

### About this Exploration

We are not who we once were. We adapt and change along with the shifting circumstances we experience. Gifts of ministry develop throughout the duration of our lives. Our gifts are revealed, acquired, and developed as we encounter the present and are led toward expanding hope for the future. When we engage our gifts of ministry we join with God in making that hope reality, and we become the people God calls us to be.



**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**1 Samuel 3:1–10, 11–20**  
**Philippians 4:1–13**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### Leader Preparation

In an uncertain world, it can be very helpful to give young people a safe haven to explore who they are, what they are going to do with their lives, and how their faith will play a role in their future. By providing them with consistent, open-minded, affirming activities, as well as confidence-building relationships, their worries and concerns can be significantly decreased. So it's very important to find opportunities to encourage positive interactions, to lighten the mood, to provide support for dealing with challenges, and to help them see the future as a hopeful place rather than a fear-filled one.

*Prayer: Dear God, life can seem so uncertain at times—and talking about the future just adds another worry. Guide us in these various activities so that we can gain confidence and courage. Help us to discover the gifts you've given us that will help us to grow beyond any doubts or concerns we may have. Teach us to share these gifts with others, so that they too may feel your presence and find comfort, strength, and hope, whatever the future may hold. 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

#### 1 Night Invite (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The story of the Prophet Samuel's call to ministry makes for a great plot for a movie or TV show. It could even be portrayed with a sense of humor, when Eli repeatedly says that he's not the one whose voice Samuel has heard. The truth is, for those wrestling with their own feeling of a call from God, Samuel's experience is a very common one, and it can be helpful in understanding the sometimes mysterious and unusual ways that God chooses to invite someone to share her or his gifts. This activity, through a reenactment of the nighttime experience of Samuel, may enable participants to connect with their own feelings of “being in the dark” about their gifts, their “visit” from God, or their own future.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- a meeting place where you can provide a sense of darkness
- 1 or 2 candles
- matches or a lighter
- (optional) blindfold and earmuff for each person

Have one or more members of the group read 1 Samuel 3:1–10 and 11–20 to the group. They may wish to take different parts, such as God's voice, Eli, Samuel, and a narrator. Talk briefly about what they thought happened in the story. Ask them to draw connections or parallels with their own experiences. Light a candle, dim the room lights, and re-enact the story. Have everyone put on earmuffs and blindfold or tightly close their eyes and cover their ears and imagine themselves in Samuel's shoes. This time, however, part of the challenge will be to “hear” the invitation from God when it happens, because of the added limitations of sound-reducing materials.

The leader or group member(s) playing the role of God can start out with a very soft voice, and gradually increase the volume until the call is heard more clearly. He or she can also vary the call, speaking first to one or two people, and then to the entire group, so all experience the call, not knowing when it is coming. Encourage the participants to ad lib as well, throwing in questions such as: “Dylan, do you know what gifts I'm asking you to share?” or “Mary Anne, why do you think I'm calling you?” or “Jared, what do you see in your future? What vision do you have for my church?” The blindfolded members may respond in whatever manner they feel comfortable, sharing whatever feelings they have about gifts or ministry with the group.

#### 2 Water Power

**Leader preparation:** From the turbulent waters of Creation, to the parting of the Red Sea, to the water of the River Jordan, where Jesus was baptized—ordinary water is another important, symbolic part of the Christian faith tradition. It has been a source of life, a means of cleansing, and an ingredient for miracles (changing water into wine, walking on water), among other things. Like other basic elements of God's creation, it is considered a gift, not to be taken for granted. The talent to understand and make use of the chemistry of water is another gift—as are the abilities to employ medical science to heal; to use tools for building schools, hospitals, or churches; or for interpreting God's word to comfort and care for others. Each of these mysteriously marries God's original



at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

gift with human resourcefulness as a way to offer ministry through our own hands, voice, heart, mind, or imagination. Engaging any of our own physical or intellectual gifts can also lead to a new, God-inspired vision for expanding upon, and multiplying, the initial blessing.

This activity uses a simple demonstration of water chemistry to illustrate the ability for a person to be an agent of change, by combining God’s power (the amazing potential of water, provided by God in the act of Creation) with a gift of ministry (adding the human ability of touch to effect a change). To prepare, it can be helpful to preview the water chemistry demo at this website: <http://chemistry.about.com/od/chemistrymagic/a/peppertrick.htm>. Try out the experiment beforehand. Familiarize yourself with the “Water Chemistry Demonstration” attachment, with step-by-step details for doing the demonstration.

### Supplies:

- black pepper, flour, talcum powder, or other floating material
- water
- dishwashing liquid
- plate or bowl
- “Water Chemistry Demonstration,” Attachment: Activity 2

Begin with a conversation about the many different ways that water plays a role in the Bible. Mention how it’s such a basic element, part of God’s creation, and that it has been used as a symbol for a wide range of things, including our being “reborn” through the act of baptism in water. Shift gears by saying that they’re about to see how water can be used to illustrate the power of the ministry gifts they all have.

Bring out the materials for the water chemistry demonstration, and guide members of the group in performing it. Point out the difference between having a little dishwashing liquid on one’s finger versus having none, and how this can be like doing ministry with God’s help versus doing it all on your own, with no help. Following the demonstration, ask them about their experience having a “hand” in the chemical or physical changes that caused the water to do what it did.

- How can this be compared to having a “hand” in other processes or situations?
- What are times you’ve had a “hand” in someone else’s faith journey? Describe what happened. How did your touch or your words guide the other person?
- Was it your “touch” or God’s that made the difference? Why? Talk about how the process could have been the result of God, the other person, and yourself, all working together.
- How does using one’s gifts of ministry equip them to play a role in changing things for the better?

Have the group brainstorm different ideas for how their individual gifts can actually serve as a positive force for change, as part of their ministry.



### 3 Ski Mount G

**Leader preparation:** Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to encounter God in a burning bush and receive the gift of the Ten Commandments. Others travel to similar faraway places, or undertake comparable challenges on a mountain of their own design, to find a connection with God or to discover their purpose in

life. It's not even unusual to think of a ski resort or a snowboarding slope as a source for inspiration. In this activity, the group will be encouraged to consider a wide range of alternative places and situations in which ministry gifts may be uncovered or realized. To prepare, use sheet of newsprint to draw a simple "peak" or mountain and label it "Mount G." It should be large enough to be able to write in ideas "up and down" the slope.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: "Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA," [http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorig\\_id=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak](http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorig_id=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak)
- markers and newsprint

Introduce the photo "Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA," and ask the group for off-the-cuff responses and observations about the picture. Some initial questions to consider:

- What is the main focus in the picture?
- What is the person doing, and where is it happening?
- How is this kind of a setting a place where one can feel closer to God?
- How can a person discover untapped gifts in a place like this, where traditional ideas of proper religious practice or conventional church gatherings do not seem to be part of the plan?
- How does one feel God's presence when the setting isn't "serious," or when it offers fun or recreation as part of the deal?
- What does the image of the sun suggest, or the movement toward the sun? How does this serve as a centering focus, or a divine power, to which we're drawn in order to find our gifts?

Suggest a link between this scene and other similar ones, perhaps mountains they've read about in the Bible. Mention the Moses story, in which Moses traveled up the mountain to meet God and to receive the Ten Commandments on a pair of stone tablets. Ask them how it might be considered a "gift" to be shared with others.

Turn to the simple drawing of a mountain. Mention that it's named "Mount G," because it's a place to meet God. Ask the group to brainstorm what kinds of unusual (or ordinary) places they might be able to go to, in order to discover their gifts of ministry.

- If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would that be?
- What gifts might be a natural for the kind of wintry, mountainous setting in the artwork?
- Picture other settings—tropical islands, water resorts, city museums, historical places, and so forth. What gifts might be found or nurtured there?
- What particular places seem to suggest, or call out, certain kinds of gifts?
- If one had a gift for using music to offer ministry, what are some places to do this?
- What are some other gifts they can think of, that would fit their own personal journeys of ministry?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Giftpower (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The Gospels of the New Testament speak of “deeds of power” and the “power” given by God to Jesus and the disciples in order to carry out their ministry. By using these “powers,” they would be helping to change the world, one act of compassion at a time. In this activity, group members will be asked to create a cartoon or short story in which “power” is the focus, and the characters—either themselves or another person, real or imaginary—use their “powers” (in other words, their gifts of ministry) for the good of others, changing the world of today in some small, modest way.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- paper (lined paper for writing stories, plain copy paper for drawing cartoons)
- pens, pencils, markers, colored markers
- sample comic books or comic strips for inspiration

Have the group read a few of the passages mentioning “deeds of power,” including: Matthew 7:22, Matthew 13:54, Mark 9:39, Luke 5:17, Luke 6:19, Luke 8:46, and Luke 9:1. Ask them to imagine using their own individual “powers” or gifts of ministry in that way. Ask them how they might use them to change the world. Hand out the paper and pens or pencils, and invite them to create a story or comic strip in which a person does just that—uses his or her powers (not superhero powers, but ordinary human talents and abilities that are considered God-given gifts for ministry) in order to help people and make a significant difference in the world, one deed at a time.

### 5 Sands of Ministry

**Leader preparation:** Much of the action in biblical stories is set in the lands of the Middle East, where sandy landscapes, seas, or lakeshores figure prominently in people’s daily lives. Jesus met and recruited many of his disciples at the seashore, and later had a final meal with them in the same locale; he advised disciples to shake the dust (possibly sand?) from their sandals. He also spoke of a foolish man “building a house on sand.” In other cultures, such as Native American, Tibetan, Australian aborigine, and Japanese, sand also plays a role, particularly in sand paintings that have religious significance. For Mexican Christians, sand paintings are a big part of *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations, used to symbolize the fleeting nature of our lives. So for those who are exploring ministry, sand is another possible artistic avenue for expression of one’s gifts.

This activity employs sand painting as a nonverbal, visual medium for group members to see connections between God’s call and simple elements of creation like sand that can serve as a unique canvas for bringing to life deeply held beliefs. To prepare, it can be helpful to research beforehand various websites offering background information and tips on sand painting, such as these:

- “Sandpainting” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandpainting>
- “How to make a Sand Painting” <http://ladyhawkesite.tripod.com/Sand-Painting.htm>

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- “Sand Painting,” Attachment: Activity 5
- a variety of colored sands
- white glue
- paper cups
- paint brush, plastic knife, or craft stick
- paper (as thick as possible to prevent warping)
- pencil
- spray bottle

Start the activity with a conversation about how sand figures into religion. Have group members read a few of the stories from the Christian tradition, selecting from passages such as Mark 1:16–20, Matthew 7:26, Luke 9:5, and John 21:1–14. Follow that with information on other faith traditions’ use of sand (from website research), particularly sand painting, and chat about its symbolism for these other cultures. Bring out the sand painting materials and have group members create their own sand paintings. Encourage them to create paintings with a theme of “gifts of ministry.” As they paint, invite them to share their thoughts about their gifts or the artwork they’re creating.



**6 Assurance Policy**

**Leader preparation:** A ministry gift that’s sometimes taken for granted is the ability to provide hope, comfort, and assurance to people in need. The Apostle Paul, in his numerous letters, demonstrated a wide variety of gifts, from wisdom to exhortation, prayer to prophecy. But in the uncertain, challenging days of early Christianity, a very frequent focus of his ministry was offering reassurance and encouragement to those churches struggling with all sorts of questions and concerns, not the least of which was basic survival. In this activity, participants will develop an “assurance policy” that attempts to list the most common worries and needs that people or faith groups might have—along with a prayer that employs the group’s own gifts for providing words of comfort.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils
- “Assurance Policy,” Attachment: Activity 6

Invite a youth to read Philippians 4:1–13 to the group. Have the group offer reactions to Paul’s message:

- What main points was Paul making?
- What was he trying to do for them?
- What did he say about “worry”?
- What do you suppose some of the worries of the early church might have been?
- What did Paul advise the Philippians to do?

Hand out paper and pens or pencils, along with copies of the “Assurance Policy” form. Invite participants to prepare an “assurance policy” for a faith-related person or group of their choice, relying on their combined gifts for ministry (and particularly the gift for offering comfort and assurance). The participants may brainstorm different needs, potential situations requiring coverage, and ways that they can relay God’s assurances to their “client.” The scenario could be based

in the present time, or even the past or future. Encourage the youth to be creative in coming up with statements that will provide a similar kind of assurance to that which Paul gave in his letter to the Philippians. Finally, have participants collaborate on a prayer that expresses this same comfort and hope for the future in traditional “prayer language.”

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Signs Everywhere (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** For most Christians, signs often take on a different meaning. More than just road signs or directional aids, they are a visible demonstration of God’s power or presence—a clue that the Spirit is working in our midst. Yet, even road signs can play a role in pointing us in a certain direction, or alerting us to something extraordinary that either happened or is about to occur. This activity will use the making of “personal road signs” as a way of naming people’s gifts for ministry, exploring the meaning and particulars of those gifts, and then suggesting possible directions for group members to pursue in order to share their gifts.

**Supplies:**

- poster board or heavy construction paper
- colored markers
- pens, pencils
- scissors
- colored construction paper
- glue
- (optional) small balsa wood sticks, dowels, stakes, or something similar for mounting the finished signs

Have the group name the different kinds of road signs they’re aware of, including direction signs, warning signs, advisory signs, and so forth. Ask the youth if they think these are the kinds of “signs” that are often mentioned in the Bible. If not, how would they describe the nature of biblical “signs”? Some more questions include:

- When do signs usually happen?
- To what do they alert us?
- Where and when can they be seen?
- Do signs like these still happen in today’s modern world?

Invite the group to create personal road signs that will communicate and/or alert people (including themselves) to what they feel their gifts for ministry are, for example: “Caution—Musician Crossing” or “Prayer Limit: 65 mph (messages per hour).” As they engage in the activity, have them talk about their different gifts, what they include, what are some of the challenges or opportunities associated with them, and what direction they’d like to take in sharing these gifts with others. Close by saying that creating personal signs, as they are, is a great way to bring their gifts to the forefront, rather than hiding them under a bushel.

## 8 Planting Seeds of Ministry

**Leader preparation:** A number of stories in the Bible use seeds and planting as an illustration of how God connects with ordinary people, through the act of making new life possible. Through this process, human beings become “co-creators” of life, by planting “seeds” of God’s love in this world. This activity asks group members to symbolically plant seeds of their own, in order to discover how their intentional plans and actions, together with God’s empowering presence, will ultimately result in new gifts of ministry being shared in different places and times in the community. They will also create a personal journal in which to record their thoughts and observations on this process.

### Supplies:

- 5 sheets of 8½" × 11" white paper for each participant
- 1 sheet of 8½" × 11" colored cover stock or construction paper for each participant
- potting soil
- “mystery” seed packets (flower seeds in unlabeled packets or plastic zipper snack bags)
- paper or Styrofoam cups
- 3" × 5" index cards, folded in half
- pens or permanent markers; colored markers
- craft sticks
- stapler or tape

Mention that a number of the passages in the Bible are stories that tell of extended experiences of people or groups, such as the journeys of Moses and the people of Israel while searching for the Promised Land. Start the activity by inviting them to create a personal journal to take home with them in which they’ll record their thoughts and observations about this seed-planting exploration. Use the 8½" × 11" paper and cover stock, as well as colored markers to decorate the covers, to create the journal by folding the pages in half and stapling them together to make a small booklet.

Then have each group member name a talent, skill, resource, or gift that he or she promises to share with others. Write that specific gift on an index card, and attach this “seed label” to a craft stick. Put some soil into a cup, along with a “mystery” seed, and place the label and stick into the soil. Some ideas for gifts might include “cooking seeds,” “praying seeds,” “caring seeds,” and so forth.

Tell the group to take their seed cups home, where they can be watered regularly and watched for signs of new life. They can record the progress in their journals. The group’s assignment: When the shoots start springing forth, the members are to deliver on their promise (as described on the seed label) by finding a way or place to share the gift they’ve named, for example, cooking meals for a soup kitchen; writing a prayer to be shared with others (in person, by e-mail, or in a worship setting); volunteer work at a hospital; or visiting shut-ins. When they do this, encourage them to reflect on how the experience felt to them:

- What gift did they share?
- Where did they use it?
- Who was the recipient?
- How did the gift that was offered connect with or address the situation, circumstances, or needs of the person or organization it was given to?



## 9 The Gifts Tour

**Leader preparation:** Gifts for ministry often seem to arise out of specific needs or circumstances. A close parallel might be when someone plans a trip out of the country, it becomes obvious that a passport will be needed; until that situation happens, however, the person is not aware of the need. Likewise, an event or occurrence requiring a certain gift of ministry will call forth unexpected talents and resources that one wasn't aware of previously. This role-playing activity presents the group with a creative scenario: a multi-location (domestic or international) concert tour that offers numerous possibilities for ministry along the way. The group's assignment is to brainstorm various plans and options available to them, and in the process, discover some of the gifts of ministry they will be able to offer.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet
- (optional, if computer is unavailable) world atlas or globe
- maps, guidebooks, travel brochures, plane schedules and route maps
- articles or publicity about similar concert tours, for ideas
- paper
- pencils and pens
- pictures, postcards, symbolic props or items representing different locales or countries, for inspiration

The group members are to imagine themselves as concert promoters—all part of a team that is in charge of arranging a world tour for the group known as "Spirit." The group's job is to think of all the possible details that need to be arranged before the tour gets underway (such as song selections, menus, publicity opportunities, flight plans, cities to be visited, crew members needed, and so forth). The one condition: all of these need to be chosen with "gifts of ministry" in mind. Questions that they'll need to answer, in the process:

## Reflect

The future is a mystery—only God knows what it will hold. The best we can do is live our lives faithfully and purposefully, trusting that God will be there with us, helping us to discover and share our gifts in ministry with others in the years ahead. Can we imagine new directions or opportunities coming about in the process? What are a few of the experiences from these activities that you'll find yourself fondly recalling, long after these conversations are over?

- What songs tie into the idea of "gifts"?
- What theme can they use for the tour? (For example: "The Giving It All Tour.")
- What gifts, talents, or abilities will be needed to pull off the tour (include both the performers and their behind-the-scene entourage)?
- How can the participants put their gifts to use in the cities they visit?
- What pressing needs or ministry opportunities can they connect with on the tour?
- How can the participants and performers encourage their audiences and others to use their own gifts?
- How will the "before" and "after" of the tour be publicized?

Invite the group to reflect on how this project might be similar to the original disciples being sent out on their own "world tour" to spread the good news of Christianity while discovering their own newfound gifts.

Attachment: Activity 2

## Water Chemistry Demonstration

### Materials

- black pepper, flour, talcum powder, or other floating material
- water
- dishwashing liquid
- plate or bowl

### Procedure

1. Pour water into a plate or bowl.
2. Shake some pepper onto the water.
3. Dip your finger into the pepper and water. Note what happens.
4. Place a tiny drop of liquid soap in the center of the water. Or put a drop of dishwashing liquid on your finger, and then dip it into the pepper and water. Note what happens.

### How the Pepper and Water Demonstration Works

Adding detergent to the water lowers the surface tension of the water. The tension on the rest of the water pulls the floating pepper away from the soap. The pepper just stays afloat on the skin of water—which “pops” like you might pop a balloon—and the skin of water scoots away from the soap, carrying the pepper with it. Water normally bulges up a bit, like what you see when you look at a water drop. When the surface tension is lowered, the water wants to spread out. As the water flattens on the dish, the pepper that is floating on top of the water is carried to the outer edge of the plate.

See <http://chemistry.about.com/od/chemistrymagic/a/peppertrick.htm> for the source material for this demonstration.

Attachment: Activity 5

## Sand Painting

### Materials

- a variety of colored sands
- white glue
- paper cups
- paint brush, plastic knife, or craft stick
- paper (as thick as possible to prevent warping)
- pencil
- spray bottle

### Procedure

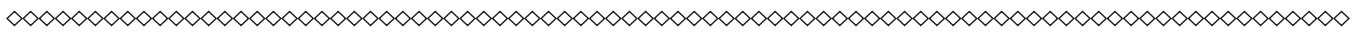
1. Draw a design on the paper. It's best to keep the design basic with large areas to fill.
2. Pour the white glue into a paper cup and add a few drops of water to create a thin, watery glue paint.
3. Paint one area of the design with the glue.
4. Every place you paint in this step should be covered with the same color sand.
5. Lift the paper and gently shake off the excess sand.
6. Repeat steps 3–5 for each color of sand.
7. When the painting is completed, set the design with a spray adhesive. Mix 3 parts water and 1 part glue in the spray bottle. Lightly spray on a dried sand painting.

Attachment: Activity 6

# ASSURANCE POLICY

*prepared for The Philippi Followers*

Apostle Paul, spiritual advisor



Name Assured

Agency's Name and Address

Policy Number:

For Policy Service Call:

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Section I—Coverage of Needs

- A.
- B.
- C.

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Section II—Coverage of Unknown or Unexpected Incidents

- A.
- B.
- C.

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Section III—Reassurances of God's Power, Grace, Forgiveness, and Presence

- A.
- B.
- C.

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Section IV—Comfort in Times of Extraordinary Duress

- A.
- B.
- C.

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Section V—Miscellaneous Assurances

- A.
- B.

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Your Assurer: The Heavenly Assurance Trust, Inc.  
Apostle Paul, Spiritual Advisor  
Jerusalem Home Office