

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Once children begin to read, they are often given Bibles by their family or their church. Activities in this Exploration may be used to introduce them to this wonderful book. This Exploration will show them how the Bible is different from other books and why it is so important to the Christian church. If the children have their own Bibles, encourage them to bring them to use during these activities. A variety of translations will add richness to their exploration and discussion, and children will become more familiar with the contents of their own personal Bibles. Notice that some activities require stronger reading skills than others. Select activities according to the abilities and interests of your group.

Children of this age may have a wide variety of learning styles and interests. Some may be very keen to demonstrate skills they have learned at school, including reading and writing. Others may need kinesthetic, musical, or art-based activities to help them learn. Activities in this Exploration offer a range of options. Remember that this is not school. Growing in faith entails far more than learning information. It engages the whole learner—body, mind and spirit—in a journey of discovery.



About this Exploration

Scripture tells the story of God's relationship with human beings. It is a gift of God for the people of God. As we engage with scripture, we discover God, and we discover a new world through words from long ago. We encounter scripture as an ancient text, but one that is living, breathing, and alive to contemporary people. It comforts and challenges, heals and holds accountable. Scripture expands worldviews and limits selfishness, offers forgiveness and embraces those who are on the margins. As we encounter scripture, we join with the great diversity of God's people to ask questions, connect with the text, pray, and discern together God's unfolding word for us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Proverbs 2:1-8

John 21:1-19

Leader Preparation

Do you remember receiving your first Bible? Even people who have not owned their own Bibles until adulthood sometimes experience the excitement and pleasure of holding that book in their hands. Try to recall what it felt like to read and explore your own Bible for the first time. How did it feel for you to first encounter scripture? Were you excited or uninterested, puzzled or curious, delighted or cautious? Unlike any other book, the Bible has a special place in our lives as Christians. Did you wonder what this ancient text might have to say to you and your life, or did you experience a deep sense of God's word speaking to you through the texts? Recognize that the children in your group may be experiencing emotions similar to your own, or very different ones.

The activities in this Exploration are especially appropriate for children who have just received Bibles from the congregation. That moment is an ideal time to engage them in encountering scripture. However, anytime during these childhood years is a valuable time to introduce them to the Bible and all that it has to offer. The games

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Introduction to Encountering Scripture (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity can include children with less developed reading skills as well as children unfamiliar with the Bible. If the Bible skills of the children are wide-ranging in your group, consider having the children work with partners, pairing children who have more experience with those with less experience. Select a Bible translation easier for children to understand, such as the Contemporary English Version or the Good News Bible, to read Proverbs 2:1-8.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Each child will need a Bible, even if the group will be working in pairs. The goal is to have each child turn the pages and discover the wealth of information in a Bible. Begin by having them look at the covers of their Bibles. *What is the title?* Note that there are variations, but that each one has "Bible" in the title. Have them find the page that is the contents or table of contents page. Point out that this page gives a lot of information. *What are the two large sections of the Bible?* We call the first section the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) and the second section the Christian Scriptures (or New Testament). *What is the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures? What is the last book of the Christian Scriptures?*

Invite the children to turn to the back of their Bibles. *What do you find at the back?* Some will find maps, word lists, charts, and information about measures. Some may have list of Bible characters or an index. Return to the contents page. Together, find the book of Proverbs listed under the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. *On what page does the book of Proverbs begin?* It will be a different page number in different Bibles.

Have everyone find that page. Point out the large chapter numbers and the smaller verse numbers. (There is no number one for verse one because the chapter number points out the first verse of the chapter.) Help them find chapter 2. Invite them to follow in their Bibles as you read verses 1-8, an explanation of the importance of knowing about God that we gain from reading and studying scripture. Explain that the book of Proverbs is filled with wise sayings about God and living God's way. The focus for this activity is Proverbs 2:1, 2, and 5. Ask for three volunteers to read each of these verses. *What wise advice do you hear in these verses?* Encountering scripture is one thing that Christians do. We seek to know God's word through the words of the Bible.



in these activities can be included in other sessions as ways to engage children as soon as they arrive, or to fill moments when not everyone is ready to move on.

Prayer: God of the Word, may the children and I be excited about your word to us and to all creation as we encounter that word in the Bible. As your Spirit brightens our path to faithful understanding, may we use this knowledge to be followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

2 Bible Exploration

Leader preparation: This activity is more appropriate for children who read than for those who are developing reading skills. Cut construction paper strips (about 1½” x 7”). You will need four per child to use as bookmarks if children are not yet familiar with how the Bible is organized.

Supplies:

- Bibles for each child
- construction paper
- scissors

Each child will need a Bible, preferably one that he or she owns. Help children find the book of Proverbs using these steps: Go to the table of contents. Find the book called Proverbs, and turn to it. When everyone has found it, point out the chapter and verse numbers. Ask: *How many chapters are in the book of Proverbs?* Turn to the second chapter of Proverbs, Proverbs 2. Explain how to use the verse numbers, noting that the number 1 is not used for verse 1. Read aloud verses 1–8 as the children follow in their Bibles. These verses tell us why the Bible is important to us. Proverbs 2:4 urges us to look for God’s word the way we would look for an important treasure. One place we find God’s word is in the Bible.

If the children need a fuller introduction to how the Bible is organized, begin with the following steps: Each child will need a Bible and four bookmarks. Begin by looking at the cover of their Bibles. Ask: *What is this book called?* While the actual title may vary (Good News Bible, Holy Bible, Common English Bible), it is likely that the title includes the word “Bible.” Lead the children in this introduction to the Bible: *Open your Bible to the page that shows the table of contents* (the list of the books of the Bible). *What information do you find on this page?* (This varies, but it may include the books in order and the books in alphabetical order as well as a list of special sections at the back of the Bible, such as maps or a word list.) Have the children place a bookmark at this page.

The Bible is divided into two sections: the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures or New Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures are the Bible that Jesus would have known; the Christian Scriptures (New Testament books) were written after Jesus had died. Invite children to find the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament. *What is the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures? Place a bookmark there.* Find the beginning of the New Testament. Ask: *What do you think marks the difference between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament?* Older children in this age group may figure this out. The first four books of the New Testament, the Gospels, tell the story of Jesus. *What is the first book of the New Testament? Place a bookmark there.* Then explore the book of Proverbs.

3 Bible, a Way to God

Leader preparation: Create a bookshelf of materials that fits your space and intended use. This bookshelf is intended to stay in the learning space. The size will be determined by the display space available and whether it is stored between uses. The directions here are one way that you can construct the bookshelf. Draw and label the poster board bookshelf, or assign that task to a child during the activity. In advance, choose a color for each category and cut strips of craft foam for the books.



Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- poster board or cardboard
- craft foam (eight different colors)
- permanent markers
- glue or self-adhesive Velcro® strips or dots

Print the following eight categories on newsprint or whiteboard: Books of Law, Books of History, Books of Poetry and Wisdom, Books of the Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation. Have the children open their Bibles to the Contents page. Explain that the books of the Bible can be divided into these eight categories, beginning with the Books of the Law (Genesis to Deuteronomy), Books of History (Joshua to Esther), Books of Poetry and Wisdom (Job to Song of Solomon), Books of the Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi), Gospels (Matthew to John), Acts (a history of the early church), Letters (Romans to Jude) and Revelation (John's visions). Form three or four groups. Assign each group a category and craft foam of the appropriate color. They are to write the book titles on strips of craft foam. Provide glue or Velcro® pieces to attach the books to the poster board bookshelf. (If you think you will want to remove "books" from the bookshelf at some time, use the Velcro® pieces.) When the bookshelf is complete, read the books of the Bible in order together. Then have the group locate the book of Proverbs and, before finding Proverbs in their Bibles, note the category it is in. Offer help to those who need it. Read the passage aloud as they follow in their Bibles. Then invite volunteers to read a line at a time. *What do we learn about God and the Bible from these verses?* If your group is primarily children at the younger end of this age range, rather than ask the question, read verses 1 and 5a. Explain that one way to become closer to God is through reading, thinking, and talking about the Bible with others.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Telling a Bible Story (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: For an addition to the activity, print large numerals on index cards, several sets of 0–9. Print on another set of cards the names of the books of the Bible. Also make a card with a colon and another with a dash.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles
- (optional) index cards

Decoding the message of a scripture reference is a major step for children as they become Bible students. Print this reference on newsprint or a whiteboard so everyone can see it: John 21:1–14. Explain that the name is the book of the Bible. They can find where this book is by looking in the contents page. Have everyone find it. When everyone has turned to John, explain that the number before the colon is the chapter number and have them turn to chapter 21. The numbers after the colon tell which verses to read. In this case, it is verse 1 to verse 14. When everyone has located it, read the story aloud as they follow in their Bibles. Then have each child find a partner and tell the story to each other. Encourage them to look in the Bible if they get stuck.



Variation for practicing finding texts: Call out a scripture reference and have four or six children stand with the index cards to make that reference. They will need to put the colon in the proper place and the dash, if necessary. Others can find the reference in their Bibles.

5 The Bible, a Treasure Chest

Leader preparation: Find a box, anything from a gold cardboard gift box to a gilded chest, to use as the treasure chest. On strips of paper, print these references (one reference per paper):

Exodus 25:1–8
Matthew 2:11
Matthew 6:19–20
Matthew 13:44
Acts 2:44–45

Supplies:

- box to use for a treasure chest
- crayons or colored markers and drawing paper

Proverbs 2:1–8 suggests that finding God’s word is like finding treasure. This activity uses that image as a way to get the children into their Bibles. Christians do various things to become closer to God and to be more faithful followers of Jesus Christ. One of these practices is reading and thinking about God’s word as we discover it in the Bible. Help the children find Proverbs 2:1–8 in their Bibles. Read verses 1 and 5. Ask: *What do you think of when you hear the word “treasure”?* *What do you think are some treasures in the Bible?* After they have spoken their ideas, show them the treasure box and invite a child to draw a paper from it. Help the group find the reference and, using the heading in the Bible, identify the story. The Bible has stories about treasure. *In what way can the Bible be like a treasure for us?* The Bible has many special stories from long, long ago. These stories are treasures, too. Invite children to draw pictures to illustrate some of their favorite Bible stories or characters. Invite them to put their pictures in the treasure box or to take them home.



6 Memorizing Books of the Christian Scriptures (New Testament)

Leader preparation: Print out the Books of the New Testament Chant from the attachment. Rehearse the chant until you have established a rhythm and can lead it without relying on the printed page. If you don’t feel competent developing the chant, go to www.sirchio.com and click on Music for Kids. Brian Sirchio has a delightful recording of children singing and reciting the books of the New Testament. You can purchase just that track from his CD.

Supplies:

- “Books of the New Testament Chant,” Attachment: Activity 6

Have everyone stand, if able. Clap the rhythm you established for the chant. Teach the children one part of the chant at a time. Before you know it, everyone will be able to say the books of the New Testament. Show them where the New Testament is found in the Bible, or have the children find the New Testament in their Bibles.



Variation: Once children are familiar with the books of the New Testament, have children find the gospel of John in their Bibles. When we have an idea of the order of the books, we can find it them quickly.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Feed My Sheep (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity looks at John 21:15–19, the story of Jesus sending Simon Peter to serve others. If you wish to use John 21:1–14 as well, see the variation following the activity. However, this will add considerable time to this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- drawing paper
- crayons or markers
- artwork: “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West, www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3

Have the children find John 21:15, providing help for children who are still unsure about this process. When everyone has found John 21:15, explain that Simon Peter is a disciple whom Jesus has chosen as a leader. This story takes place after Jesus’ resurrection. Invite volunteers to read this story aloud, stopping after verse 19. Ask: *What do you think Jesus is asking Simon Peter to do?* Jesus is talking about those who believe and follow him, not a flock of woolly sheep. Talk together about what Peter might do. Then ask: *What might we do today to “feed my sheep”?* Provide drawing paper and markers or crayons for the children to draw scenes that answer that question. Create a display on a bulletin board or in a hallway so the congregation can enjoy their work.

Option: Begin the activity by having the children turn to John 21 and follow as you read aloud verses 1–14. Point out that this story takes place after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Show the group the artwork “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West, but do not reveal the title because you want them to look at the art with Simon Peter as the dominant figure. To help them enter into the painting, suggest that the man in the painting is Peter. Be sure everyone has a good view of the artwork. Then, quietly, pose these ideas, one at a time, with a chance to talk after each one. Children usually want to tell what they are thinking, rather than keep their thoughts inside.

- I wonder what Simon Peter was thinking as he jumped into the water.
- I wonder what he thought Jesus was doing.
- I wonder how Simon Peter felt with water running down his face.
- I wonder what you would like to ask Peter.

After the children have thought about Simon Peter’s actions, invite them to consider the whole story, with questions such as: *How do you think the fishers felt after fishing all night and not catching one fish? How might they have felt when their net was so full of fish? What would you like to ask Jesus at this breakfast on the shore?* After this conversation, continue with the rest of the story, using the activity above.



8 Reading the Bible at Home

Leader preparation: The faith practice of encountering scripture begins when children first hear a Bible story. It takes a significant leap when children are able to read those stories for themselves. This activity will encourage the children to read the Bible during the week with the help of these folded books to record what they read with words or illustrations. Make a sample folded book. If the children have the option of decorative paper covers, put them on your book. Label some pages: Proverbs 2:1–8; John 21:1–19; Psalm 23 (because it is so well-known).

Supplies:

- large sheets of paper (at least 17" x 22")
- scissors
- (optional) decorative paper and glue

Begin by making the books, following these steps:

1. Fold the paper in half.
2. Fold the paper (without unfolding it) in half crosswise and then in half crosswise again.
3. Unfold the paper. You should see one lengthwise crease and three crosswise creases.
4. With the paper facing you so the lengthwise crease points to you, cut along the lengthwise crease from the bottom of the paper to the third crosswise crease.
5. Assemble the book by beginning with one end and folding it accordion style. You can experiment with other ways of folding the book as well.

Optional: Cut decorative paper slightly larger than the folded book and glue to the first and last pages as covers.

Show the children the pages on which you have written Bible passages in your folded book. Have them add these passages to their books. You may suggest other Bible passages that the children will encounter in future sessions, or suggest that they look through the Bible for familiar stories to read. Explain that when they read from the Bible at home, they can keep track of their thoughts by writing or drawing in their books.

For visual directions for this type of folded book, although for a sixteen-page book, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3qqtx72>.

Another simple way to make a folded book from a single piece of paper can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/3jxt66u>.

9 Song about the Bible

Leader preparation: Find hymnbooks with the song "I Love to Tell the Story." You can read about the history of this song at several websites by searching for "I Love to Tell the Story history." Sung for many years in church schools around the world, this song expresses the love for the story of Jesus and the joy in telling God's story to others, an outgrowth of encountering scripture and a similar idea to that found in Proverbs 2 about God's word.

Supplies:

- song: "I Love to Tell the Story" (tune: Hankey 7.6.7.6. D with refrain)
<http://tinyurl.com/3c56kuh>



Begin by teaching the children the refrain. When they are comfortable singing it, teach them the first stanza. First read it aloud. Point out that the songwriter got great joy from telling the story of God and Jesus. *What stories from the Bible make you happy? What stories do you want to tell other people?* After they have discussed these questions, sing the first stanza, teaching one line at a time.

Conclude this activity with this or a similar prayer: *Thank you, God, for all the people who have told your story for so many years. We want to be ready to tell your story, too. Amen.*

Reflect

Take note of what you learned about the Bible skills of the children in your group. Consider how you might adapt future activities. Where will they need help? How familiar were they with what can be found in their Bibles? Recall the activities that most seemed to engage your group. What questions did children have about the Bible? What might they be able to tell you about the Bible now, after participating in this Exploration? What excited each child about the Word?

Attachment: Activity 6

Books of the New Testament Chant

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
Tell good news—our Jesus story;
Then in Acts of the Apostles—
Deeds of followers and disciples.

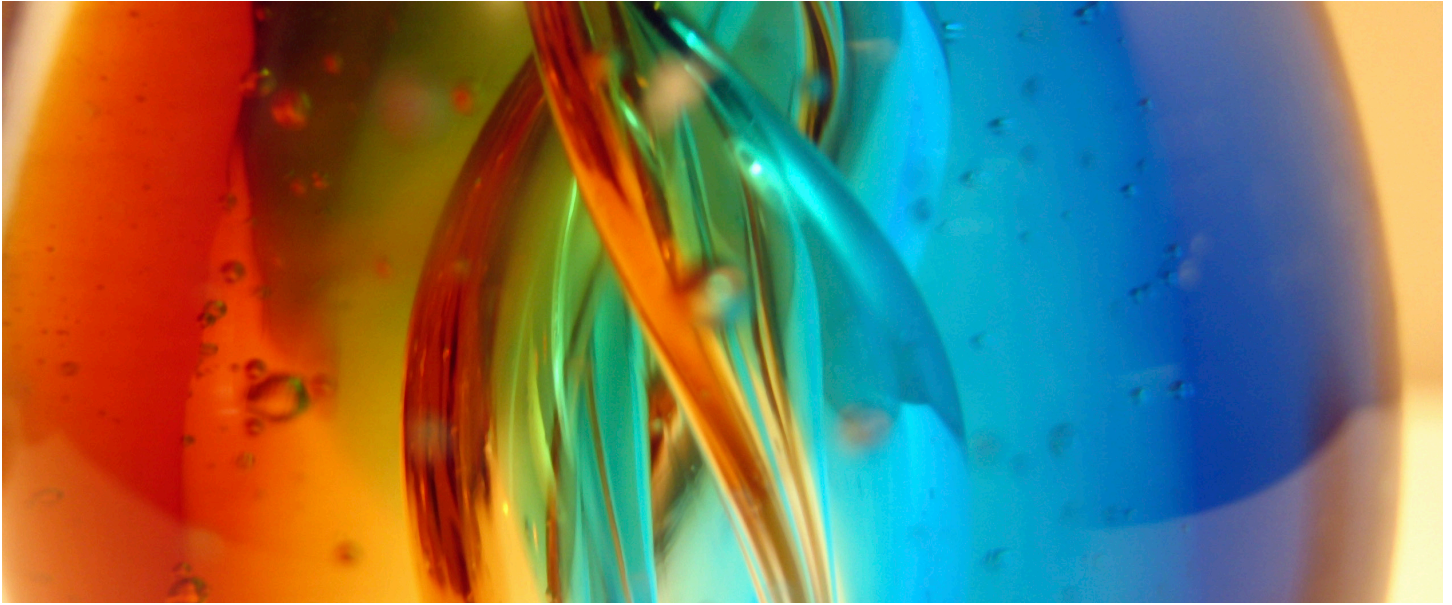
Letters to the church so new:
Romans, Corinthians One and Two,
Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,
First and Second Thessalonians.

There are letters still to go
As the church begins to grow:
Timothy One and Timothy Two,
Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.

James, then Peter One and Two,
Then we only have a few:
John, John, John—three Johns in all
And Jude's letter very small.

Last of all comes Revelation—
Hopes and dreams for God's creation.

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Children in your group are developing their reading and conversational skills. These capabilities ready them to learn more about the Bible and to explore the different kinds of literature it contains. Children need hands-on experiences with their Bibles in order to make them their own. In this Exploration they may discover the wealth of literature found in the Bible and learn more about using the Bible.

About this Exploration

The introduction to the Gospel of John gives us an image of God as one who is not distant or inaccessible, but active in the world with us. The divine lover, “the Word become flesh,” is intimately involved in our human experience. Encounter with scripture invites us into dialogue with God who dwells with us. Such encounters may heal and challenge, delight and disrupt, comfort and transform. When we hear scripture as a community, we discern its life-giving word for our lives and our world. We seek to acknowledge the ways scripture has been misused and recover its power to create new life.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

2 Kings 2:1–14

John 1:1–14

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

When have you encountered scripture most profoundly? Was it as you meditated on a passage? In a Bible study with others? How do you include your own encounter with scripture as you prepare to lead the children? Do you read the focus passages and ponder their meaning for you? Do you spend time in prayer after reading them? How you practice this faith practice of encountering scripture can stimulate your planning for your time with the children. Take time, even a few minutes, to encounter the focus passages as God's Word to you.

Prayer: God of the Word, may our eyes be opened by the light that comes from your Word. May that light shine through us to the children. We pray that the light of your Word will brighten their relationship with you as well. Amen.

Session Development

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



① Looking Up Texts Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If your group could benefit from some practice in finding Bible texts, play this game. Prepare sheets of paper with well-known references, such as Psalm 23:1, John 1:1, Genesis 2:3, Micah 6:8, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:1–3, Luke 2:7, Acts 2:3–4, and 1 John 3:18. Print the references clearly and large, one per sheet.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- sheets of paper with references

Each child will need a Bible. Invite the children to select one of the references you printed on the papers. Display it, or hold it so everyone can see it. If necessary, review how to find a Bible reference, explaining the book, chapter number, and verse number(s). Encourage the children to consult the Contents page in their Bibles. When everyone has found the reference, ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Others can follow in their Bibles as you read aloud the passage.

Do this for two or three references that you think will interest your group. Ask: *Which verses do you think you might have heard before? Which verse did you like? Why?* Encourage children to talk about the verses they heard.

② Books of the Bible

Leader preparation: Make several sets of index cards with the books of the Bible printed on them, one book per card. To save time in sorting them, use different colors of cards or markers for Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Mix up each set.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- sets of cards with books of the Bible

Divide the group into smaller groups of three to five children. Give a set of the index cards with the books of the Bible on them to each group. Have them do various activities with the cards, such as:

- Sort them into Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament books. They can check one another's work by referring to the Contents page in their Bibles.
- Find all the books with a woman's name. Locate these books in the Bible.
- Find all the books with a man's name. How many are in the New Testament?
- Remove the cards with the first four books of the New Testament, the books known as the Gospels. (If they don't remember, encourage them to refer to the Contents page.) Arrange them in order.
- Find all the books that have two or more, such as 1 Kings and 2 Kings. Locate them in the Bible. How many did you find?
- The first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures are the Law, or Torah. Find the cards for them and arrange them in order.
- Arrange the cards of the New Testament books in order.



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

3 Coin Toss Game

Leader preparation: Place sheets of construction paper with 0–9 printed on them on the floor in a pattern similar to a hopscotch game or in two rows of five papers each. Mix up the numbers.

Supplies:

- construction paper
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- markers, such as coins or large buttons
- Bibles
- index cards (for variations)

Name a book of the Bible and have the children turn to it. Select a child to toss the markers onto the construction paper numbers to determine the chapter of that book. For example, if they have turned to Psalms, give the child one, two, or three coins to toss. When everyone has found the correct chapter, invite another child to toss one or two coins to determine the verse of that chapter. When the verse is found, have a child read it aloud and write the reference on newsprint or a whiteboard. It is inevitable that the coins will land on a number that does not work. No problem, toss the coins again.

When you are ready to end this activity, talk with the children about the important place that scripture has in the Christian community. Therefore, the easier it is for them to find texts and favorite passages, the more they will read the stories and other writings in it. You might tell the group about your practice of encountering scripture, whether on your own or with a group. Children need to hear how adults use these faith practices, too.

This is a good game to play as the children arrive because additional children can be easily added to the game.

Variations: If space is limited, draw the game board on poster board and place it on the floor. To make a more difficult game for children with some experience in finding texts, print the names of the books of the Bible on index cards. One child draws a card to determine the book. To make it even more difficult, draw a card after the chapter and verse numbers have been determined.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Drama of 2 Kings 2:1–14 (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make nametags for Elijah, Elisha, and Narrator, using index cards and yarn. Make nametags for everyone else with the words “Company of prophets” written on them. Plan the route for the drama and make road signs for these places: Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, Jordan River.

Supplies:

- “Elijah and Elisha,” Attachment: Activity 4
- index cards, hole punch, markers, and yarn to make nametags
- nametags
- (optional) strip of fabric

Distribute the copies of the “Elijah and Elisha” drama. Together decide who will be Elijah, Elisha, and Narrator. Perhaps a leader will be the narrator. Everyone



else will be the Company of Prophets chorus. Provide nametags for each child, identifying her or his role in the drama. Give the Company of Prophets time to rehearse reading their lines together as the others also go over their parts. If available, use a strip of fabric for the mantle. Then, enjoy the drama together. Ask: *Do you think Elisha did inherit Elijah's spirit? I wonder why that was important to him.* To conclude this activity, point out that the Bible contains many types of writing, but perhaps the type we enjoy the most is stories like this one. Invite the children to tell you what Bible stories they enjoy. If the children are reading the Bible at home, ask about the stories they have read recently.



5 Shape Writing

Leader preparation: Working with the poetic words of John 1:1–14, the children will create a word picture based on the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess. If the children are in the younger end of this age group, you may choose to cut the paper into shapes found on the artwork in advance. Other children may prefer to prepare the paper themselves or cut it out after they have completed the writing.

Supplies:

- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess, www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3
- Bibles
- construction paper and scissors
- pencils
- colored pencils or fine-tip markers
- (optional) markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Show the children the artwork. Notice the different shapes the artist uses. Help the children find John 1:1–14. Copy some of the words or a verse that you like from John 1:1–14. Make your writing into a shape from the artwork “No-Traveller’s Borne.” Choose a shape you like, and draw it on your paper; cut out the shape. Use a color similar to that of the shape on the artwork, or a new color. You might choose a shape such as the circle in the middle of the artwork, the yellow blob that extends into the upper right corner, the grey blob in the left middle, or any others. Begin by writing or printing your words inside the outline of the shape, and continue to write it round and round until the shape is filled. When children have finished, place the shapes on a tabletop, beginning with their proximate places in the artwork. Then move the shapes around to find pleasing constructions. Each time, read the words that are next to each other. To conclude this activity, invite children to think about the words and phrases they have chosen as a group. Point out that this introduction to the gospel of John is like reading poetry, one type of writing found in the Bible. Read John 1:1–5 to the group.

To adapt this activity for the younger children in this age range, print on newsprint or whiteboard a few short phrases for them to copy. You might choose a phrase such as “In the beginning was the Word,” “the light of all people,” or “full of grace and truth.” These selections are from the NRSV. If the children use a different translation, select phrases from that translation.



6 Mantles

Leader preparation: Read 2 Kings 2:1–14 several times and tell it to yourself in your own words. The stories in our Bible were preserved by telling them from generation to generation. Keep the tradition alive by telling this story to the children. Or read it from a children’s Bible storybook, such as *The Children’s Bible in 365 Stories* or *The Children’s Illustrated Bible*.

Supplies:

- Bible or children’s Bible storybook with the story of Elijah and Elisha
- plain fabric, such as cotton muslin, cut into strips about 8” x 30–36”
- fabric markers

Tell story of Elijah and Elisha found in 2 Kings 2:1–14. Summarize what happened in the story: God tells Elijah to go to Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordan River. Each time Elijah tells his helper Elisha to stay behind. But Elisha insists on going with Elijah. At the river, Elijah hits the water with his mantle, or robe, and the water parts so the two can walk to the other side. Then Elijah is taken up into the heavens after the two see a chariot and horses of fire. Elisha picks up Elijah’s mantle. He hits the water, the river parts, and Elisha crosses. He has now taken Elijah’s place as a prophet of God. Explain that the mantle or robe had become a symbol that Elijah and Elisha followed the ways of God. Provide strips of plain cloth (muslin is a good choice) and fabric markers for the children to decorate mantles as reminders of how they might follow God’s ways too.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Jesus the Light (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Rehearse the reading of the paraphrase of John 1 from the attachment. Practice reading slowly, with feeling. Cut out construction paper circles about 6” in diameter from yellow or white construction paper, one per child. A salad or dessert plate makes a good template.

Supplies:

- sources of light, such as candle, light bulb, or flashlight
- “Paraphrase of John,” Attachment: Activity 7
- construction paper circles

Show the children the sources of light you gathered. Note that each one brings us light in some way. *When do we use these things?* One writer in the Christian scriptures talked about Jesus as light. Read the paraphrase. *How does Jesus bring light to us?* This will be a stretch for some children who find it difficult to imagine a thing to be something other than what it is. But as you continue to talk with them, suggest that Jesus brought God’s love to people, which is like the best light of all. *How do we bring God’s love to people today? What do you think you can do this week to bring God’s love to someone?* Try to get them to think of a specific action for a specific person, such as “Visit my neighbor who cannot leave her home” or “Read a story to my little brother.” Distribute the circles and markers or crayons. Have the children draw what they will do in this circle of light. Suggest that they take home their circles. When they do what they said they would do, they can write the date on the back of the circle or put a big happy face there.

Alternative: If your group needs a more active option, suggest they create a mime that shows people bringing light to others. Brainstorm ideas and work together to show this with just bodies, but no words.



8 Reminder Book

Leader preparation: The children will make a simple book with pockets to hold blank business cards on which they will keep words to remind them of God and Jesus. Print the attachment, and make a sample copy of the reminder book.

Supplies:

- Instructions for Making a Reminder Book, Attachment: Activity 8
- blank business cards (can be purchased in sheets for computer printers)
- plain white or colored paper, such as copier paper
- markers or crayons
- clear tape
- ribbon
- stapler and staples

The children can decorate the outside and put their names on their books. As they work, talk about what they might write or draw on the business cards to remind them of God or Jesus. Encourage them to think of things they know from the Bible.

Variation: You can use this same method by taping strips of paper together to make an eight-pocket book. Label the pockets: Books of the Law, Books of History, Books of Poetry and Wisdom, Books of Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation. The children can add cards with information about each section of the Bible as they discover it at home or at church.

9 “Guide My Feet”

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the song “Guide My Feet.” Make signs for “Bethel,” “Jericho,” and “Jordan River.” Display them in the learning area far enough apart so you and the children can sing a stanza of the song as you move from one place to the next.

Supplies:

- song: “Guide My Feet” (tune: Guide My Feet, 8.8.8.10)
www.tinyurl.com/fp-feet

John (called the Baptizer), Elijah, and Elisha all followed in God’s way. It was God who guided their feet. Each of them, God’s faithful ones, could have sung this song. Introduce the song “Guide My Feet” to the children. The lyrics are so simple that they can learn the words as they learn the melody. Once they know it, sing it as you walk in place to the beat.

Reflect

Which activity that you used engaged most of the children? What Bible skills are the children developing? How can you remind and encourage the children to bring their own Bibles? As you think back over the activities you have used, consider how you can continue to help children develop connections between the Bible and their own experiences.

Then recall the story of John the baptizer from John 1:1–14, or Elijah and Elisha from 2 Kings 2:1–14. These faithful people of God took the words of this song to heart. Pretend you are walking with them from place to place as you sing the song.

Conclude this activity with a prayer, such as:

*Guide our feet, God, so we walk in your way.
Hold our hand, God, so we do not stray.
Stand by us, God, for we are yours. Amen.*

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Attachment: Activity 4

Elijah and Elisha

A drama based on 2 Kings 2:1-14

Characters: Narrator, Elijah, Elisha, Company of Prophets

Setting: On the road near Gilgal

Time: About 850 B.C.E.

Narrator: Meet Elijah, a prophet of God in the Northern Kingdom. He's had quite a life. Once, Elijah said there would be a drought, a long time with no rain, until the people returned to God's ways. People were so angry with him that Elijah had to leave his home. God sent ravens with bread and meat to feed him. Elijah healed the only son of a widow. But now Elijah is old, very old.

And meet Elisha, a student of Elijah. He left his family to travel with Elijah. He will take over for Elijah. Yes, the names are a bit confusing. Elijah is old; Elisha is young. The two men are walking on the road from Gilgal.

Elijah: Elisha, stay here. God is sending me as far as Bethel. You don't need to go with me.

Elisha: Not go with you? Upon our God and upon your very life, I most certainly will go with you.

Narrator: So off the two prophets went to Bethel. As they got near to Bethel, a company of prophets led by a prophet in Bethel approached them and had a word with Elisha.

Company of Prophets: Do you know that God will take your leader, Elijah, away from you this very day?

Elisha: Yes, I know that. But don't talk about it.

Elijah: Elisha, stay here. God is sending me to Jericho. You don't need to go with me.

Elisha: Not go with you? Upon our God and upon your very life, I most certainly will go with you.

Narrator: So off the two went to Jericho. As they got near to Jericho, the company of prophets from Jericho came to meet them and had a word with Elisha.

Company of Prophets: Do you know that God will take your leader, Elijah, away from you this very day?

Attachment: Activity 4 (*continued*)

Elisha: Yes, I know that. But don't talk about it.

Elijah: Elisha, stay here. God is sending me to the Jordan River. You don't need to go with me.

Elisha: Not go with you? Upon our God and upon your very life, I most certainly will go with you.

Narrator: So the two went to the Jordan River. Now fifty of the company of prophets followed them. They watched them from a distance, saying nothing. Elijah took his mantle, which is like a long strip of cloth, and rolled it up. He hit the water with it, and the water of the Jordan River parted, leaving a path in the middle. Elijah and Elisha crossed the river on this path to the other side.

Elijah: Tell me, Elisha, before I leave you, what can I do for you?

Elisha: Elijah, please give me a double share of your spirit.

Elijah: That is a hard request, Elisha. If you see me as I am taken away from you, then you will receive a double share. If you do not see me, it will not be given to you.

Narrator: The two walked and talked. Suddenly a chariot and horses of fire came between them, and Elijah was taken in a whirlwind toward heaven.

Elisha: Elijah, my father, Elijah!

Narrator: When Elisha could no longer see Elijah, he grabbed his clothes and tore them in two. Then he picked up Elijah's mantle and walked to the bank of the Jordan River.

Elisha: Where is the God of Elijah?

Narrator: Elisha struck the river with the mantle, and it parted just as it had parted for Elijah. Elisha walked to the other side.

Company of Prophets: Look at that! The spirit of Elijah is with Elisha.



Paraphrase of John 1:1-4

(selected verse)

From the very beginning
Jesus was
and Jesus was with God.
Not only that,
Jesus was God.
Jesus, God, at the very beginning.
Jesus brought life
to everything.
This life was like
a light for all people.
This light shone
in the darkness
of the very beginning.
Jesus, this light,
came to earth to live.
Jesus showed us
God's love.
The light of God's love
shone
in Jesus.
John the baptizer said,
"This is the one I was talking about!"
Now we cannot see God,
but Jesus,
who is one with God,
lived among us
and showed us
what God's love is like.



Attachment: Activity 8

Instructions for Making a Reminder Book

You need:

- blank business cards (can be purchased in sheets for computer printers)
- plain white or colored paper, such as copier paper
- markers-or crayons
- clear tape
- ribbon
- stapler and staples

For each reminder book, you need a $\frac{1}{2}$ sheet of the plain paper ($5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$) and a $\frac{1}{4}$ sheet of the plain paper ($2\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$)

To get pieces this size, fold one piece of blank paper in half so that the short (top) edge of the paper meets the short (bottom) edge of the paper. Cut the paper in half.

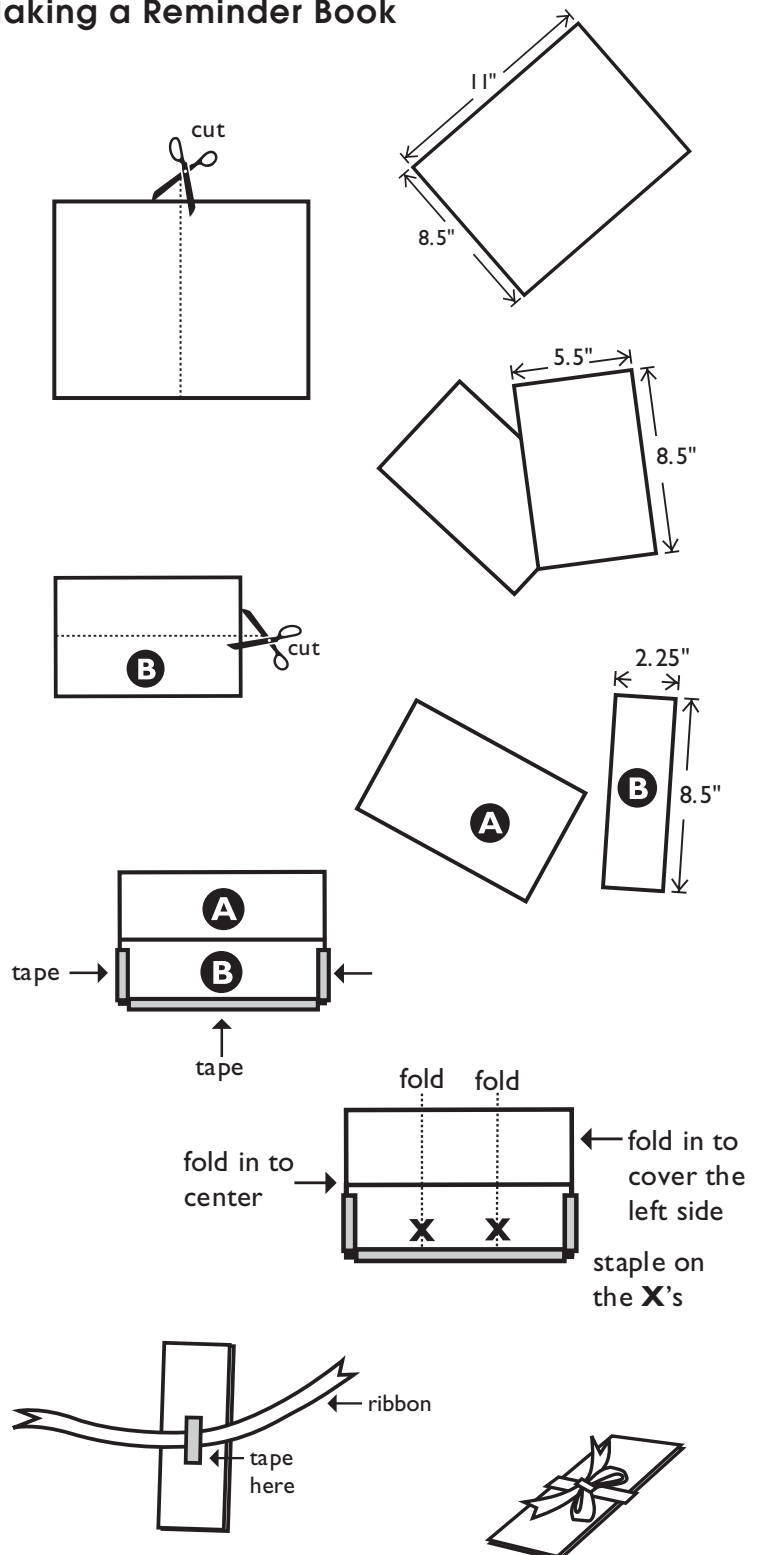
Fold one of the pieces in half again so that the longest edges meet, and cut it in half to produce a long narrow strip. Discard one of the narrow pieces. You now have two pieces of paper that are the size you need (piece A and piece B)

Place piece B (the $\frac{1}{4}$ sheet) across the bottom of piece A (the $\frac{1}{2}$ sheet). Tape the two together across the bottom and the sides.

Fold the paper into thirds, bringing the left third over and then the right third over the left third. Open up the folds and staple the two center folds to form the edge of the pockets.

You now have three pockets. Into each pocket slip two or three blank business cards.

Tape a length of ribbon (about 12 in) to the middle of the back of the book. This will be used to tie the book closed. This is the reminder book.



Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

The Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, provides many examples of faithful living for children to ponder and consider imitating. As they find themselves in new situations, they are eager to make their own choices. During these years, a wider circle of friends and mentors in the faith community is invaluable for their faith development and their life of discipleship.

About this Exploration

For the Christian, discipleship includes servant leadership. As Christians, we believe that scripture makes a difference in our living. Engaging with scripture is one way we discover how to live in Christ's way. As we hear, read and interpret scripture, we listen for God's word. We discern how to live into its teaching. And as we respond to scripture, we learn the practices of our faith, mentor others, pass on the sacred texts, and learn more about living with compassion, hope, and love.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ruth 1
Acts 8:26–40

Leader Preparation

After you have read the focus passages for this Exploration, think about the choices the people made in each one. Each person—Orpah, Ruth, Naomi, Philip, the Ethiopian official—appears to be of strong character. How did they decide what to do? What do they suggest to you about how to make choices in your life? How does your faith influence your choices?

Prayer: God of the Word, each day we make choices without giving them much thought. We pray that we might slow down and think more carefully about how we treat others at home, at work, at school, and elsewhere. We pray that we might spend more time thinking about how to live your way 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 to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Meeting Bible People (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Go over the page “Meet . . .” so you will be familiar with the characters the children will discover. Select two or three whom you and the children will learn more about to conclude this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Meet . . .” Attachment: Activity 1
- (optional) computers with Internet access

Each child will need a Bible and a copy of “Meet . . .” If some children in your group need help finding Bible references, partner them with children who have those skills. Children can work on the page on their own if they want to. When the children have found all the references, select three characters on which to focus, providing additional information about them by reading more at the reference the children looked up. *What have you heard about any of these people before?*

Imagine that you are a character from the Bible. What Bible person would you like to be? (It can be an actual Bible person or a character you make up.) Give children a few minutes to think about the character each would like to be. Ask questions such as: What is your name? What do you do? Are you a prophet, friend of Jesus, someone who is in one of the Bible stories you know, an animal in one of the stories, or someone else? Invite children to share their characters with the group. As a Bible character, what can you tell us about God or about Jesus?

To conclude this activity, have the children turn to the story in Ruth 1 or Acts 8:26–40 and identify the major characters in that story.

Optional: If you have access to a computer with Internet, go to a site with lists of Bible names, such as <http://tinyurl.com/ozx3>. Children might use the search box to see if their own name (or a similar one) is in the Bible. Or they may enjoy reading some of the more unusual sounding names. Some sites show what they look like in Hebrew, the language the Bible was written in. There are some sites, such as <http://tinyurl.com/6npssc>, that let you translate your name into Hebrew. You can see what your name looks and sounds like in one of the original Bible languages.

② Moving to a New Home

Leader preparation: Prepare space for the children to work with finger paint. Clear a space for paintings to dry.

Supplies:

- finger paint (various colors)
- finger paint paper or shiny white shelf paper
- basin of water and towels for cleanup
- paint shirts (small men’s short sleeve shirts put on backwards work well)
- Bible
- (optional) book *Home to Medicine Mountain* by Chiori Santiago, illustrated by Judith Lowry.

- 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.

Has your family ever moved to a new town or new home? Invite children to tell what it is like to leave friends and familiar places. Since not every child may have moved, this will help those children understand the emotions of a move. Then invite everyone to think about what it feels like to move to a new place. Give them paint shirts. Show them the finger paint. They can select colors to portray those feelings and paint with them. As they finish, set the paintings aside to dry, and have the children clean their hands.

With the emotions related to moving in their minds, introduce the children to Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi. Read Ruth 1 and invite the children's observations about how each woman felt about leaving the others.

Variation: If you think the children in your group have not had much experience with moving, read the story *Home to Medicine Mountain* by Chiori Santiago and illustrated by Judith Lowry. It is based on the true story of a young boy who had to leave the reservation to go to a boarding school.

③ Sacrament of Baptism

Leader preparation: This activity needs to be specific to the way that baptism is celebrated in your congregation and denomination. If you are uncertain about the details, invite your minister to join the children for this conversation. If possible, take the children to see the place where baptisms occur in your church building, and have the conversation there.

The baptism of the Ethiopian official in Acts 8:26–40 offers an occasion to talk with the children about the sacrament of baptism as it is practiced in your church. Avoid asking if the children have been baptized, even if your congregation practices infant baptism, as children who have not been baptized may feel excluded. Instead, find out what they know about this sacrament and fill in their knowledge with additional information.

Supplies:

- a jug of warm water and large basin
- Bibles

Have a conversation with the children about baptism, using questions such as the following: *Have you seen a baptism in our church? What happens at a baptism? Who is present at a baptism? Do you remember any questions that are asked at a baptism?* (This may seem more than any child will know, but an eight-year-old boy startled a church school guest by reciting all the questions asked at an infant baptism in their church. Apparently, he had heard them often enough that he memorized them.) *Why do you think babies/people are baptized?*

Place the jug of water and basin in a central place. Invite the group to gather around. Invite children to place their hands over the basin as you pour a little warm water over their hands.

Say this prayer:

*Water
Water of life
Water when we are thirsty
The waters of baptism
The blessing of God washing over us
God's love all around us
Thank you God, Amen.*

With knowledge of baptism in their minds, the children are ready to hear the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official, a different kind of baptism story. Read Acts 8:26–40 as the children follow in their Bibles. Invite children to help you retell the story from memory. They can check their Bibles for details. *Why do you think the Ethiopian man wanted to get baptized?* Invite suggestions about what difference it might have made to him to know the story of Jesus.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ What to Do? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about the children in your group. What do you know about their lives? What kinds of decisions might they make? Consider how you will help them consider the choices they make often.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask children to work in groups of three. Ask each small group to act out the object or scenario you give them. The rules are that (1) each person can make only a single repeated gesture (for example, lifting one's arm up and down across one's body) and a single repeated sound (for example, saying "ah, ah, ah," or making creaking noise repeatedly), and (2) each of the three people must coordinate their sounds and gestures to make a single image. Give teams only a few seconds to figure out their sounds and movements. Start with some warm-ups. After each scenario, let groups admire the sound/movement creations of others. Use these or similar objects or scenarios:

- Be a washing machine
- Be a crackling bonfire
- Be a hamburger
- Be a very difficult decision

Ask about the last scenario. *How did you show the idea of a difficult decision? What are some choices or decisions you make?*

Each woman in the story of Ruth 1 has an important decision to make. Read Ruth 1 to the children. If there are good sight readers in the group, they may be able to take turns reading it aloud. Print the names—Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth—on newsprint or a whiteboard. Comment that each woman in the story had a choice, a decision to make. Invite the group to identify the decision or decisions each woman made. Each woman's decision was personal and based on how she understood the situation. Invite the children to explore how each woman might have come to the choice she made, with questions such as:

- What decision did she have to make?
- What choices did she have?
- How do you think she made her decision?
- How do you think God might have been a part of her decision?

For children to recognize that much thinking can go into a decision is to help them evaluate their own decisions and how they make them. Ask: *What decisions do you make?* They may not think they have many decisions, but probe their thinking by asking about how they decide to make new friends or how they decide to spend their allowance. Finally, ask: *How is living in God's way a part of your decision?* It may be likely that they had not considered including this in their decision-making. If not, let the question sit in their minds to ponder later.



5 Mime Ruth

Leader preparation: Read the book of Ruth so you will be ready to summarize the rest of the story for the children in three or four sentences. Or find it in a children's Bible storybook, such as *The Pilgrim Book of Bible Stories* or *Lectionary Story Bible, Year B* and be prepared to complete the story by reading it to the children.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab" by William Blake, www.tinyurl.com/fp-apwb
- Bibles
- children's Bible or storybook with the story of Ruth
- lengths of fabric or cotton towels and headbands or pieces of rope

Help the children find Ruth in their Bibles. They can follow as you read aloud Ruth 1. Alternatively, you can tell the first part of Ruth's story from a children's Bible or storybook. Look at the artwork "Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab." *What part of the story of Ruth is shown in this art? What feelings do you notice in the picture? What else do you notice? Who are the people in the scene?* (Note that more than one interpretation is possible.) Notice how the artist, William Blake, used long curling and swirling lines for each woman's clothing, hair, and bodies. *How is the background different? What else has the artist done to make the painting feel the way it does?*

Talk about how the story of Ruth 1 can be divided into scenes. Use the text to determine which verses represent each scene. Select children to play the parts. Provide scarves and lengths of fabric and rope or headbands to create head coverings.

To include more children in the play, add the characters Elimilech, Mahlon, and Chilion and expand the beginning of the story. Boys and girls can be in the group that welcomes Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem. Read the story again as the children mime it. If they are not used to doing this, you may need to encourage their actions to fit the story. Conclude with a brief summary of the rest of the story of Ruth from a children's Bible or in your own words. End by reading Ruth 4:17.



6 A Baptism on the Road

Leader preparation: Cut paper squares (about 3") for the children's illustrations.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: "Baptism of Jesus" by Pheoris West, <https://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- tape or glue sticks
- drawing paper
- colored pencils or fine-tip markers

Have the children turn to Acts 8 and follow in their Bibles as you read Acts 8:26–40. Then look at the artwork, inviting the children to imagine that the figure is the Ethiopian official being baptized. The baptism occurs at the end of this story. With the help of the children, list on newsprint or whiteboard the events leading up to and including the baptism. Assign one scene to each child. Provide squares of paper and art materials for the children to draw a picture of their scene. When they have finished, help the children put the scenes in order and attach them to the list of events on newsprint, in sequence.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Book of Mentors (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Prepare the paper doll pages and covers for the children's books, using the pattern on "Accordion People Book."

Supplies:

- Accordion People Book, Attachment: Activity 7
- construction paper
- plain white paper such as copier paper
- crayons or markers
- Bible

Help the children make their accordion people books, according to the directions on the people pattern. They can decorate the front cover and put their names on their books. When they have finished, review or read the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official in Acts 8:26–40. Point out the important role Philip had in helping the Ethiopian official interpret the words from Isaiah and telling him about Jesus. Invite children to name people who have helped them understand a Bible passage or told them stories from the Bible. You might prompt them by asking about their parents, grandparents, and people in the church. Have children make books. On the inside front cover, they can print a title, such as "People Who Told Me about Jesus." On the pages, they can write the names of the people they identified and draw pictures of those persons or of the stories they have heard about Jesus.

8 “As We Gather at Your Table”

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn “As We Gather at Your Table.” Concentrate on the first stanza, which points to the importance of “listening to your word” and “sacred story.” A communion hymn, it connects the table to our life of discipleship as we welcome others to the table. For the children, the focus will be on the importance of scripture.

Supplies:

- hymn: “As We Gather at Your Table” (tune: Beach Spring, 8.7.8.7.D.), <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-table>; tune: <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-table2>

Read to the children the words for the first stanza of “As We Gather at Your Table.” Pause after each line to explore its meaning. Pay particular attention to these phrases: “as we listen to your word” and “nourish us with sacred story.” The children may not immediately recognize this use of “word” and “sacred story” as references to the Bible. Explore how the songwriter sees the value of hearing and encountering the Word. The melody has a firm beat. With the children devise movements. This can be as simple as raising your hands above your head to clap on the first beat of the second measure (“gath-er”) and all measures matching it (“Lis-ten” “know” “hearts” “us” “claim” “through” “make”). Or, you and the group can work out a simple circle dance to accompany the song.



9 Stories of Jesus

Leader preparation: What stories of Jesus do you remember hearing as a child? Are there Bible stories have you known since childhood? Think about how the children will answer questions about Bible stories they know. The faith practice of encountering scripture begins with the first Bible story that children hear, probably the story of Jesus’ birth. As stories are added to their repertoire and as they are able to read these stories for themselves, they may not realize how many Bible stories they know. This activity will encourage them to recognize that wealth of story and to add to it.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Christ Among the Children” by Emil Nolde, www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3
- (optional) camera

Show the children the artwork “Christ among the Children” by Emil Nolde, and read the title to them. Ask children to look at the picture carefully, noticing how the artist has blended and overlapped the colors. *What do you notice in this picture?* Invite a variety of responses. *Look again. See if you notice anything you didn’t see before. What feeling or idea do you think the artist is trying to show?* Invite the children, as a group, to pose in a way that is similar to the picture. Encourage them to put their bodies in similar positions to the figures in the artwork. Think about what the different people might be thinking or feeling and try to match their face and their gestures closely.

Optional: Take photographs of the group in their posed “artwork” position. Ask: *If you had been in this scene, where would you have been? Put your body into the kind of position you might have been in, if you had been part of this picture. What stories from the Bible do you know about Jesus? Do any of these stories help you know what Jesus was like or help you feel closer to Jesus?*



Pray this or a similar prayer: *Loving God, you have provided us with many stories about you and about Jesus. We want to read and think about them so we can be faithful to your ways. Amen.*

Reflect

Consider your feelings about scripture. What is your relationship with the Bible? What texts are important to you? What questions trouble you? As you engage with the children in your group, what are you discovering about the Bible? Perhaps the children are helping you to hear familiar texts with new ears. What connections did the children make between Bible stories and learning to live in God's way? Which Bible stories do they remember?



Meet . . .

1. Meet a boy who helped Jesus feed 5,000 people—John 6:9.
What did the boy have? _____
2. Meet the first twins in the Bible—Genesis 25:24–26.
What are their names? _____
3. Meet a man who traveled to tell people about Jesus—Acts 13:13–16.
Who is he? _____
4. Meet a boy God chose to be a prophet—1 Samuel 3:10.
What is his name? _____
5. Meet the first king of Israel—1 Samuel 13:1.
Who was he? _____
6. Meet two sisters who were friends of Jesus—Luke 10:38–39.
What are their names? _____
7. Meet two brothers who became followers of Jesus—Mark 1:16–18.
Who are they? _____
8. Meet a man who wore camel's hair clothing—Matthew 3:4.
Who was he? _____ What did he eat? _____



Accordion People Book

To Make the Pages for the Book

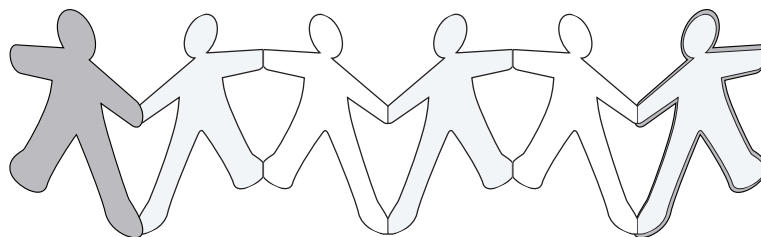
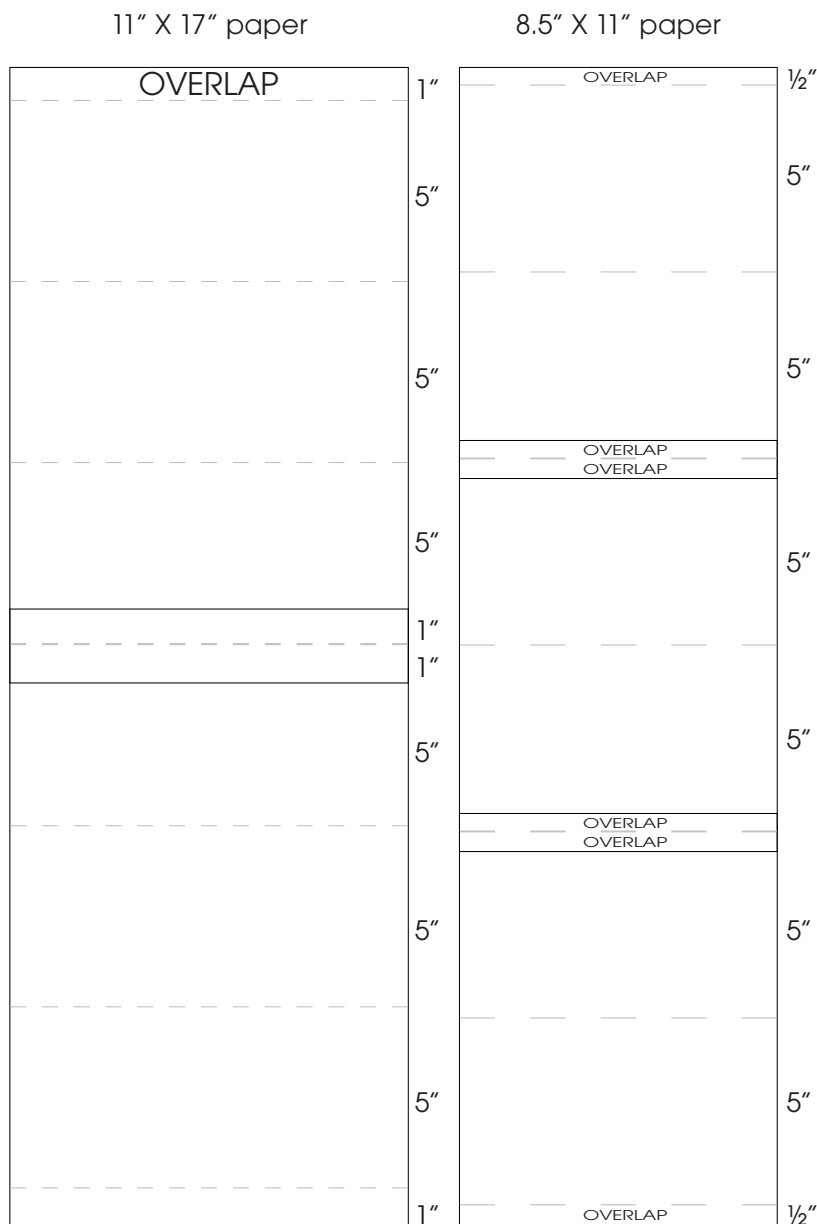
1. Cut a pattern of the figure.
2. Fold a long sheet of paper (or several sheets taped or glued together) accordion-style, using the pattern as the width for the folds.
3. Place the figure pattern on the folded paper so the hands and feet are on the folds.
4. Trace around the pattern. Cut out the figure. Cut through all the layers of paper. Do not cut the folds for the hands and feet.
5. Open up the paper and you have a row of human figures.

To Make the Covers for the Book

1. Trace around the cover pattern on construction paper or card stock.
2. Cut around it. The cover is slightly larger than the pages to give some protection to the pages of your book.
3. You need a front cover and a back cover.

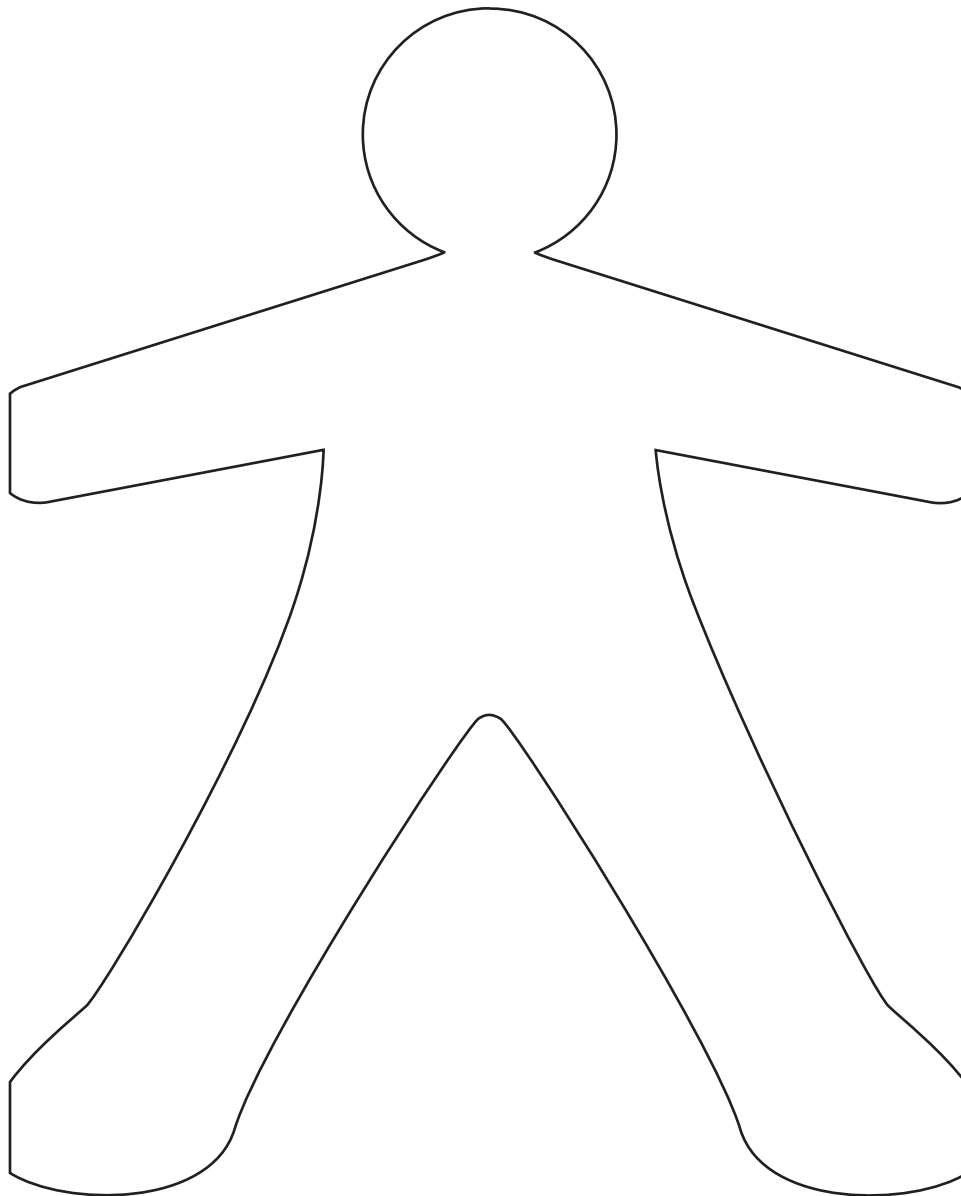
To Assemble the Book

1. Glue the first figure of your folded figures to the inside of the front cover.
2. Glue the last figure to the inside of the back cover.

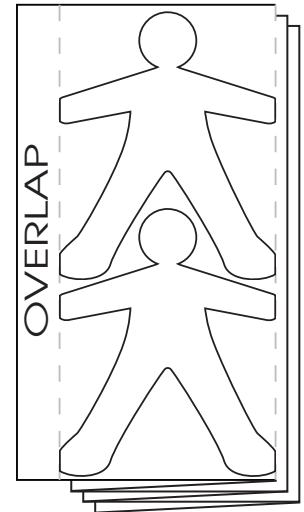


Attachment: Activity 7 (continued)

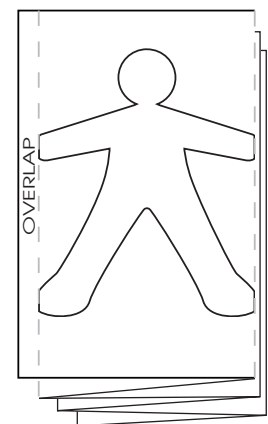
Inside Pages Template



8.5" X 11" paper

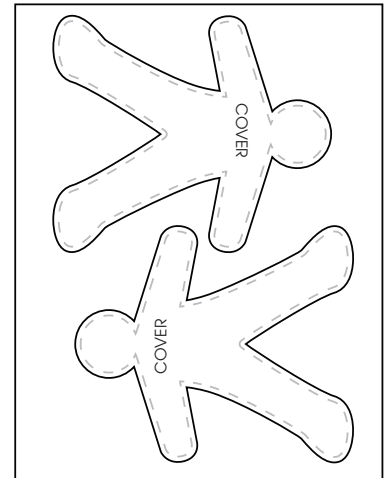
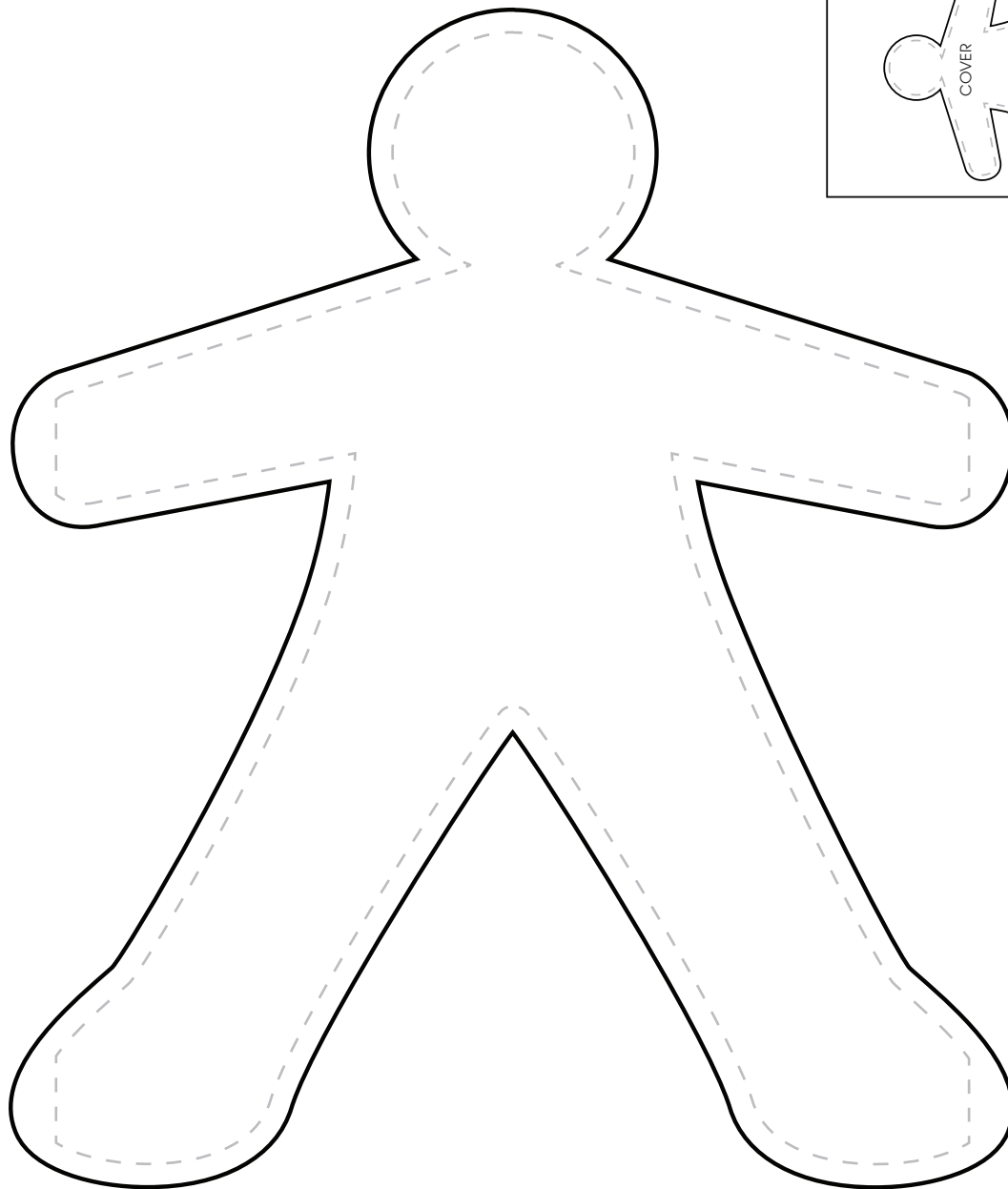


11" X 17" paper



Attachment: Activity 7 (continued)

Cover Template



Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

In these activities, the children will be introduced to the richness of the Christian tradition both in its historical and contemporary offerings. They may also find opportunities to encounter scripture with their families. They will discover that scripture takes many forms. In the Bible there are many different kinds of literature, from jokes and poems to songs, letters, and stories. As they increase their verbal skills, children are able to experiment with more of these forms. Not all of your group members may be strong in verbal skills. Be sure to find ways to engage and include those who learn more through logical processes, through their bodies, or from quiet, reflective activities. For some, their enjoyment of music, art, or story will have them eager to participate in the activities in this Exploration. Children this age can be eager to learn and eager to play. The combination can be challenging and invigorating for leaders.

About this Exploration

Encounters with God through scripture take many forms. Christian tradition offers a rich treasury of practices for personal, family, and community engagement with the Word. Over the centuries, scripture has been read aloud in worship, sung through the Psalms, or enacted in medieval mystery plays. Scripture has been shared through mosaics, painting, dance, architecture, and sermons. Families have anchored their days in the sharing of scripture. Bold souls immersed in God's word have sparked social change movements. Memorized passages have given courage to those who struggle. Our Reform tradition reminds us that all Christians have the privilege and responsibility to wrestle with God's word and to give it new voice in our own lives.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalms 96
2 Timothy 1:1–14

Leader Preparation

Read 2 Timothy 1:1–14. Think about the people who have taught you about God and Jesus. They are the most contemporary examples of the Christian tradition. What practices important to your growing faith have been passed down for generations? Think about the art, the instrumental and choral music, the dramas, and the books that have challenged or supported your understanding of God. All these are part of the Christian tradition, too.

Prayer: God of the Word, a simple thank you seems inadequate for the amazing ways your people through the centuries have sought to tell others of your wonders. May we join the long line of those who pass on your word from one generation to the next. May we join in the celebration of all creation, knowing that we cannot begin to fathom you and your wonder. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Poetry and Wisdom Books Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Create sets of index cards with the names of the Bible books of poetry and wisdom written on them (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom of Solomon), one name per card. For each set, use the name of the book at least twice. Be sure the backs of the cards are identical. You will need to make a set of cards for every two children in the group. (See the Scripture Exploration, Activity 2.)

Supplies:

- pencils and paper
- Bibles
- sets of index cards as described above

In this activity the children will learn about the books of poetry and wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom of Solomon. Divide the group into pairs, and give each pair a set of cards. Shuffle the cards, and lay them face down on the table in two rows of five each. The children take turns turning over two cards, trying to match them. When a card is matched, both cards remain face side up. When all the cards are face up, the game is over. Have the children find these books on the Contents page in their Bibles and arrange each set of cards in the order they are found in the Bible. Then have them find these books in their Bibles. Focus on the book of Psalms. Explain that it was the hymnbook of the Israelites, the songs they sang in worship and when they wanted to connect with God.

There are lots of songs and poems in the Bible. Have children find a poem in their Bibles by looking up Ecclesiastes 3. Notice how the words of the first eight verses are written like a poem. Then it switches to prose. The book of Proverbs has lots of short little sayings that give good advice. Here are some of them:

- To have wisdom is to love yourself (Proverbs 19:8).
- If you don’t hear the cry of the poor, no one will hear you when you cry for help (Proverbs 21:13).
- A good name is better than great riches (Proverbs 22:1).

Invite children to discuss what these proverbs mean. *What other proverbs do you know?*

Hand out pencils and paper. Ask children to work in groups of two or three to write a short, wise saying (a proverb) that gives good advice to other kids. Share creations together.

2 Singing Psalms

Leader preparation: This activity provides an opportunity for you to invite a musician or choir member of your congregation to meet with the group, if possible. Getting to know more people gives the children a stronger sense of identity with the congregation and another avenue to Christian tradition.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymnbooks or songbooks used by your congregation



- 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.

Psalms were first sung by the Israelites as praise to God in worship and at other times, such as when walking to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Christians of the early church continued this custom. Have the children turn to the book of Psalms. Point out how the words are arranged on the page like poetry. Note that there are psalms of great joy (Psalm 100) and sadness (Psalm 10). Some psalms repeat the history of the Israelites (Psalms 68 and 78). However, the most familiar psalms are those that praise God because they are the basis of hymns we sing today.

Distribute hymnbooks. Have the children turn to the back of the hymnbook and spend a few moments exploring the information there, such as the first line index. Finally, turn to the scripture index. Explain how it works, using an example probably familiar to them outside the book of Psalms. You might have them look for hymns about the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:1–20. There are probably several listed related to various sections of verses 1–20. Then ask: *Which book of the Bible has the most listings?* Most likely, it will be the book of Psalms. Ask: *Are there hymns based on any part of Psalm 96?* Find them and see how they make use of Psalm 96. Perhaps you and the children can read a stanza in unison or sing it.

Variation: If your congregation sometimes sings responses to the reading or singing of a psalm, ask your church musician to teach the response for Psalm 96 to the children and then sing the psalm together.

Option: Have children suggest their own favorite hymns and sing them together.



③ We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle

Leader preparation: While the song “We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle” is often choreographed with simple steps, not all children like this type of activity. If you choose to teach dance steps, simple grapevine dance step instructions can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/3bykb29>. Another option is to make musical instruments to accompany their singing.

Supplies:

- hymn: “We are Dancing Sarah's Circle” (tune: Jacob's Ladder, 8.8.8.5.), www.tinyurl.com/fp-ladder
- “Musical Instruments,” Attachment: Activity 3
- materials for the instruments you have chosen to make

Read Psalm 96:11–13a. Explain that God's people have always praised God with music, both singing and dancing. The book of Psalms was the hymnbook of the Israelites.

Provide the words for “We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle” for the children. Once they know the melody, they will be able to sing this song easily, certainly by the time you reach the fifth stanza. Ask: *Who do you think Sarah is?* Some children may guess that she is Abraham's wife. If necessary, introduce her to the group: wife of Abraham in the Hebrew Scriptures, mother of Isaac when she and Abraham were very old. Ask: *Who do you think would be dancing in Sarah's circle?* Encourage them to think about the last two stanzas, which extend the circle out into history.

Then show them the instruments that they can make. Put the supplies for each instrument and directions in one workplace. Be available to help with explanations or extra strength. When their instruments are ready, read aloud Psalm 69:11. Then sing “We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle” with their instrumental accompaniment.

Option: Teach children how to dance a simple grapevine step in a circle, as they sing or listen to the song.



Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Memorizing the Word (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Select a verse or portion of a verse from Psalm 96 or 2 Timothy 1:1–14 for the children to memorize. Some possibilities are 2 Timothy 1:13b, “Let the faith and love of Jesus Christ be your model” (CEV) or Psalm 96:4a, “For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.” Print each word of the verse on a separate piece of paper. Print the whole verse on a piece of paper. Leave a wide border. Make a copy for each child.

Supplies:

- paper strips
- markers

Lay the words face up in order. Read the verse in unison two or three times. Remove one word. Together read the verse, including the word that has been removed. Continue removing a word at a time until all the words are gone. Most of the group will be able to say the verse without the aid of the words. Give each child a complete copy of the verse. Invite the children to create a decorative border or to illustrate the verse to take home with them.

Option: Make up simple hand gestures to go with each word (the kind that might be used in the game of charades). Have the children use these as hints to help one another remember the words.

⑤ Yarn Paintings of Creation

Leader preparation: Create your own yarn painting to show to the group. Gather a variety of yarns. This is a good time to ask the knitters in your congregation for leftover yarn they will not use. You can see an example of a Huichol yarn painting at <http://tinyurl.com/646van>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- card stock
- pencils
- black marker or crayon
- yarn (variety of colors and types)
- white glue
- scissors
- plates

The book of Psalms is unique in the Bible. Have the children find it in their Bibles. Establish information about it by having the children find the number of psalms (150) and the psalm with the fewest verses (Psalm 117). Draw attention to the titles given to each psalm, which will be different in the various translations and editions. Have them look for a psalm that is a plea for help, one that is about praising God, or one that is about a shepherd. Once the children have begun to see the variety of material in the book of Psalms, note that many of the psalms were sung by the people of God. Have the children find Psalm 96:11–13a. Unless they have the Contemporary English Version, suggest that they listen as you read it from that translation, or read the following paraphrase:



Tell the sky and earth to get ready.
It's time to celebrate!
Order the ocean to start roaring.
And all of the sea creatures, too.
Tell the grass to join the music.
Trees in the forest, let me hear you singing!
Everything that is, start singing. Sing for joy to God.

Invite their ideas about how these parts of creation would be glad and celebrate their Creator God. Encourage them to use their imaginations. Then provide the card stock, pencils, black markers or crayons, yarn, scissors, plates, and glue for the children to create yarn paintings. Explain that this art form is from the Huichol Indians in Mexico on the Pacific Coast. They use a similar process to tell the stories of their heroes and heroines and the plants and animals around them. Show them your example.

Begin by drawing a pencil outline of the picture on the card stock (simple is better than complicated). When satisfied with the design, trace over it with a black marker or crayon. Cut the yarn in short pieces, which are easier to apply. Pour a little glue on a plate and dip the yarn in it. Place the yarn on the picture and press it in place. Follow the outline of the shape to emphasize each part of the picture. Fill in every part of the card stock. Glue a yarn border around the edge of the card stock. Set the pictures aside to dry.

At the conclusion of the session, with everyone holding their yarn pictures, read the paraphrase of Psalm 96:11–13a above, pausing after each line for the children to echo the words.



6 Book of Hours for the Twenty-first Century

Leader preparation: Practice folding the paper for the book pages. It is confusing at first, but once you get it, quite simple. For visual directions, go to <http://tinyurl.com/qsoqo>. Make your own book to use as you are suggesting that the children use theirs. For a beautiful video of an actual book of hours that you might show the group, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3fb6wus>.

Supplies:

- “Book of Hours,” Attachment: Activity 6
- plain paper such as copier paper
- colored card stock
- scissors
- felt-tip pens or fine markers

Tell the children about the book of hours used in the Middle Ages as an aid to prayer throughout the day. They were often beautifully illustrated and included prayers, psalms, and other aids for prayer. Invite the children to make a contemporary Book of Hours to assist in their prayers when they get up, at noontime, and when they go to bed. See the attachment “Folded Book Directions” for making the book and what they might print in their Book of Hours.

Begin by having them find a verse from Psalm 96, such as verse 1, to pray as a way to begin the day and a verse or part of a verse from 2 Timothy 1:1–14 to include in their nighttime prayers, such as verse 3 or, another time, verse 14. Then offer the other possibilities on the page of directions, if they need additional ideas.



Sending & Serving Activities



7 Thank You in 140 Characters (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Who has nurtured you in faith? What was the most important way one of these persons helped you? Write a thank you to that person in 140 characters. If you are familiar with Twitter, you will know about sending messages, Tweets, that are limited to 140 characters. The children may know many of the instant messaging acronyms, but here are some that might be helpful for this activity:

DD—dear or darling daughter	DS—dear or darling son
BFF—best friends forever	JTLYK—just to let you know
TBH—to be honest	PROPS—proper respect or acknowledgment
TUVM—thank you very much	

Supplies:

- Bibles
- writing paper and pencils
- adding machine paper and markers
- ribbon

Have the children find 2 Timothy 1 in their Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read verses 3–5. Ask: *Who are the people who helped Timothy grow in faith?* Those mentioned here are his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois. Some children may notice that Paul, the writer of the letter, had an important role, too. Ask: *What do you think these people did?* After the children have offered some ideas, ask: *Who has helped you feel close to God or learn about faith?*

Explain that they are going to write thank you notes to one of those people. But there is an important condition: they have only 140 characters. If the concept of characters is difficult for them, say that it's almost the same as 140 letters. Give the children paper and pencils to work out their messages. They can copy them to a strip of adding machine paper and decorate the back of the strip. Roll it up and tie a ribbon around it.

8 Take Home a Word

Leader preparation: This activity is designed to help children think about what scripture means to them and what it might mean to live out or live by God's word as they discover it in the Bible. Some children may be more able to take this conceptual step than others. The main point is to help children think about scripture as more than just good stories—to see it as something to live by. Print the words to the following paraphrase of 1 Timothy 2:1, 5–6 on a piece of newsprint or whiteboard. Print large and clear, and display it in your learning area. Gather enough objects for each child, plus a few extra. Objects should be small enough to fit in a child's pocket. It is best if there are no two the same.



My beloved child,
I am happy when I think of you.
I'm sending peace from God to you.
Your faith is true.
That faith lived first in those who went before,
and now it lives in you.
So let your faith burn bright inside.
It makes you brave and strong.
It gives you power and love.
It keeps you on the path that is God's way.
2 Timothy 1: 1, 5–6

Supplies:

- a variety of inexpensive everyday objects such as a pencil, eraser, spoon, shoe lace, balloon, small ball, small package of crayons, marker from a game board, a coin, and so forth.
- fine-tip markers in different colors
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles

Share with the group the paraphrase of 2 Timothy 1:1, 5–6 that you have written on newsprint or whiteboard. Ask: *What words in this verse do you really like?* Underline the words the children suggest with a colored marker. Invite the children to say the passage in unison with you. This comes from a letter Paul wrote from prison to his young friend and student, Timothy. Tell them that Timothy traveled with Paul on many of his journeys, and ask them to find 2 Timothy in their Bibles. Ask if there are maps in the back of their Bibles. Some of these maps show where Paul and Timothy traveled to tell people about Jesus and to start new churches. Say: *I wonder how Timothy felt about these words when he read them. Do you think his faith did help him be strong and brave? How does faith give us power? How might our faith help us?*

Show the group the objects you have selected. Invite them to choose one that is in some way like faith for them. For example, someone might choose an eraser because “faith helps us feel like even if we make a mistake, God helps us start over.”

After everyone has chosen an object, invite them to choose one word from the paraphrased verses to go with their object. They can choose any word they like, one they like the sound of, one that makes them feel good, a word that might help them this coming week. Ask them to print that word on their object with a fine-tipped marker. Think about your word. Tell the group what your word is and why you chose it. Say: *Think about whom you might tell about your word when you get home. Put your word/object in a pocket or somewhere you can carry it with you this week. Every so often, you can take your word out and look at it. Think of it as God's word to you.*



9 Art Gazing

Leader preparation: Spend time gazing at the artwork “Two Women and a Child.” Put yourself in the place of the women facing out. What are you thinking? What is your role? Where might you find God in this painting?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Two Women and a Child” by Diego Rivera,
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdr>



Have the children sit where they can easily see the artwork. Invite them to look carefully at the women. *Who do you think the women are? Where do you think they are? What do you think the artist wanted us to know about them?* Draw attention to the child. *Who do you think the child is? Do you think the child is asleep or awake?* Read 2 Timothy 1:1–5 or the paraphrase from Activity 8. Invite the children to imagine that the child is Timothy as a little boy, the woman holding him is his grandmother Lois, and the other woman is his mother, Eunice. Ask: *What might the woman be talking about? They have each other to talk to. Whom do you talk to? Who helps you learn about God and Jesus, as Timothy's mother and grandmother helped him?* Suggest that the children sit quietly for a moment and thank God for these people.

Reflect

What did the children learn about the Christian tradition and ways to encounter scripture in these activities? What new interests were opened up for them? How can you capture that interest in future sessions? Consider how your group members are interacting with one another. Are some children being left out of the conversation? What can you do to help them find their place? Are some children growing in their ability to offer leadership? To listen to one another? To share their feelings and their faith? What can you do to encourage them?

Attachment: Activity 3

Musical Instruments

Bottle Maracas

- plastic water bottles with tops
- stickers, glitter glue, ribbons, other trims
- beads or buttons
- ribbon
- glue

Remove labels from plastic water bottles. Clean the bottles. Decorate the bottles with stickers, glitter glue, or other trims. Put beads or buttons in the bottles. A few jingle bells in each bottle adds a little sparkle to the sound. Put a thread of white glue on the inside of the cap to secure the cap to the bottle. Tie a ribbon around the neck of the bottle.

Wrist or Ankle Bells

- rubber bracelets (the kind people wear to promote causes)
- jingle bells
- string or heavy thread
- scissors

Tie two or three bells to the bracelets with string. Simple as that!

Tambourines

- paper plates
- hole punch
- yarn
- jingle bells
- markers or paint and brushes

Decorate the outside of two paper plates. Hold them together, top sides facing, and punch eight to ten holes around the rims. Tie bells to the holes with yarn. Shake them gently to the music.

Rain Sticks

- cardboard tubes from gift wrap or paper towels
- straight pins
- clear tape
- duct tape (in several colors)
- beads, popcorn, or aquarium gravel

Insert the straight pins in a spiral pattern around the cardboard tube. It may be helpful to draw the spiral with a pencil for a pattern. Tape over the pinheads with clear tape. Then seal one end of the tube with duct tape. Pour some beads, popcorn, or aquarium gravel into the tube. Seal the other end with tape. Finish by decorating the tube with duct tape. Turn the rain stick from end to end, slowly allowing the beads, popcorn, or aquarium gravel to travel across the pins inside the tube.

Attachment: Activity 6

Book of Hours

Folded Book Directions

1. Fold one sheet of paper to make a square. Bring the top right corner over to the left side. Cut off the extra paper at the bottom of the folded triangle. Unfold and flatten the square.
2. See the crease in the paper diagonally across the paper? Fold the paper along that crease and press it with your finger or a ruler to make it flat.
3. Unfold the paper and fold it in half from top to bottom. Make that crease flat, too.
4. Now fold the folded paper in half the other way and make that crease flat.
5. Open the paper. You should have three creases. Fold it again along the diagonal, from corner to corner, but in the opposite way matching, the other sides of the paper.
6. Open the paper. See the four boxes made by the creases? Good. Notice that two boxes have diagonal creases and two do not.
7. Now bring the squares with the diagonal folds together so the diagonal folds meet. Flatten the squares without the diagonal folds. You now have a small square. Do these same steps with each sheet of copier paper.
8. Now you are ready to put your folded book together. Place one folded square in front of you in a diamond position (like a baseball field), with the folded edges to your left and the unfolded edges to your right.
9. Rub a glue stick over the entire top square of the diamond. Place another square exactly on top the glued side and press the two squares together. Repeat until all the sheets of paper are glued together.

10. Cut two squares of card stock slightly larger than the paper square. Glue one to the top square and one to the bottom square for the covers.
11. Carefully open your folded book. The pages open up and you have lots of small pages.

Prayers to Put in Your Book of Hours

Morning prayers

Thank you, God, for a night of rest.

This is the day that God has made,
I will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Night is over, and you were with me, God.
I give you thanks and praise.

Noontime prayers

For this meal to give me energy,
thank you, God.

We sit at this table, Holy God,
and give thanks for all we have.

Thank you for this food, God.
Be with anyone who is hungry.

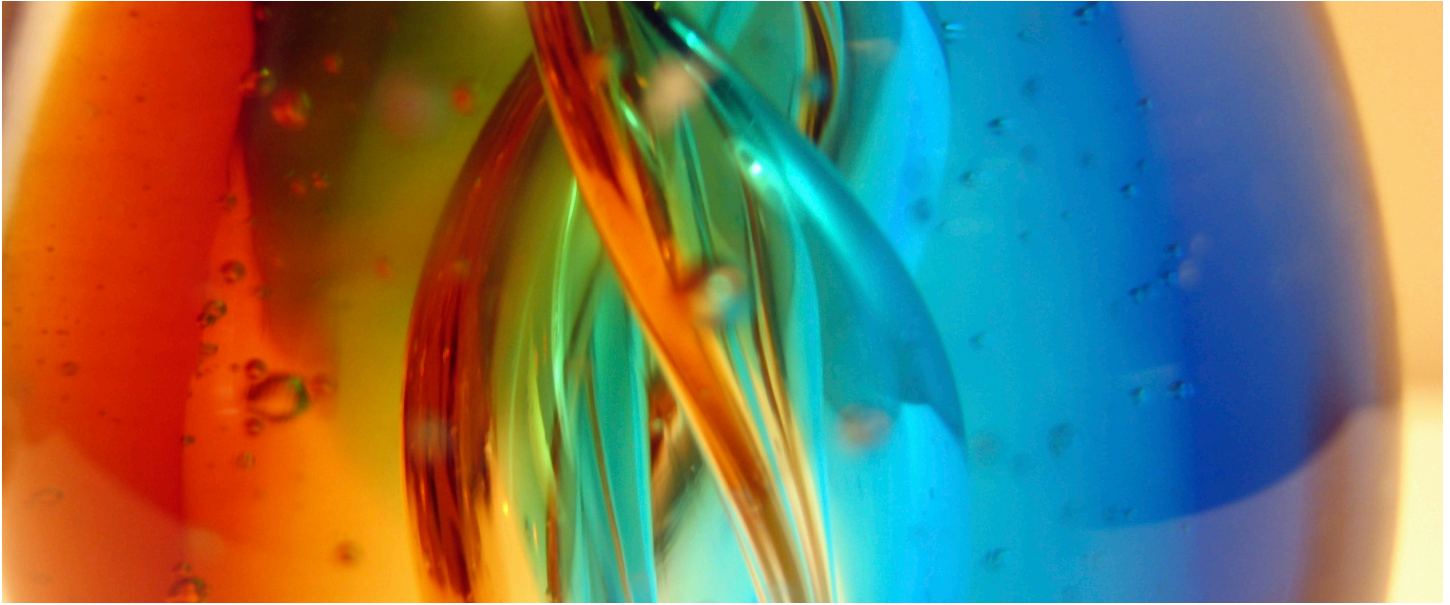
Nighttime prayers

Thank you, God, for this day.

Now I go to sleep, God.
I thank you for the good times today.
I am sorry when I was unkind to others.

God, bless (name family and friends).

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Most children of this age group are somewhat unaware of the context in which they live. They simply live in it. Like many adults, they do not think about their own context or circumstances. They assume that the values, worldview, and situation that they live in is much the same as that of everyone else. Thus, they participate in mission within their own context. Therefore, for children, the emphasis is primarily on mission rather than context in this Exploration. However, even young children are capable of empathy, imagination, and compassion. They need role models, support, and challenges to show love and care in the world. Not only does this lead them into lives of discipleship, but it is how they know they are included in God's people. Furthermore, as children are encouraged to stretch their care, they begin to discover that their own "world" is only one of many possible worlds.

About this Exploration

Jesus offered an image of God's realm as a tiny seed planted and flourishing. God's word can be like a seed in our lives and in our world. Individually and collectively, we encounter scripture with the hope of better understanding our own context—the place, time, and circumstances in which we live. Scripture invites us into a more intimate knowledge of God and community. It guides and challenges us to discern our mission to our faith community, our neighborhood, and our world. The tiniest of seeds can produce a rich harvest of peace, justice, and restoration.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 4:26–34

Esther 4:1–17

Leader Preparation

Spend a few minutes thinking about the focus passages for this Exploration. Read them slowly. Read the whole story of Esther so you will have it in mind for the activities about Esther. How do these texts fit together for you? Which one calls to you today? Think about the context in which Esther lived, within the palace. She was sheltered from the outside world, surrounded by luxury, but that very context became crucial to her faithful response to God's call. As her uncle reminded Esther, perhaps she was there in the palace precisely "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). What is important about your context, as living in the palace was important to Esther? Is it possible that you are in the context and situation you are in "for such a time as this"? How might you respond to God's call out of the situation in which you are living?

Consider the image of the seed in Mark 4:26–34. What seed was planted in your heart by those who nurtured you in faith? How, with the help of the Holy Spirit, are you planting that seed in the hearts of the children in your group?

Prayer: God of the Word, I pray for an awareness of your creation that opens my eyes and heart to the needs and gifts of others. I pray for an appreciation of the children as ones growing into knowledge of your realm of justice, of Shalom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Books of History Card Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Print the names of the books of history from the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) on index cards. Make enough sets of these cards so that each child in the group will be able to have five cards in the game plus a pile from which to draw. Note that the books of history in the Bible are not historically accurate. These books also include some made-up stories, such as the story of Esther. The game works best if combinations such as 1 and 2 Samuel are on one card. Be sure the backs of the cards are identical. Also print a list of the books of history in order for each child. (See Activity 2 in the Scripture Exploration.)

Supplies:

- index cards
- markers
- Bibles

Give each child a list of the books of history and explain what these books are. Have the children find these books in their Bibles. The object of the game is to collect four cards that are in order—the same order as the books appear in the Bible. Deal five cards to each child. Put the rest of the cards in a stack in the middle of the table and turn one card over, creating a discard stack. The child to go first may draw from the stack or take the card that is face up. If the child does not have four cards in sequence, one card is discarded and play continues. When someone has four cards in sequence, at that one's turn, play continues as usual, but the child puts the four cards on the table face up and discards the extra card.

The people who told the stories and wrote the histories that are part of our Bible thought it was important to remember things that happened in the past. They wrote down good things that God had done to help them and told stories about people who were brave and true in following God's way—these are some of the heroes of our scripture. Invite children to pretend they are archeologists a thousand years from now, looking back on our time. Say: *If someone were writing a history about today, about our country, I wonder what they might tell about. Who would be heroes of faith? What good things is God doing?* This kind of thinking might be a stretch for some children because it encourages them to think outside of their own context.



2 Plant Seeds

Leader preparation: This activity is a way to prepare the children to hear the two parables about seeds and plants recorded in Mark 4:26–34. Gather the supplies needed. Please note that the photograph "Hidden Depths" is a manipulated photograph by Ralph Clevenger, not an actual photograph of an iceberg. You don't need to explain that it isn't an actual photograph unless a child questions it. What it represents is what we think a photograph of a whole iceberg would look like and that the largest part of an iceberg is under the sea.



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:

- peat planting pots or yogurt cups
- potting soil
- spoons
- seeds that germinate quickly, such as beans or marigolds
- paper sandwich bags
- artwork: “Hidden Depths,” www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphd
- Bible

Show the children the artwork “Hidden Depths.” Ask if they know what this picture is. Some children may identify it as an iceberg. Invite children to comment on how the picture makes them feel and what they notice. Point out that when an iceberg floats, most of the iceberg is underwater hidden from view. *Does anyone know why?* Icebergs are made of ice and snow, which are lighter than water, so they float. The top of an iceberg is mostly snow and hasn’t been packed down as much so it’s fairly light. The bottom of an iceberg has been packed down hard and it’s mostly ice—so it’s a lot heavier than the top. The weight of the heavy ice at the bottom of the iceberg pulls it low in the water. Ask: *What other things in nature have large parts that are hidden?* Give the group clues until the children identify trees or other plants whose root systems are large.

Provide the materials for the children to plant seeds, taking them through the process step by step: add soil to the pot, put in the seeds, cover the seeds with soil, add a little water to stabilize the soil, place the pots in paper bags to take home. Talk together about how they will care for their plants at home.

When all the children have a paper bag ready to take home, explain that Jesus told stories about ordinary things such as planting seeds and growing plants to help us understand how wonderful God’s plan for creation is. Read Mark 4:26–34 to the group. Invite them to think about Jesus’ stories as they watch their plants grow at home. Print this scripture reference on the paper bags so they can read it at home.



3 A Child Advocates for Children

Leader preparation: In the story of Esther we meet a woman who finds a reserve of courage and faith deep inside. We find that same courage in Thandiwe Chama (pronounced Tan-dee-way Cha-ma). Read “An Advocate for Children” several times so you can read or tell it with conviction. For more information about the Children’s International Peace Prize, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ykm9ame>. For a two-minute cartoon video of Thandiwe’s story produced by Kids Rights, go to <http://tinyurl.com/5tp9vka>. To see Thandiwe receive the peace prize from Bob Geldof, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3vgll3u>.

Supplies:

- “An Advocate for Children,” Attachment: Activity 3-1
- “Brave Esther,” Attachment: Activity 3-2, or a children’s Bible storybook that has this story.

Tell a summary of the story of Esther, using a children’s Bible storybook or the outline on “Brave Esther.” Ask: *What did Esther do that was really brave? What brave things do people do today?*



Explain that there are many brave people in the world, and some of them are children. Tell or read the story “An Advocate for Children.” After the story, invite the children’s comments, with questions such as: *What did you think about this story of Thandiwe? Why do you think she wanted to go to school so much? Why do you think she was able to do what she did?* Emphasize that Thandiwe was both brave and determined.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Brave Esther (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity is all about storytelling. If there is someone in your congregation who specializes in storytelling, you might invite that person to tell the story of Esther. Provide the storyteller with the story outline “Brave Esther” and tell how much time is allotted to this activity.

Supplies:

- “Brave Esther,” Attachment: Activity 3-2
- (optional) costume for storyteller

Have your guest storyteller tell Esther’s story to the children. After the story, invite comments and questions from the children: *What did Esther do that was really brave? How did Mordecai help Esther to be brave? How did Esther help the Jews?*



5 Esther Story Puppets

Leader preparation: The puppets in this activity are based on Javanese shadow puppets, which have been used in puppet theater for over a thousand years. Make a sample puppet. Think about where you can hang a sheet to create the shadow theater. If that is not possible, simply use the puppets without making shadows. For more information about Javanese shadow puppets, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3zranln>. Your puppets will not be that complex, of course. For ideas on how to make shadow puppets see this site: <http://tinyurl.com/ykwr8xc>.

Supplies:

- newsprint
- pencils
- poster board
- markers
- dowels (16–18”), three per puppet
- scissors
- paper fasteners (also called brads)
- masking tape or transparent sticky tape
- hole punch
- “Esther and Mordecai,” Attachment, Activity 5-1,
- “Brave Esther,” Attachment: Activity 3-2 (if needed)
- “Making Puppets,” Attachment: Activity 5-2

Use the puppets to present the script “Esther and Mordecai.” After the puppet show, be prepared to tell the children the rest of the story of Esther. Refer to the outline of the story “Brave Esther” if you need to.



6 Jesus Teaches

Leader preparation: If your group consists of children seven to nine years old—especially in the younger end of this age group—consider focusing on one parable rather than both of them. Bring a cartoon strip as an example to show the children.

Supplies:

- Bible
- plain paper cut into strips about 4" x 11"
- pencils
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Read Mark 4:26–32 to the children, unless you have chosen to focus on only one of the parables. Explain that parables are stories that Jesus told when he taught the crowds of people. Both parables talk about how plants grow from small seeds into a plant that provides food for us (grain) or shelter for birds (mustard seed). Establish the steps in that growth (planting, the plant grows into what you see and the roots you do not see, it gets bigger and bigger.) Show the children a sample cartoon strip and explain that they are going to make a cartoon strip of a plant growing. Help them divide their paper strips into boxes for their drawings. Suggest that they lightly sketch their drawings and then color them.

Talk with the children about the parable. What does Jesus mean by the “kingdom” or “realm”? Encourage a variety of responses. Possible answers include: a time when God rules all creation, a time of peace and justice, God presence with us here and now, God-time, God’s peace. Ask: *Why might Jesus have said God’s peace (or kingdom) is like a tiny seed (or a mighty tree)?*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Standing Up for Others (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the vignettes on “Stand Up!” and decide which ones are most appropriate for your group. Select vignettes from “Stand Up!” for the children to discuss or act out. Select those that you think will be familiar situations for the children, but not ones that have been discussed many times. If there are other situations you think they encounter, develop vignettes for these situations.

Supplies:

- “Stand Up!” Attachment: Activity 7
- “Brave Esther,” Attachment: Activity 3-2, or a children’s Bible storybook

Review the story of Esther and how she stood up for her people and went to the king. You might use the outline “Brave Esther,” or read the story from a children’s Bible storybook, such as “Esther Saves Her People” in *The Family Story Bible*. After talking with the children about Esther’s actions and how the people supported her, move the conversation to ways the children can stand up for others. Present the vignettes to the children and pose the question at the end of each vignette. Encourage children to think of alternative endings to the vignettes or solutions that help everyone to feel satisfied. *What does it mean to stand up for someone else? When has someone stood up for you or when have you stood up for someone else?*



8 Congregational Outreach Project

Leader preparation: Talk with your minister about potential outreach or mission projects in which the children can be involved. Especially look for a project in which the congregation or those involved are speaking out or working on behalf of others, such as preparing for a refugee family. If possible, arrange for a guest to come and talk to the group about the project.

Supplies:

- small tree branch supported in a pot with sand or stones
- green construction paper, cut into leaf shapes
- tape or pipe cleaners to attach leaves to the branch
- Bibles

Read Mark 4:30–32 to the children. If you have already talked about this parable, recall that this is one way that Jesus described God's hope for creation. If not, take a few moments to help the children think about this little story. A tiny seed becomes a bush large enough to provide a home for birds. The little acts of kindness that we do come together and grow to provide help for others.

Tell the children about the project. If you have a guest who is working with the project, introduce the guest to the group. Have the guest describe her or his involvement and how the children might contribute. If the children will be contributing to this ministry in some way, track their acts of kindness by adding paper leaves to a small tree branch.

9 We Promise

Leader preparation: Be aware that many children the age of the children in your group may be bullied and harassed for a variety of reasons. Perhaps others think they are gay; they seem to be shy or slow; they have an outstanding characteristic such as hair color or glasses or walk with a limp or wear an arm or leg brace; they dress different from the rest of the children; or they do not fit conventional sex-role stereotypes (for example, boys who love to dance, girls who are good mechanics). See sites such as <http://tinyurl.com/3b8nbmf> or <http://tinyurl.com/3o9a9sa>. Note that these sites are for your own background information. This is information for adults, not to share with your group. Talk to others in your community, such as teachers or social service workers, about antibullying programs in your area.

On newsprint or a whiteboard, print this covenant: We promise to do all we can to stop bullying. We will tell adults when we see or hear it happening.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard
- poster board
- markers (various colors)

One difficult situation with which children are familiar is bullying. It happens in the classroom, on the playground, on the street, and, even in church. Too often it is dismissed as something that goes along with childhood. Perhaps it does, but unless unchecked, the childhood bully becomes the adult bully. This is an area of their lives where children have a real opportunity to stand up for themselves and others. Since some schools have antibullying programs, begin by finding out what the children know about bullying. Establish a definition for bullying.



(Bullying is when someone scares, insults, hurts, or embarrasses another person on purpose and the person being bullied is unable to defend himself or herself. Usually, a bully will do this over and over.)

After you have a common definition of bullying, ask: *Who in the story of Esther was being bullied? Who was able to stand up to the bully?* To help the children connect with Esther's actions and bullying in their contexts, ask: *What can you do when someone is bullying you or someone else?* First, they should tell a trusted adult. Invite the children to sign a group covenant that they will do all they can to stop bullying.

Reflect

In what ways did the children grasp a sense of their mission as followers of Jesus? Which activities seemed to challenge their understanding of mission? What prompted them to want to stand up for others? What from this session might require follow-up from you? Consider what you have learned from the children in your group. How have they helped you to experience the word of God as a call to mission within your own context? How have you helped them?

Attachment: Activity 3-1

An Advocate for Children: Thandiwe Chama, Zambia

Even when she was very young, Thandiwe Chama (pronounced Tan-dee-way Chama) knew that education was important for all children. When her school was closed because there were no teachers, eight-year-old Thandiwe was not willing to stay home and help her mother or play with her friends.

No, not Thandiwe. She would not accept that there was no school for her and the other children in her village. She organized her friends, and she and sixty children walked to find another school. Amazed by their determination, the new school took them in. This only made Thandiwe Chama more determined to see that all children have an education.

Another matter that concerned her was children with AIDS. She talked about the plight of these children in church, when others older than she tried to avoid these children. She and a friend wrote and illustrated a book to explain AIDS to young children. It was called "The Chicken with AIDS."

In 1999, when Thandiwe was sixteen, she received the International Children's Peace Prize.* She was one of twenty-eight children around the world who were nominated. The prize is 100,000 Euros (almost \$150,000) that the winner can give to a project that helps others and a statuette called "the Nkosi."

What an exciting day that was for Thandiwe. "It's so important to know that also a child has rights. At school I learned about rights. And I knew then that this was something I wanted to fight for. Because if children are given an opportunity, they for sure can contribute in making this world a better place."

*The International Children's Peace Prize is given annually to a child whose courageous or remarkable actions have made a difference in working on problems that affect children around the world.

Attachment: Activity 3-2

Brave Esther

Use this outline to prepare a story to tell the children.

Esther becomes queen:

- The king of Persia holds a beauty contest to find a new queen to replace Vashti, who disobeyed his orders.
- Esther, a Jew, is selected as the new queen, but no one knows she is Jewish.

Enemies of the Jews have the ear of the king:

- Haman, angry that the Jew Mordecai will not bow down to the king, devises a plan to get rid of all the Jews.
- Mordecai hears about Haman's plot and gets word to Esther.
- Mordecai tells Esther that perhaps she is queen for just this time to save her people (Esther 4:16).

Esther stands up for her people, the Jews:

- Brave Esther asks to speak to the king, an action that could get her killed.
- She plans dinners for the king and Haman. Then she reveals Haman's plot and that she is a Jew.
- The king saves Esther and her people and punishes Haman.

The Jewish people today celebrate Esther's bravery in the festival of Purim.

Attachment: Activity 5-1

Esther and Mordecai

Based on Esther 4:1-17

Characters: Esther, Mordecai, Hathach (pronounced ha-thack; a servant of the king assigned to Esther), and Narrator

Esther: Hathach, I have heard that my Uncle Mordecai is sitting at the gate to the palace in funeral clothes and covered with ashes. I sent clean clothes to him, but he would not take them.

Narrator: Hathach goes to Mordecai.

Hathach: Esther sent you clothes, but you wouldn't take them.

Mordecai: I cannot take them. I am too upset. The king's advisor, Haman, has convinced the king to sign an order to kill all Jews. Tell Esther that it is up to her to speak to the king. Here is a copy of the terrible order.

Narrator: Hathach returns to Esther.

Hathach: My Queen Esther, Haman has talked the king into sending out an order that all Jews are to die. Mordecai said that you must speak to the king.

Esther: Tell Mordecai that no one can speak to the king unless the king calls for that person. If I appear before the king without being called, he might put me to death. The king has not called for me for a month.

Narrator: Hathach returned to Mordecai and gave him Esther's message.

Mordecai: Tell Esther that she is not safe just because she lives in the palace. If she does not speak now, all her family will die. Tell her that perhaps she is in the palace for a reason. She is the only one who can save her people.

Narrator: Hathach gave that message to Esther.

Esther: Go, tell Mordecai to gather all the Jews in the city. Do not eat or drink for three days and nights. Pray for me. I will do the same thing. Then I will go to the king. If I die, I die.

Attachment: Activity 5-2

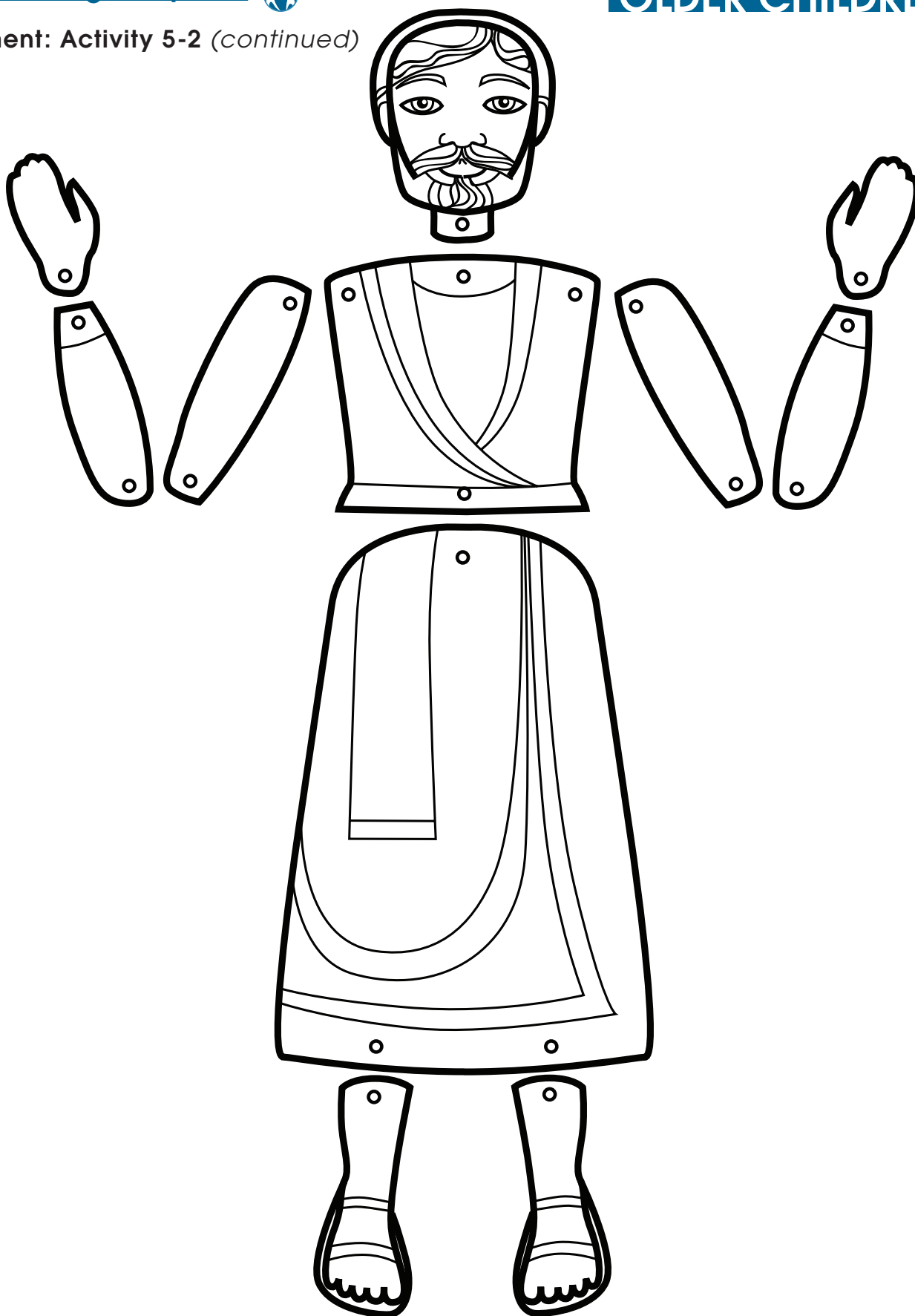
Making Puppets

Supplies needed:

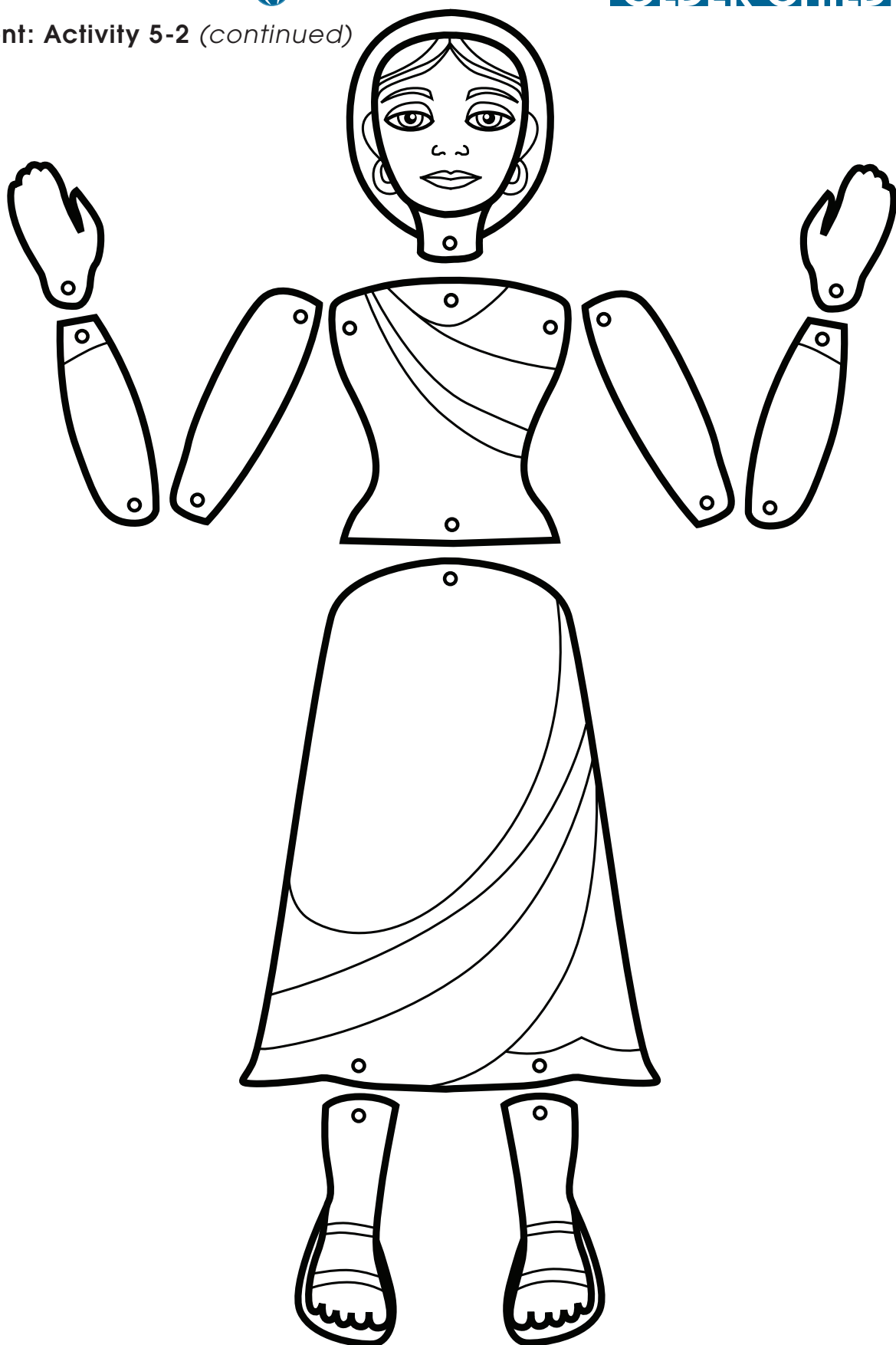
- pencils
- poster board
- markers
- dowels (16–18”), three per puppet
- scissors
- paper fasteners (sometimes called “brads”)
- masking tape or transparent sticky tape
- hole punch

Cut out the figure pieces. Use them as patterns to trace on the poster board. Tape in place, if that is helpful. Cut out the pieces. Decorate the pieces with markers. To assemble the puppet, punch holes in the shoulders, at the elbows, in the tops and bottoms of the top part of the arms, in the tops of the bottom parts of the arms, in the body where the legs attach, and at the top part of the legs. Attach the pieces together using paper fasteners through the holes. Move the arms around a bit to be sure they are flexible. Turn the puppet face down. Lay a dowel in the middle of the body of the puppet. Tape the dowel securely in place. Tape the remaining dowels to each hand. The legs will swing freely.

Attachment: Activity 5-2 (continued)



Attachment: Activity 5-2 (continued)



Attachment: Activity 7

Stand Up!

Ernie and Mac were best friends. They played together every day after school and often did things together on the weekend. One weekend, Ernie's cousin Jack, who was the same age as Ernie and Mac, came to visit. Jack began to make fun of Mac while the boys were playing a card game because Mac took a long time to decide which card to play. Ernie could see that Mac was upset.

How can Ernie stand up for his friend Mac?

Maria and her mother were shopping for groceries. When they left the store, their cart was filled with food. That night, the television news was on. Maria wasn't paying much attention to it until the reporter talked about families in the community who had little or no food and that the charity food banks were in short supply.

How can Maria and her family stand up for families who are hungry?

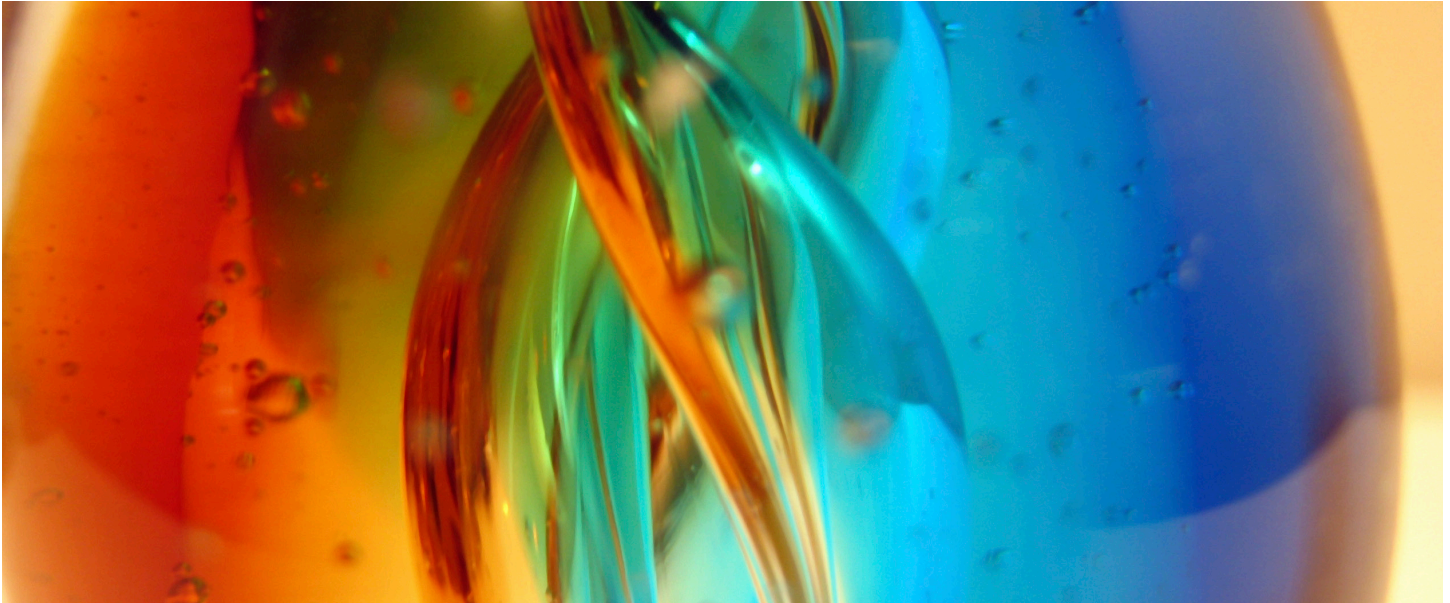
The school chorus was preparing for their end-of-the-year concert. The director asked everyone to wear a white t-shirt with no slogans or pictures on it. The children were asked to bring their shirts to school to be approved. By the week before the concert, some children had not brought their shirts to school. Other children were talking about this in the lunchroom. They wondered if the children had plain t-shirts.

How might these children stand up for the children who had not brought shirts to school?

The Yee family enjoyed a trip to the ice cream shop on Friday nights. One Friday, Jenny came home from school with a note: Our class has voted to give up sweets for a week, beginning today. We have studied good nutrition and discovered that we eat too much sugar. Jenny's big sister Susie was upset that the family wouldn't go out for ice cream.

What can the rest of the family do to stand up for Jenny?

Encountering Scripture



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

For the children in this age group, the future usually means next week or next month rather than years from now. Although adults may often ask them what they plan to be, children live more comfortably in the present than do many adults. But the present can be hard. Children have worries of their own, and some children may face adult-sized problems such as bullying, family conflict, a precarious economic situation, or abuse. It is not always easy to identify the burdens children carry. Some children have fears about the future. Some children don't have any hope for becoming adults. They may worry about global warming, environmental degradation, or the possibility of war. Many children do think about others in the world around them—other children who are victims of war or conflict, children who work longer hours than they do, or those who live in more difficult economic circumstances. They are interested in helping to create a better world for people, plants, and animals. They can find hope in knowing that others in the faith community are working to build a better future, and they can relate to the vision God has for all creation. As they develop the skills to encounter the Bible on their own, they can also find it a source of hope and encouragement for their own lives now and for the future.

About this Exploration

As we look toward a shared future as a community of faith, our encounter with scripture restores our sense of hope, renews the multilayered meanings of the texts, and opens our imaginations. We reclaim the stories that shape us and discover possibilities for change and transformation. Encountering scripture fills us with new vision, opening our hearts to Christ, who invites us to proclaim and celebrate God's realm. Engagement with the Bible nurtures our faith community from generation to generation.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 30:15–20
Hebrews 11:1–16

Leader Preparation

What are your visions of the future? How do they affect your day-to-day life and decisions? Where do you find hope? How do you “choose life”? Think about Moses’s words to the people. He knew he would not go with them to the promised land. Think about the people named in Hebrews. What do you think strengthened their faith?

Prayer: God of the Word, the future, whether tomorrow or a century away, is in your hands. Grant me the faith to live with that knowledge every hour of every day. Strengthen my faith so that I may choose life and follow your ways. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 New Testament Books (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Prepare a set of index cards with the abbreviations for the books of the New Testament on them, one per card. If you do not have a set of cards for the New Testament books, make a set of cards with the names of each book (one name per card). The backs of the cards should be uniform. (See the Scripture Exploration, Activity 2.)

Supplies:

- index cards
- markers
- Bibles

Have the children turn to the page in their Bibles with the abbreviations for the New Testament books. Explain that instead of writing out the name of the book in a reference, we often use abbreviations for the names of the books. Look at some of them on the page. Keep the Bibles open to this page during the game.

Mix up the cards for the books and abbreviations for the New Testament books. Deal out all the cards. (If this is too many for children to hold, use part of the books and their abbreviations.) Play a game similar to Old Maid, with the children drawing cards from one another and trying to collect matched pairs of books and abbreviations. As they get matches, they lay them on the table. The game ends when all the books and abbreviations have been matched.



2 Using a Concordance

Leader preparation: Bring concordances to show the children. Or use a computer concordance. A concordance is usually included with computer Bible programs. If you are using the Internet, practice using search terms to find biblical passages. Good sites for this are: <http://tinyurl.com/3qtrj> or <http://aruljohn.com/Bible/>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- concordances or computers with Internet access or a Bible program
- “That’s Faith,” Attachment: Activity 2

If you are using concordances, each child will need a Bible and a copy of the paraphrase of Hebrew 11. Explain that sometimes when we are studying the Bible, we can’t remember where to find a story, or we want to know where to find other verses about a topic so we can read them. Turning page after page can take a long time, but there is a better way. (A few editions of the Bible include a subject index or an abbreviated concordance. You might have the children check their Bibles for this feature.) Show the children the concordances you have and how they are used. Look up “manger” or “dragon.” Have the children find a reference for the word. (Note: a concordance is keyed to a particular translation of the Bible. If the concordance and the Bibles the children have do not match, they may not find the word in the verse they look up.)

If you are using a computer with Internet access, show the children where to type the word they are looking for. Encourage them to experiment. Notice how different translations and versions of the Bible use different words to say the same



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

thing. *Can anyone find a Spanish Bible on the Internet? How about one in Hebrew?* The first part of our Bible, the one we call Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, was written in Hebrew. *Can anyone find a Greek Bible?* That's the language in which the second half of the Christian Scriptures (the New Testament) was written.

Have children find Hebrews 11 in their Bibles or in an online version. Point out the names in the first 16 verses. *The writer assumes we know who all these people are, but what if we don't? We can use a concordance or Internet site to find out more about them.* Hand out copies of the paraphrase of Hebrew 11 and have the children follow along as you read. Point out how faith gets passed from parents to children, from family to family. Ask: *How does the Bible help to pass faith from one person to another?*

③ Dreams and Visions Mobile

Leader preparation: Cut poster board into free form cloud shapes, one or two per person. Tie strings of varying lengths to the dowel or the clothes hanger. Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

Supplies:

- Bible
- poster board in light colors
- markers or crayons
- string
- dowel or clothes hanger
- scissors
- hole punch or clear tape

Recall how God helped Moses and the people leave slavery in Egypt. They spent many years in the desert. Finally, they reached a high mountain. From there, they could see the new land they soon would enter. God showed them the land and said these words: (read Deuteronomy 30:15–20). Invite the children to think about the idea of choosing life and God's ways. Ask: *What did God want the people to do? Imagine what life in that new land might have been like if everyone had "chosen life." What can you imagine about life then? What dreams do you have for our world that would fit this kind of life?* After they have talked about this, give them the poster board cloud shapes to draw their dreams. As they finish, punch holes at the top of the shape and tie them to strings on the dowel to create the mobile (or use tape to hold the strings in place).

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Practice reading "That's Faith," the paraphrase of Hebrews 11:1–12:2a, selected verses. If the children have explored this passage by looking up the people named in verses 1–16, make use of that information during this activity. They can report what they learned about the people named in verses 1–16.



Supplies:

- Bible
- modeling clay in bright colors
- “That’s Faith,” Attachment: Activity 2
- artwork: “No-Traveller’s Borne” by Jess,
<https://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr3>

Give each child a walnut-sized lump of clay to work as they listen to “That’s Faith,” which is based on Hebrews 11:1–12:2a. Display the artwork “No Traveler’s Borne” as a visual centering for the children as they listen. After the reading, invite them to make a symbol with the clay that represents faith for them. When children are finished, invite them to talk about their symbols, if they wish. Don’t force this. Many children prefer not to explain what they have made.



5 Moses’s Story

Leader preparation: Read the attachment “Moses’s Life” and reflect on what you know of the story of Moses. How is this story significant for you in your life right now? What meaning or significance do you think it may have for the children in your group? How will this “word” from God help them in their faith journey?

Supplies:

- hymn: “Guide My Feet,” (tune: Guide My Feet, 8.8.8.10.),
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-feet>
- “Moses’s Life,” Attachment: Activity 5
- Bibles

Distribute the sections of “Moses’s Life” to the children. If they are looking up the references, give them time to find their passages. If you are using the readings, check to be sure they know the words on their papers. When everyone is ready, have them stand in order of the numbers on the papers or the scripture references. Let them find their own order, without assistance from the leaders. Then have them read their papers or texts to tell the story of Moses’s life, including the portion from the focus passage, Deuteronomy 30:15–20. Talk about how God guided Moses in each decision, and sing “Guide My Feet.” Ask: *How does God guide us?*

Option: Instead of using the handout “Moses’s Life,” give the children the scripture references only. Ask them to look up the passages and create the story of Moses’s life on their own.



6 Hope for the Future

Leader preparation: Check that the pencils are sharpened and that erasers are available. Then try your hand at writing a tetractys poem, using the directions on the “Tetractys” attachment. Choose a passage for the group from one of the following and write it on newsprint or whiteboard: Revelation 21:3–4; Isaiah 65:17–19; Psalm 30:11–12.



Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- “Tetractys,” Attachment: Activity 6
- writing paper
- pencils
- colored pencils
- (optional) Bibles

Read aloud the passage you have selected. Ask: *What in these words makes you feel happy or gives you hope? What do you think about when you hear this passage of scripture?* After they have discussed each text, distribute the copies of “Tetractys.” Together go over the introduction and directions. The children can work alone or in pairs to write a tetractys poem or verse. When they finish, have them read their work to the group.

Alternative: Each child will need a Bible. Print only the references, or the one you have chosen for the group, on newsprint or a whiteboard. Have the children find these references and ask volunteers to read aloud each one. (Using the abbreviations is another way to reinforce their value with children who have been introduced to them.)

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer for the Future (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Print the litany response “Choose life, and live in God’s ways” on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

The response for a litany prayer is “Choose life, and live in God’s ways.” Teach it to the children by repeating it with them several times. You can say it softly, loudly, with your hands on your head, or standing on one foot.

Then write the rest of the prayer together. Provide an example: *When we want to save the forests, remember . . .* (and then the response). After they have written four or five lines, pray the prayer together.

8 Motto Plaque

Leader preparation: Cut cardboard rectangles, about 8” x 12”. Cut a large number of 2” squares and 2” x 4” rectangles of construction paper. You can see a photograph of some of the Alhambra tiles at: <http://tinyurl.com/3f6chx8>.

Supplies:

- construction paper (primary colors and white)
- cardboard (can be scrap pieces if large enough)
- glue
- scissors
- press-on letters for the motto, or strips of white paper and markers



Moses's words to the people are also important for God's people today: "Choose life. Follow God's way." The children will make plaques to hang in their homes. Scrap cardboard will form the base. The next layer is a geometric pattern using squares and rectangles that the children can design. This will have the look of tile walls or décor as found in the Alhambra in Spain. Suggest that they lay out the pattern to cover the cardboard before gluing the pieces in place. Then provide letters to create Moses's words over the geometric background. If you do not have press-on letters, the children can print the motto on strips of white paper cut to fit the plaque.

Reflect

Think of activities that seemed to capture the children's imagination or attention. What new insights or ideas did they share? When did the children seem to grasp the idea of God's vision and future for creation and them? When did hope enter into this session? How have their Bible skills improved? Has your understanding of or thinking about the Bible changed through these activities? If so, how?



9 Life-size Mural

Leader preparation: Cut lengths of paper about 4' x 2½–3', one for each child, large enough for a child to lie on and be the pattern for a figure. Select a medium for painting the figures: colored chalk, markers, or poster paints. If you decide on paints, provide paint shirts.

Supplies:

- Bible
- roll of paper
- pencils or washable markers
- colored chalk, markers, or poster paint and brushes
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- song: "We are Dancing Sarah's Circle" (tune: Jacob's Ladder, 8.8.8.5.), www.tinyurl.com/fp-ladder
- "That's Faith," Attachment: Activity 2

Begin by having the children find Hebrews 11. Ask a volunteer to read Hebrews from the attachment "That's Faith." Then point out how many lines in the passage mention faith. The author of the letter names many people from the Hebrew Scriptures. *Who else do you think of, in the Bible or not, who lives by faith?* Encourage them to think of people they know as well as figures from history. Add these names to the list.

At some point, you may have to declare the list ended so the children can proceed to making the figures. Invite the children to select a person from the list to create a figure for the group mural. Stress that realistic representation is not the goal. When the figures are ready, they will create a row of people around the learning area or in the hallway.

To make the figures, the children take turns lying on a sheet of paper for a leader or another child to trace around them with pencils or washable markers. They should lie on their backs with their arms apart from their bodies so the figures will appear to be holding hands when they are displayed. Show them the art materials for finishing the figures. You may want to put a name tag on each one for identification.

When the figures are all finished and displayed, sing together "We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle."

Attachment: Activity 2

That's Faith

Selected verses from Hebrews 11:1–12:2 (paraphrased)

Whatever we hope for, faith makes certain.

Faith also gives us proof of things we cannot see.

We know that the whole world was made good by God. That's faith!

God was delighted by the faith of our ancestors.

Because of his faith, Noah got a warning about the flood.

Because of their faith, Abraham and Sarah moved to a new land.

Even though she was too old to have children, Sarah had faith that God would do what God had promised. And she had a baby, Isaac.

Isaac had faith and he blessed his children and they blessed their children and on and on it went.

Moses and Miriam had faith to help the people escape slavery in Egypt.

That crowd walked right through the Red Sea on dry ground. That's faith!

I don't have time to tell you about all the others—Elijah, Elisha, Deborah, Esther, Ruth, David, Samuel, Isaiah, and so many more. Even though we can't see them, they're like a great cloud of witnesses all around us.

This is a race and we've got to be fast. We'll get rid of everything that slows us down. And we'll keep our eyes on Jesus, up there ahead of us, leading the way and making our faith complete.

Attachment: Activity 5

Moses's Life

The scripture references show where this part of Moses's story is found.

The excerpts are not direct quotations.

1. Moses was born in Egypt when the pharaoh wanted to destroy the babies of the Israelite women.
Exodus 1:22

2. Moses was born, and his family tried to save him from the pharaoh's soldiers.
Exodus 2:1-4

3. The pharaoh's daughter found the baby Moses.
Exodus 2:5-9

4. Moses went to live with the Israelites and married Jethro's daughter.
Exodus 2:15a-21

5. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush.
Exodus 3:1-6

6. God had a special job for Moses. Moses was to tell the pharaoh of Egypt to let the Israelites go free.
Exodus 3:7-8a, 11-12

7. It took many days, but Moses and God convinced the pharaoh to let the Israelites go free. Exodus
12:31-41

8. Finally, after years of traveling, they came to the land where God told them to live.
Deuteronomy 29:2-3

9. Because the people needed to be reminded about God, Moses told them all that God had done
for them and reminded them, "Choose life. Obey God."
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Attachment: Activity 6

Tetractys

No, a tetractys (rhymes with “malpractice”) is not a newly discovered dinosaur. However, the word is very old. Euclid, a mathematician thousands of years ago, gave this name to the combination of 1, 2, 3, and 4, because these four numbers add up to 10. He thought this made them a special number combination.

Ray Stebbing found the word as he looked through the dictionary one day and thought it would make an interesting way to write poetry. This is the formula he devised:

One syllable word
Two syllables (one or two words)
Three syllables (one, two, or three words)
Four syllables (one, two, three, or four words)
Ten syllables

You can also turn it upside down and begin with ten syllables.

You can even combine the two and have two lines with ten syllables in the middle, a double tetractys.

Here’s an example of a single tetractys poem:

Faith
is the
knowledge that
what you can’t see
is real and can be trusted completely.

A tetractys can rhyme, or not. It can be one long sentence or more than one sentence. The only rule to follow is the number of syllables in each line.