

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Young adults are often more comfortable with diversity than previous generations. They expect different people to have different experiences and opinions. On the one hand, this gives them an excellent perspective on witness and testimony, disposing them to assume that different people have different yet valuable stories that offer perspective on God's work in the world. On the other hand, a challenge that young adults face may be that of discovering common languages and shared stories in which diversity and difference unite. Young adults may be well-positioned to explore how different experiences of testimony and witness come together in a larger, unifying story of God's salvation.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

Think of your work as that of creating open-ended space where young adults are not necessarily finding answers but exploring different perspectives on and options for giving witness and testimony. Since “young adult” can mean 18-year-olds as well as 35-year-olds, these groups may bring great diversity of life experience. Pay attention to who your participants are in order to speak to their life experiences even as you invite them to be open to the experiences of others.

Prayer: Loving God, give us hearts to receive one another's lives as gifts. Deepen our love as we meet others so that we may meet you in them. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Every Which Way (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 24:34–67 thinking about which characters your different participants are likely to identify with. Consider how each character has a different way of witnessing to her or his experience of God. Write on newsprint or a whiteboard these three questions:

- What were you thinking?
- How were you feeling?
- What kind of witness did your words or actions give about God?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers, pens, and paper
- newsprint or whiteboard, with questions listed

Ask for volunteers to take parts reading Genesis 24:34–67 in a Reader's Theater approach. Parts include the narrator, Abraham's servant, Rebekah, and all the other characters in the passage (one person could read all the minor parts). Suggest that participants listen for the different ways each character witnesses to her or his experience of God in the story.

After the reading, ask: *If you were Abraham's servant, how would you answer these questions?* Allow a few minutes for participants to jot down notes. Next ask: *If you were Rebekah, how would you answer these questions?* Allow a few more minutes. Finally ask: *If you were Laban, how would you answer these questions?* Allow a few more minutes. Finish any remaining time for this activity by inviting discussion about which character participants identified with most and why. Talk about the different ways each character testified to his or her faith in God.

2 Songs We Sing

Leader preparation: Research different versions of the Beatles' song “Let It Be.” (Artists such as John Denver and the group Peter, Paul, and Mary recorded versions, for instance, and searching online can turn up free-to-play versions such as recordings on <http://www.Youtube.com>.) If you are aware of a musician or vocalist who will be one of your participants, consider contacting that person a few days in advance with an invitation to perform her or his interpretation of “Let It Be” for the group. Regardless, you might create your own “reminder image” (see below) a few days in advance while listening to the recordings you have found. You could show your image to participants as an example and even share where or how it might have already served as a reminder to you.

Supplies:

- several different versions of the song “Let It Be”
- pens and paper

Introduce this activity as a chance to hear different voices using the same words to capture experiences of comfort and renewal. While listening to recordings of various renditions of “Let It Be,” invite participants to wonder about what words or sounds they would use to capture their own experiences of God's presence, help, or inspiration. Encourage any who wish to jot down words or phrases in response. Encourage anyone with musical talent to use the listening time to draft

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

their own lyrics to the song. As you begin playing the recordings, you could prompt participants with questions such as:

- What encourages you?
- What brings you back here to spend time with other people of faith?
- What could you see hung on a mirror or refrigerator, sitting on your desk, or as wallpaper on your computer or smartphone that would remind you that you do have something to give a testimony about?

If anyone is prepared to perform “Let It Be,” or if anyone would like to sing an impromptu version of new lyrics they have written, invite them to share. Otherwise, encourage participants to carry with them the new song lyrics, words, or phrases they have jotted down as reminders of the specific details of their unique witness to an experience of God.

Without Saying a Word

Leader preparation: Seek a local person who would be comfortable speaking briefly (5–7 minutes) about a way she or he can witness about her or his Christian faith without needing to say a word. For instance, this could be a cook or baker who takes food to grieving families or someone with building skills who volunteers to help install ramps in the homes of mobility-impaired people. The possibilities are as varied as the people you, your friends, and your family know.

For example, ask a guest speaker to talk about how she or he understands her or his ministry to be a testimony about the God of Christ. Encourage this guest to bring “tools” of that ministry that the young adult group may see, touch, taste, hear, or smell. For instance, encourage a builder to bring hand tools and samples of construction materials that she or he uses most often, or ask if a cook would be willing to bring samples of favorite dishes to share. Be sure to ask the guest if she or he has any special requests in advance for the meeting area, such as a DVD player or projector, to share images of her or his ministry.

Supplies:

- guest speaker with “tools” for giving witness
- any additional requests the guest speaker may have for her or his visit

Introduce the activity by emphasizing that testimony and witness are not at all limited to words. Testimony and witness may be given through many different actions, gestures, efforts, art forms, and so forth. Briefly introduce participants to the guest speaker as someone who has come to share about a way to give testimony or witness. Allow the guest speaker to use the time as she or he sees fit. However, be prepared to make time for participants’ questions and comments. Conclude by encouraging participants to think about their lives and how they can be a testimony to God’s love through their vocations and actions.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Let It Be (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the attachment “Mary and the Angel” as well as Luke 1:26–38, on which the script in the attachment is based, and consider how Mary and Gabriel may have witnessed to God’s future. If you have access to any Bible commentaries, reading the entries about this passage from Luke may help prompt your thinking.

Supplies:

- “Mary and the Angel,” Attachment: Activity 4
- Bibles

Introduce the story of Gabriel, Mary, and the Annunciation in Luke 1:26–38 as a story of giving and receiving testimony and witness about an amazing future that God is making possible. Ask for 2–4 volunteers to be actors, using the script in “Mary and the Angel.” Allow everyone to spend a few minutes with the script before the volunteers perform. Afterward, encourage participants to express their responses to this story, using these or similar questions:

- How are your ways of witnessing to God’s future similar to Mary’s and Gabriel’s ways? How are your ways of witnessing to God’s future different from their ways?
- What did they seem to think God would be doing in the world?
- How will you say “let it be” in your own way?



5 It Takes a Community

Leader preparation: Take time in the days ahead to prepare a mindset of gratitude by sending a message, making a phone call, or having a conversation to thank someone who has brought some of the care, patience, forgiveness, love, or grace of Christ into your life.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel the Elder
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr>
- paper, markers, and pens

Gather participants around the painting “The Adoration of the Kings,” and open the activity with this question: *Who are these people?* Allow participants to be as creative as they want in their speculations. When ideas slow down, encourage them to draw their own version of an “Adoration” picture with the people in their own families, workplaces, and schools, as well as in their own past and present, who have been part of Christ’s presence in their lives. As participants complete their drawings, offer some questions for silent reflection:

- Who in your picture could you witness with by thanking him or her for being part of Christ’s presence in your life?
- Who is not in your picture with whom you could witness by telling about how one of the people in the picture touched your life with Christ’s presence?

Encourage participants to find a time during the next week to offer a witness by expressing thanks to someone in the picture or by telling the story of someone in the picture to another person.

6 Experimenting with Effectiveness

Leader preparation: Use a digital camera to expand follow up opportunities for participants to practice sharing their faith perspectives. Since you will be helping people connect the ancient Acts story with contemporary life, take time beforehand to think of possible connection points yourself, so you may be able to prompt participants in their thinking.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) digital camera

Prepare for a Bible reading by asking participants to listen for why testimony about God’s work in Christ is so effective in the story they will hear. Then ask a volunteer to read Acts 16:16–34, and divide participants into teams of 3–4 people for a game of charades. Invite each team to come up with a wordless performance of a contemporary scenario where testimony about God’s work could be effective for a reason similar to that in Acts 16. If a digital camera is available, or if participants have phones with cameras, have participants photograph moments of the performances. When teams are ready to perform scenarios, invite them to perform each in turn so that the other teams, when they are not performing, can try to guess what settings and situations are being acted out.

Invite participants to identify a situation in the week ahead when they could at least imagine themselves offering a similar kind of testimony about God’s work in the world. If performances have been photographed, encourage participants to upload images they find especially inspiring to Facebook or another social media site.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Honoring One Another (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider in advance whether you will invite participants to follow up on this activity by practicing on their own, or if you will suggest scheduling a special gathering at a later date when participants will follow up by practicing together.

Supplies:

- (optional) party-like refreshments
- (optional) recordings of upbeat music and a way to play them in the background
- markers, pens, and paper

Suggest that testimony can be as simple as celebrating and honoring the gifts of God in the presence of others. If available, invite the participants to enjoy the music and refreshments. Pose these two questions for reflection:

- Who at work or in your neighborhood do you appreciate because you’ve seen them doing “good work,” something that lifts up the people around them or makes a significant contribution to the community?
- Whether or not the person is “a person of faith,” is there someone you appreciate for living or acting in a way that makes the world a better place?

If you are inviting participants to follow up by practicing this form of testimony and witness on their own, then encourage them to think of doing something that would honor the person as a gift of God. Encourage them to be creative and allow some time for participants to actually put down on paper (through writing, drawing, or any other way) a plan for how they will put this idea into practice in the next week or so. Also invite them to share their ideas with the group.

If you are suggesting that the group schedule a special gathering at a later date when participants will practice this form of testimony and witness together, allow time for them to discuss plans for some sort of pitch-in or gathering to which they could invite their guests of honor and which could include a moment of prayer or blessing for the good work of the entire group.

8 Naming the Blessing

Leader preparation: Spend time before participants arrive looking at the painting “Baptism,” identifying your favorite things about the picture and thinking about why these might be your favorite. Write these questions on the board and consider what your own answer to them would be: Where are the blessings in this scene? Where may the Spirit of Christ have been at work?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Baptism” by Hulis Mavruk <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) recordings of hymns, gospel music, or other songs that deal with baptism

Compare testimony and witness to drawing attention to God’s blessing. Read aloud the questions you posted, and invite participants into a time of silent reflection about the artwork and the questions. After a few minutes, open a discussion by asking for any responses participants would like to share. You might draw attention to the great number of people likely to have been involved in blessing, caring for, and nurturing any one person who makes the journey to baptism. You might mention that the choice to be baptized is itself a form of testimony to God’s provision of that blessing, caring, and nurturing.

Invite participants into a final moment of silent reflection with the question: *What blessing would you like to celebrate or draw attention to [testify to] these days?*

9 Longing and Listening

Leader preparation: If you have contact with participants before the day of the activity, consider inviting them to bring recordings of “popular” music to which they listen. Find some “popular” recordings yourself, and listen for the different longings they seem to express or suggest.

Supplies:

- Internet access
- MP3 player, CD player, or radio
- recordings of “popular” music
- pens and paper

Introduce this activity with the idea that testimony and witness can be especially transformative when they speak to the longings of the people around us. For instance, if we describe our experiences of God as encouraging because we are freed from a sense of guilt, and yet the person with us does not feel particularly guilty, we may not connect with that person on a very deep level. However, if we pay attention to the loneliness our companion expresses and consider how our experience of God involves comforting and healing relationships, then we may find ways to express our sense of encouragement that speak the language of a lonely person.

As a group, choose one or two songs and listen to them. Encourage participants to listen for the longings that the song expresses, such as for freedom from guilt, for companionship, for meaning, for reconciliation with someone, or for hope or rest. Allow time after listening for participants to name the longings they hear, and talk together about how they would express their experiences of God in ways that speak to those longings. Suggest that one way to practice witness could be to experiment with writing new lyrics to those songs, lyrics that draw attention to God in response to the longings of the old lyrics. If time permits, allow participants to write a line or two of lyrics and then share them with the group (if they feel comfortable doing so).

Reflect

Think about three or four of your participants and their reactions during the session. Ask yourself what one word you think each would now choose to describe her or his ability to share testimony and witness. Why would her or his answers match or not match your expectations before the session? Though different participants will gain different insights and develop different perspectives on the practice of testimony and witness, their ability to imagine themselves as a people who do practice these is vital.

Attachment: Activity 4

Mary and the Angel
A script based on Luke 1:26–38.

Parts: Mary Voice 1
 Gabriel Voice 2

Mary: Imagine having someone come up to you and say:

Gabriel: Favored one, the Lord is with you.

Mary: That’s why I’m perplexed. I’m not used to being “favored.”

Voice 1: You’ve been dropping the ball!

Voice 2: You still have to get that done!

Voice 1: You’ve got to try harder.

Mary: People tell me what I’m doing wrong all the time. But, this . . . someone . . . tells me:

Gabriel: Favored one, the Lord is with you.

Mary: As if God looked at me and saw something good. I needed to hear that. I really needed to hear that because of what came next. You know that when someone starts by saying . . .

Gabriel: Don’t be afraid . . .

Mary: . . . that something scary must be coming. And, yes, this news is scary: a baby. I’m so overwhelmed I ask the first silly question that comes into my head: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” Well, it isn’t a silly question. It’s an obvious question. I’m only betrothed to the carpenter, Joseph, and a woman in my position isn’t supposed to have relations with her betrothed yet. So, I’m wondering if we’re talking about a baby that Joseph and I are planning on having eventually, or if our plans are going to have to change. If this baby is coming now, before Joseph and I are married, there are going to be people who shame us. It’s hard enough to believe in yourself on a normal day. Imagine having everyone in town feeling like they need to shame you!

Voice 1: There’s something wrong here!

Voice 2: You did something wrong—don’t forget it!

Mary: You know people do that. I could face it, but what if I have to face it without Joseph? If this isn’t Joseph’s baby, then he’ll know it as well as I do. What will I tell him? I don’t know what to tell myself. Besides, this . . . someone . . . isn’t talking about just any baby.

(continued)

Attachment: Activity 4 (continued)

Gabriel: The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Mary: David's kingdom was a thousand years ago! We hear about this in scripture all the time, but—I don't know about you—I don't wake up thinking: "My life's going to fulfill thousand-year-old scripture today!" Once upon a time, God spoke to David and promised an heir, someone who would be a leader for God's people. But, I don't know anyone these days who's ever heard God talking like that. As for me: I'm plain old Mary! Granted, the name "Mary" comes from the name "Miriam." Miriam had wonderful things going on in her life. She was the sister of Moses. She helped him bring the people up out of Egypt so they could stop acting like the slaves they'd been all their lives and start acting like people of God. It's nice to be named after someone like that. I never expected to be someone like that. Do *you* expect to be someone God uses?

Gabriel: Nothing will be impossible with God.

Mary: Think about parts of your life where you haven't even dared to hope.

Gabriel: Nothing will be impossible with God.

Mary: That's radical. That's crazy. Yet, our faith tells us that it's true. So, however scary, unexpected, impossible, crazy the words of this . . . angel . . . are sounding, I find myself knowing that this is the only kind of world I want to live in: a world where God looks at us everyday people with favor and takes the family situations, the plan-disrupting situations, and even the shameful-seeming situations and uses them for good. I started hearing voices from even more than a thousand years ago, like the voice of Moses telling God:

Voice 1: Here I am, I'll go to Pharaoh.

Mary: And I heard the voice of the prophet Isaiah telling God:

Voice 2: Here I am, send me!

Mary: And I heard myself—plain old Mary—saying: "Here I am." Let it be with me according to your word. Let something that none of us were planning be. Let something that could alienate me from everybody I care about be. Let something so amazing I hadn't even imagined that it was possible be. Let it be, whatever that may mean. Amen.

"Mary and the Angel," © 2007 by Callie J. Smith. Used by permission.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Even though young adults are connected to one another like no previous generation thanks to text messaging, Facebook, and Twitter, they may still feel isolated as they move to go to school, begin a family, or change jobs. Testimony and witness are opportunities to be called out of isolation and into relationships that risk changing and being changed in the name of Christ.

About this Exploration

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God's larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren't perfect, inviting us to tell our stories in response. In John's account of Jesus and the blind man, the man's witness sparked a process that touched on people's relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man's testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation.

Similarly, our stories may shape other people's responses to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1–41
Psalms 116

Leader Preparation

Think of your work as relationship building. While participants reflect on the different models of testimony and witness in the Bible, and while they respond to the people of these scriptural stories, they also practice responding to people today. You will be facilitating a practice of relationships that give as well as receive perspective on how God is present and active in the world. Encourage participants to join you in enjoying the journey together.

Prayer: God of life, as we listen to the stories of many lives and many times, give us ears to hear echoes of you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Practicing Meaning (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 116 and attempt the “take home” practice opportunity (see below). Pay attention to what you find most difficult, frustrating, or embarrassing about this exercise. Based on your experience, consider what advice or reassurance you might offer participants.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Introduce this activity by speaking about testimony and witness as drawing attention to God’s activity and peoples’ responses to it. Offer Psalm 116 as an example: the first half describes God’s activity in the psalmist’s life, and the second half describes how the psalmist will respond. Invite two volunteers to read aloud the first half (vv. 1–11) and second half (vv. 12–19) of Psalm 116, and encourage participants to imagine what situations in their own lives reflect what is being offered in this psalm.

Allow time for participants to speak with a partner about a situation in their lives that relates to the psalm. Reassure participants that they can be general or as specific as they feel comfortable. However, encourage them to think of speaking out loud about their sense of God’s presence or absence during difficult times as a way of practicing testimony and witness. After partners have had time together, invite participants to “take home” the practice opportunity of rewriting Psalm 116 in their own words so that it describes their experience of God’s work in a particular situation of their lives and what their responses have been or will be to it.

2 Allowing for Messiness

Leader preparation: Consider placing this activity at the end of a session, since cleanup time will be necessary. Think about the parts of your own life that could be called “messy,” asking yourself how God might be involved in those situations. Arrange seating around a few tables. Place plastic table cloths over each table and in the middle of each table place a sheet of paper with the two discussion questions. If you have time, practice mixing mud in advance so that you can consistently achieve a mud thick enough to at least partially be worked with or shaped.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and paper
- soil
- plastic table cloths
- soap, water, and towels

Invite a volunteer to read aloud John 9:1–16 while you mix soil and water and place a blob of mud in the middle of each table where participants are sitting. Find some way to be demonstrative about the messiness of the mud. Have fun with making it. If the gospel reading is over before you have delivered mud to each table, allow silence so that people can watch you work with the mud. In your own words, suggest that testimony and witness can involve us in some messy, ugly, unpleasant parts of life. Offer John 9 as an example. Blindness and illness, spit and mud, arguments among religious people about what is of God and what is not—this story shows that being involved in God’s work in the world can in-

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

Involve people in messy situations. Offer participants some moments of silence to reflect on one of the two following questions, encouraging them to mold a blob of mud in some way that represents their response:

- How do you (or could you) tell other people about a messy, unpleasant part of your life where you have encountered or want to encounter God’s work?
- How do you (or could you) act faithfully during messy, unpleasant disagreements with other people of faith about what is “of God”?

Offer a prayer together: *God of life, Creator of this earth, help us expect the mess and mud to be the very places where your healing comes. Amen.*

Allow extra time for cleanup.

③ Honoring the Pharisees

Leader preparation: Read John 9 beforehand, imagining who your “Pharisees” would be today. After reading the scripture, attempt the second reflection question/journaling prompt (see below). Consider talking with someone you identify as your “Pharisee,” and try to practice the invitation at the end of this activity. Your experiences could inform your introduction to the activity with participants. Before participants arrive, write the first reflection question on the newsprint or whiteboard: *With whom have you disagreed about whether or not something was good or was “of God”?*

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- pens and paper

Introduce this activity with the idea that testimony and witness call people out of isolation and into relationships where they not only seek to make change, but also risk themselves being changed. Draw attention to just how many people are telling, listening to, and trying to understand the story of the blind man’s healing in John 9. Suggest that even the Pharisees were people seeking to understand how God was or was not at work.

Ask for four volunteers to read John 9:13–34 with a Reader’s Theater approach (one reader each as the narrator, the Pharisees, the blind man, and his parents), and encourage participants to imagine the situation as if it were taking place today. Afterward, invite participants to gather in groups of 3–4 to reflect together on the first question: *With whom have you disagreed about whether or not something was good or was “of God”?* Offer another reflection question—a journaling prompt—that participants have a few moments to respond to in writing: *What is one good point that your “opponent” had, and how could you honor that good point the next time you meet the person [or someone like that person]?* Write that second question on the newsprint or whiteboard as a reminder while participants begin to write their response in their journal or on paper. Close the activity by repeating the second half of the question as an invitation: *Let’s remember to honor in Christ’s name the person with whom we disagree.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 **Going against the Grain (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Look into the possibility of meeting in a worship space. If this is not possible, do your best to make the meeting space you have seen as quiet and reflective as possible. Browse through the book of Psalms and try to find a psalm where the psalmist's prayer has not been answered (such as Psalm 22), and consider how you might work it into your activity introduction.

Supplies:

- Bible
- pens and paper
- (optional) access to an empty worship space in which to meet

Acknowledge that the psalmist's experience of answered prayers in Psalm 116 is not an experience that everyone has all the time. Our prayers do not always receive the answer we seek. While testimony and witness include sharing with others about answered prayers and times of joy, they also include sharing about times of doubt, pain, and loneliness. Prepare to read Psalm 116 aloud by suggesting that participants pay attention to any feelings of annoyance or frustration they may have as they listen. *Does anything in the psalm rub you the wrong way? Seem overbearing? Make you want to argue that life is not so simple?*

After the reading, offer participants some moments of silence in which to think, pray, or jot down notes in response to these reflection questions:

- When was a time that you prayed, but did not receive the answer you sought?
- What was that like? What were you thinking? How did you feel?

After a few moments, ask this final question for reflection:

- Did you eventually receive comfort? If so, what brought you that comfort? Did it come in a way that you expected or in a totally surprising way?

Suggest that sharing prayer with others during times of difficulty is itself a form of witness. Invite participants to gather in a circle and hold hands. If you are meeting in a worship space, suggest the group circle around the cross (if it is on a table) or under the cross (if it is mounted on a wall). Have each person take a turn around the circle offering words of prayer out loud; say "Amen" after the last person. Encourage participants to craft a prayer that they could pray with a discouraged friend or someone who comes to them to talk through a difficulty.

 5 **Touches of Healing**

Leader preparation: Look over the imagination exercises and practice reading them out loud in a soothing or relaxing voice. Also, consider reading a healing story of the Bible (such as John 9:1–41) as well as what a Bible commentary says about it. These readings may help you introduce the activity with your own reflections about what "healing" can mean or what signs of God's presence, power, and salvation may look like.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Blind Pedlar” by Robert McGregor
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm>

Introduce this activity as a chance to explore testimony and witness as glimpses of God’s healing presence with us. Mention healings throughout scripture (such as John 9:1–41) as signs of God’s presence, power, and salvation in the world. Draw attention to the blind peddler and the little girl, inviting them to wonder where the picture might show kinds of “healing” or signs of God’s presence, power, and salvation. After a few moments, encourage participants to stand, close their eyes, and relax so they can try out three imagination exercises together. Lead them in these exercises:

Imagination Exercise 1: *Choose one of the characters in the picture and imagine how she or he was feeling before the picture’s situation happened. What was her or his posture like? Pose your body in this posture. What were her or his arms doing? How was the person holding her or his head?*

Imagination Exercise 2: *Imagine the same character in the moments after the picture’s situation happened. How is she or he feeling? What is her or his posture? Again, pose your body in this posture. What are her or his arms doing? How is the person holding her or his head? How does this person experience a sign of God’s presence, power, or salvation, and how does that affect the person?*

Imagination Exercise 3: *Imagine one more scenario, a time when you experienced a sign of God’s presence, power, or salvation. What did it feel like? How were you sitting or standing or moving? Move, stand, or sit so your body shows what the experience was like.*

Invite participants to remain as they are, open their eyes, and observe the people around them. Invite participants to choose a few conversations in the next week and experiment with duplicating this posture and remembering the feelings of when they experienced God. Suggest they pay attention to how that body language and memory affect the way they participate in the conversation.

6 Opportunities in Illness

Leader preparation: Reflect about what you would consider an “illness” or complaint that afflicts you. This could help you introduce the activity in your own words and/or enrich the examples you could offer participants.

Supplies:

- Internet access
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Suggest that everyone has had some sort of “illness,” some obstacle, complaint, disability, loss, or pain in their lives. *In your own words, describe testimony and witness as opportunities to think of our “illnesses” not as something that is wrong with us, but as a place in our lives where God’s presence, power, and healing could be most visible.*

Encourage participants to think about an “illness” they have experienced and give them time to do a quick search online for some sort of statistics about how many people deal with the kind of “illness” they have experienced. Give everyone permission not to name the “illness” they are thinking about if they do not feel comfortable doing so, but invite them to share with the group (1) any statistics they found and (2) one or two places in the course of a week where they might encounter someone dealing with this same issue.

If there is time, open a group conversation with this question: *As your testimony this week, how could you encourage someone who shares your “illness”?* Record any ideas with a word or phrase on the newsprint or whiteboard. If not enough time remains for this conversation, offer participants the opportunity to think about this on their own during the coming week.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Exploring the Opportunities (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity is a variation on, and a potential follow-up to, Activity 6. Even if you choose not to use Activity 6, one helpful way to prepare to lead this activity may be to read over Activity 6 and try it out for yourself. Another approach to preparation is to find a friend who will practice one of this activity’s role-playing scenarios with you. Having attempted one, you may be able to better anticipate questions or concerns it will raise for participants. Before the activity, write the following phrases on newsprint or a whiteboard: “loss of a job,” “an addiction,” “depression,” and “a sexually transmitted disease.”

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Introduce this activity by suggesting that testimony and witness can be opportunities to think of our challenges not as things that are wrong with us but as the places in our lives where God’s presence, power, and healing could be most visible. Ask for volunteers willing to role play a situation of testimony and witness by choosing one of the scenarios listed on the newsprint or whiteboard. Once volunteers choose a scenario, offer them a few minutes to prepare. Meanwhile, invite the other participants to think about what testimony and witness might look like in that situation.

After the role play, ask the observers to share their thoughts about what to try differently, without being critical of those who volunteered to role play. If there is time, invite the volunteers to act out the scenario again, this time using some of the observers’ suggestions.

8 Social Networking as Witness

Leader preparation: Spend time with the online portion of this activity so you are comfortable leading participants in it.

Supplies:

- Internet access

Introduce this activity by comparing testimony to sparking conversation among different people about different understandings of God and about causing people to interact in ways that bring about transformation. Encourage participants to imagine any of their conversations, interactions, and relationships as situations that become a witness when they act as if they believe God is healing and transforming the world.

Open a group discussion with this prompt: *Think about the social networking and other interactions you have with people on a daily basis. How could those be situations of witness?* When enough ideas have been offered to get creative juices flowing, invite participants to go online and begin blogging, entering something new on

Facebook, or tweeting in a way that reflects something about their relationship with a God of healing and transformation. Encourage them to be creative. Invite them to pause before each tweet, Facebook session, blog, or e-mail in the week ahead and ask themselves the question: *How can this witness to the healing work of God?*



9 A Service of Sending

Leader preparation: Arrange for the song “Tú has venido a la orilla” to be played during the activity. This could mean obtaining sheet music and finding a musician with an instrument to lead participants in singing. Or you could find a recording (such as at the YouTube video <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ytorilla>) and a way to play it for participants. Gather the rest of the supplies. Photocopy enough handouts and sheets of music and/or lyrics for each person.

Supplies:

- recording and player, or sheet music and musician, to play “Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de hombres 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla>
- copies of the music, or at least of the lyrics, for “Tú has venido a la orilla”
- “A Service of Sending for a People of Witness,” Attachment: Activity 9
- Bibles
- (optional) access to an empty worship space in which to meet

Invite participants to volunteer to lead a part of “A Service of Sending for a People of Witness.” If you are not able to meet in a worship space for this activity, consider inviting participants to stand in a circle during the “Service of Sending.” If participants are not familiar with the song “Tú has venido a la orilla” and you will be asking them to sing it during the service, consider practicing it with them once before the service.

Reflect

Think back about which activity seemed to engage participants most, which seemed to engage them least. Consider whether there were certain kinds of scripture stories or characters that engaged them more than others. Sometimes we respond best to the people and situations with which we can most identify. Young adults come from such varied life situations that different groups of participants will vary in the people with whom they tend to identify. Paying extra attention to the life situations of your participants and what Bible stories you see them connecting with may be helpful for planning future sessions.

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Attachment: Activity 9

A Service of Sending for a People of Witness

Welcome

Leader: For every story of every eye that has seen you, God . . .

All: We thank you.

Leader: For every song of every voice that has sung you, God . . .

All: We praise you.

Leader: For hearts to love them . . .

All: We pray.

Leader: For courage to know them . . .

All: We pray.

Leader: For you with us . . .

All: We watch. We listen. We reach out our hands.

Leader: Amen.

Song: "Tú has venido a la orilla"

Reading: Mark 1:16–20

Prayer of Sending (in unison)

We grow strong in telling our stories, for you are in them. We grow bold with imagining your blessings, for you insist on them. We grow grateful in knowing your people, for you bring us together in possibility. Let us live vividly in hope of you. Let us sing of the good news we hear. Let us find the paths reflecting you, going in the name of Christ. Amen.

Blessing Go with joy and peace, living witnesses for the sake of many. Amen.

"A Service of Sending for a People of Witness," © 2010 by Callie J. Smith. Used by permission.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

As a generation, young adults face a breakdown of many traditional systems, institutions, and assumptions. While this can be destabilizing and anxiety-causing, it can also serve as an entrée to the uncertainties and new territories that come with discipleship. This Exploration offers opportunities for young adults to practice the ways of Jesus that includes acknowledging faith in God as the reason they live the way they do. This Exploration also offers ways to practice those habits of Jesus that are themselves a form of giving testimony and witness by word as well as deed.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 8:27–38
Psalms 25:1–10

Leader Preparation

Reflect on your journey of discipleship. When have there been moments when you felt compelled to testify to your faith? Were you able to testify, or did you hold back out of fear or discomfort? Think about the atmosphere you need to provide for your group so that they can feel free to share their testimonies without fear or intimidation. Center yourself in prayer and let the witnessing begin!

Prayer: God of Christ, shape our habits and instincts so our lives cannot help but inspire others with an awareness of you. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Saving Our Lives (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Take time before the session to reflect on people in your own life who have demonstrated God’s love. What about their lives demonstrated God’s love? In what ways did that affect you? Be prepared to guide your participants in similar reflections.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pens, markers, and slips of paper

Suggest that following Jesus involves assuming that everything we do can witness to God’s love and give testimony about how that has affected us. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Mark 8:27–38, and encourage participants to listen as they consider this question: *Whose life has demonstrated this for me?* Invite participants to a moment of silence to think about someone whose everyday way of following Christ demonstrates God’s love to them.

Invite participants to find a partner and talk about a time they observed someone’s life providing witness. Conclude the activity with this combination of question and invitation: *What is one characteristic of that person that you could adopt for your own life? Jot it down on your slip of paper, and try it out each day this week.*

2 Document It!

Leader preparation: Arrange for the song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” to be played during the activity. You could even obtain sheet music and find a musician to be present, or you could find a recording (such as at the YouTube link below) and a way to play it during the activity so participants can learn to sing it a cappella. Gather the rest of the supplies.

Think about examples of people you know who seem to live in ways that point to God. Ask yourself what about their words, actions or behavior seem to be responses to God’s life. Reflect on what it is like to know and interact with these people.

Supplies:

- song: “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr South African song) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ytsiyahamb> and a way to hear or sing it
- video-recording technology

Compare discipleship to doing everything we do as if we were doing it in response to God’s life. When others encounter the results of people living in ways that point to God, the very act of living discipleship becomes an act of testimony and witness. Even blogging, tweeting, or listening to music—when done as if in response to God—can be means of testifying!

Invite participants to listen to the song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ytsiyahamb>, reminding them our focus is testimony as discipleship. Invite them to stand up, stretch, and move around while listening, even to sing, clap, or dance with the music.

Have the participants gather in 2–3 groups (depending on how many video recording devices are available) and record a brief video segment of what it would look like for one of them to live a day in her or his life with this song for the soundtrack. Conclude by making arrangements for videos to be shared electronically with all participants. Invite everyone to use YouTube or their favorite social networking platform to share the video and to blog or tweet about something that surprised them as they created the video. (Remind them that doing this points to God and is indeed witness).

3 Faces of Discipleship

Leader preparation: This activity seeks to offer participants multiple options for responding to a set of reflection questions, so gather enough of the “optional” materials to provide adequate choices. Spend time responding to the reflection questions yourself. Your own practice may give you insights for the “in your own words” portion of your introduction. Write on newsprint or a whiteboard these reflection questions:

- What’s been happening in your picture?
- How is God involved?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo>
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- markers, pens, and paper
- (optional) paints, brushes, paper, soap, and water
- (optional) computers with Internet access
- (optional) floor pillows or mats for meditation

Give participants time to study the painting “Blind Feeling,” and invite them to reflect on this question: *What’s been happening in this picture?* Eventually, suggest that Christian discipleship means living alongside other disciples with many things happening in their lives, not to mention living alongside others who may or may not be committed to Christian discipleship and who have many things happening in their lives too. All lives are connected in God’s creation, and, like the overlapping and interconnected faces of the painting, our testimony about God’s activity in our own lives will overlap and interconnect with things that are happening in the lives of others.

Invite participants to reflect on another question: *What’s been happening in your “picture” or your family, workplace, school, or neighborhood?* Draw attention to the various materials you provided. Invite them to paint, draw, journal, blog, tweet, meditate, or in some way reflect on and respond to the questions you posted on newsprint or whiteboard: *What’s been happening in your picture, and how is God involved?* Close by reminding participants that naming how God has been involved is giving testimony, and encourage those who have not already been blogging or tweeting to find a way to share their painting, drawing, or other reflections with somebody beyond this group.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 Saying It Out Loud (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Consider browsing through a Bible commentary's introductory material on the book of Psalms as a way to enrich your introduction. If you are not already comfortable with praying out loud, try to find a situation where you are offering a prayer out loud in a group of people. That experience could help you give advice as you offer the closing invitation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pens and paper

Note that the book of Psalms was like a worship book in ancient Israel. These psalms were not necessarily one person's prayer. They were more like the prayers, litanies, and worship materials spoken out loud and shared by the whole community. Invite participants to take turns reading aloud Psalm 25:1–10 by going around the group with each person who is willing reading a verse. Do not force anyone to read. Allow people to pass. Encourage them to listen for a favorite part of the psalm or what they find most striking. After the reading, invite them to talk about their favorite or most striking part.

Ask participants to gather in groups of 2–3 and write a prayer using everyday language that they could imagine sharing out loud in a group situation today: before a snack with their children or with young people they work with; with friends or family when someone is going through a difficult time; at the beginning of a meeting in which fellow Christians are involved. Invite groups to share their works-in-progress with one another. Acknowledge that many people find praying out loud difficult. Encourage them to finish writing the psalm at home and to find situations this week where they could at least imagine sharing that kind of prayer aloud.

 **5 Baptism Witnessing**

Leader preparation: Spend time with the painting "Baptism" by Hulis Mavruk. Focus especially on the people in the background. Reflect on any baptisms you have witnessed and the role of the congregation during that baptism. Spend time thinking about how witnessing a baptism is a form of testimony to your own faith. If you do not know, find out what your congregation says in response to a baptism.

In the United Church of Christ (UCC) book of worship when the congregation is asked to respond to their commitment to the one being baptized, they are asked to say, "We promise our love, support and care." The following is the congregational response from the UCC hymnal that was published in the 1970s:

We receive [name] as a new person in Christ. We offer our understanding and support as he/she explores life. We enfold him/her in our love, seeking together to grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and all people. We join with [parents' names] in telling the gospel in our midst so that [child's name] may live with us for Christ, showing forth Christ's love for all people.

Check out your denomination's book of worship or hymnal.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Baptism” by Hulis Mavruk <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm>
- copies of the baptismal response from the 1977 UCC Hymnal

Talk with the group about baptism. *When was the last time you witnessed a baptism? Who were all the participants? What goes through your mind as you participate in the response of the congregation?*

Study the painting together, and talk about the people who are witnessing the baptism. *What is their role? Read the congregational response above, or one from your denomination’s worship book or hymnal. If your congregation does not use this particular response, what do they use? What does the statement you make say about your witness to the baptized and their family? Invite everyone to think about this the next time they are at a baptism. How are you witnessing to their faith, simply by your presence?*

6 Clearness Committee




Leader preparation: Set up your meeting space with several clusters of seats so that multiple small groups will have some degree of separation. As you prepare, look over the attachment and think about a time in your life when someone helped you gain insight into how to share your life and gifts in your community. You will be helping participants reflect on their potential for helping one another discover ways of witness that are uniquely theirs. If you have time, consider doing additional research on the Quaker (Society of Friends) practice of holding a “clearness committee” by doing an Internet search for resources such as “A Communal Approach to Discernment” by Parker J. Palmer, <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-parker>.

Supplies:

- pens and paper
- “A Clearness Committee on Testimony and Witness,” Attachment: Activity 6

Open this activity by speaking of discipleship as involving life in community with other followers of Christ. Disciples participate in one another’s lives and together discern their callings to participate in the larger community. Introduce the concept of a “clearness committee” from within the Quaker (Society of Friends) tradition. Review the attachment with the group, providing opportunity for questions. Invite participants to gather in smaller groups and imagine that they are serving as someone’s clearness committee. Suggest that they come up with a running list of questions they could ask that might help the discerner reflect on how she or he may best offer testimony and witness. Conclude by inviting the larger group back together to share some of the questions they developed. Suggest that some participants who are interested could arrange to gather at a later date and practice holding a clearness committee together.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Moments of Offering and Blessing (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Before the activity, place a table somewhere near the front of the room as an offering table so participants may place their offerings there during the service. Write the following service outline on newsprint or a whiteboard:

1. Welcome
2. Reading from Psalm 25:1–10
3. Invitation to offer of the pieces of our lives
4. Prayer of blessing the pieces of our lives for testimony and witness
5. Benediction

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- table
- pens and paper
- (optional) copies of hymnals or worship books from your church's sanctuary or library

Our lives are full of symbols. Wedding rings remind us of the vows we made to our spouse, a certain necklace might remind us of the person from whom we received it, an alarm on our phone reminds us to take medication or to make a phone call. Every day we carry with us reminders of our lives, either consciously or subconsciously. A service known as Faith Practices introduces us to ways we can carry our faith with us every day of our lives as a reminder of our commitment to Christ. Allow participants a few moments to discover a symbol that will remind them as they leave this place to continue the practice of testimony and witness.

Ask for volunteers to lead different parts of the service outlined on the newsprint or whiteboard. Give them a few moments to prepare what they would like to say. If hymnals or worship books are available, suggest browsing through these for examples of welcomes, offering invitations, prayers, and benedictions. Once everyone has had time to prepare, invite volunteers to lead the group in this service of blessing. As you finish this activity, return the symbols to the participants reminding them that it has been blessed and that they can carry it with them as a reminder of their testimony and witness to the world.

8 On a Witness Hunt

Leader preparation: Imagine yourself interacting with or engaging someone very different from you in a way that might offer you another perspective about God. For instance, would you worship or attend an event at a church in a neighborhood with a socioeconomic status different from yours? Coming up with even more possibilities yourself will help as you begin the activity.

Supplies:

- Internet access or recent local newspapers

Talk about discipleship as a willingness to live in community with other followers of Christ, to hear and honor perspectives that are different from our own, and even to be challenged and changed by the people with whom we share the discipleship journey. Encourage participants to think of giving testimony and witness as both “giving” their own stories, perspectives, and lives as well as “receiving” the stories, perspectives, and lives of others. Invite participants to think about those with whom they could interact who would have a very different perspective than they do on how God is present in the world.

Discuss how participants could interact with or engage people in a way that would help them glimpse another perspective about God. After sharing initial ideas together, suggest that participants look through recent local newspapers or search the Internet together for spirituality-related ads or sites, information about local organizations, or Facebook pages of local people that might offer further ideas about new people or settings to seek out. Have the group think of an idea for how each person could seek a new opportunity for interacting with someone who likely has a different perspective about how God is present in the world. Perhaps you will want to set a time to come back together to see how this activity went for everyone.

Rules and Reflections

Leader preparation: Gather supplies and make selections of a monastic rule (or rules) available to participants during the activity. Public libraries and church libraries often have copies of The Rule of St. Benedict, or free electronic versions are available online at sites such as <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-rule>. Browse through the rule(s) in advance, and choose some samples to which you may draw participants’ attention. If you have time beforehand, reflect on the activity’s brainstorming question and come up with a couple sample ideas that you could share with participants to begin the brainstorming.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- pens and paper
- several copies of, or selections from, a monastic rule, such as The Rule of St. Benedict
- (optional) several computers with Internet access

Suggest that following Jesus involves assuming that all we do can witness to God’s ways of interacting with the world and give testimony about how that has affected us. Beginning in the ancient world, and even still today, some religious groups have developed a “rule,” or a set of guidelines for their community, to guide them in living together in ways that witness to God’s intentions of blessing for this world. Hand out printed selections or project electronic selections of a monastic rule to give participants some examples of what kinds of daily life guidelines a rule might give.

Open a group brainstorming session with this challenge: *Imagine that our group was writing a rule for regular things we could do at home, at school, at work, in the neighborhood, at the store, and other public places that would witness to God's intentions of blessing for the world. What habits would it make sense for us to encourage? What behaviors would we want to practice?* Take note of participants' ideas with a word or phrase on newsprint or a whiteboard. If time remains, encourage participants to begin writing down (or sending themselves an e-mail, blogging about, etc.) a rule they can imagine themselves using. Conclude by encouraging participants to finish drafting a rule at home and experiment with living by that rule for at least a week.

Reflect

Think back over the discussions and group projects you observed and ask yourself: "What specific changes do I think participants might try making in their daily lives as a result?" Remember that discipleship is a life-long journey as people continue to discern how to act, speak, and live in response to God in each new situation. If participants seem likely to come away from a "Discipleship" session with even one realistic possibility for experimenting with a new way of living testimony and witness, the session has been helpful.

Attachment: Activity 6

A Clearness Committee on Testimony and Witness

Some Basics

- *The Discerner:* From within your group, choose one person who is willing to be the discerner, someone seeking to make a decision about ways or settings in which to share a testimony in her or his daily life. The discerner might, for instance, have a certain social or work setting in mind and be trying to decide what words or actions would be effective for expressing her or his sense of God's presence.
- *The Committee:* The rest of the group will serve as the "clearness committee," willing to listen to the discerner's story and ask questions about her or his situation.

Some Ground Rules

- *The role of committee members is not, at any time, to offer advice or tell someone what to do.* The committee does not give the discerner answers but, instead, offers open-ended questions for the discerner to consider.

Some Suggestions

- The discerner may offer the committee a brief story or overview of the situation in which she or he wants to make a decision about where or how to give testimony. It would be helpful to conclude the overview with a statement of what the discerner is trying to decide.
- The committee members may respond to the discerner's story or overview with questions. These may be questions that ask for additional information or questions that help the discerner clarify issues, see situations from other perspectives, or gain insight so that she or he may make a well-considered decision.

Food For Thought

In addition to helping discern ways of testimony and witness, the clearness committee can itself be a way of witnessing to God's presence and power among us. The willingness of discerners to be vulnerable with others—and the willingness of a committee to offer the gifts of time and attention—"speak" very loudly of a trust that God's Spirit moves among followers of Christ and guides them as they seek to live in Christ's name. This applies to the clearness committee's discussing any topic that comes up (not only testimony or witness) as disciples seek to live in response to God.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Tradition for the sake of tradition is meaningless for most young adults. However, tradition that helps ground them in a community and makes them feel a sense of belonging is not only meaningful but often necessary for a highly mobile group of people. Helping young adults articulate what it is about Christian tradition that gives meaning to their faith today can help them grow deeper in their faith.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 52:7-10
2 Peter 1:16-21

Leader Preparation

Spend time thinking about what you know and experience as Christian tradition. If you feel like you're not sure what this means, spend time either on your denomination's website to see what you can learn, or Google the phrase "Christian tradition" to see what comes up, keeping in mind that just because you see it on the Internet doesn't necessarily mean it is true.

Prayer: God of our history, as we honor stories from many places and times, let it be a way of celebrating your presence with us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Opening Up to One Another (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 52:7–10, thinking about the different work, school, and home situations that your participants are likely to bring. Try to imagine some of the emotions or experiences in Isaiah 52 with which these participants might identify.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Isaiah 52 offers beautiful imagery about rejoicing, salvation, and good news. Spend time thinking about major news stories of the past week. How many of them were about good news? How many of them made you want to shout "My God reigns"? Think about the world and what is happening in it. How can this group gathered bring a message of good news locally or globally? Spend time practicing joyful testimony so that you might be able to take it into your places of work or study.

2 Traditions of Prophets

Leader preparation: Make enough copies of the attachment for each participant. Read both the attachment and Ezekiel 37:1–14, on which the script of the attachment is based. To help you facilitate discussion, take time to think about a seemingly hopeless situation you are familiar with and how you have seen yourself or others respond.

Supplies:

- "The Sound of Hope," Attachment: Activity 2
- Bibles

Ask for three volunteers to read aloud the script of "The Sound of Hope." While the readers look over the script, everyone else may read Ezekiel 37:1–14. After the performance of the script, invite reactions, comments, and questions. You could also offer prompts such as:

- Based on Ezekiel, how would you describe a "prophet"?
- What kinds of seemingly hopeless situations have you or people you know faced?
- How might Ezekiel have responded to those situations today? What might a "prophetic" response to these situations be like?

Have a discussion about how our testimony can be the impetus for change in our community and world. As Christians we are called to use our voices to testify to God's work in our lives and our communities.

3 Traditions of Worship

Leader preparation: "Testimony" is a loaded word. When some hear that we are going to hear testimonies in worship, visions of people baring their souls come to mind. But isn't all of worship really testimony? When we sing songs, listen to scripture and sermons, and share prayers, we are testifying to God's presence in

our lives. This activity will invite you to look at worship as testimony and to talk about what it might be like to have individuals testify during worship if you don't already share this practice.

Supplies:

- copies of a recent order of worship (one copy for each participant)
- Bibles
- (optional) recordings of music listed in the worship bulletin
- markers, pens, and paper
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Explain that some Christian communities regularly involve time for testimony as part of their worship services. Sometimes any worshipper may share, and other times pre-selected worshippers testify. Review your order of worship together. Talk about which portions of the service honor the practice of testimony. *How would your community respond to persons witnessing during worship? Why?* Read one of the scriptures listed in this particular service, and invite individuals to offer their testimony as they hear this text speaking to them. If you have a hymn or response that you regularly sing, consider singing it together and discuss how that is a testimony during worship.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Not Without Caution (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. Circle the words that relate to testimony and witness. The *Discipleship Study Bible* states, “This letter is presented as Peter’s dying testament and thus as a trustworthy, abiding witness to the apostolic foundations of Christian faith. . . . The chief doctrine defended in the letter is that of the second coming of Christ in power, glory, and judgment.” Think about what this means to you and how your learners will respond to these words.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read the quotation from the *Discipleship Study Bible* about 2 Peter. Talk about what feelings or thoughts emerge when you hear words like “apostolic foundations” or “chief doctrine.” Read aloud 2 Peter 1:16–2. *What testimony is being given? Are there parts of it that are uncomfortable or that just feel “wrong”?* Talk about how we do or don’t receive the testimony of the early church. *Are there times when it no longer seems to fit for where the church is today? How do we form our testimony so that it is relevant beyond our time?*

5 Picturing Our Witness

Leader preparation: Do an online search using the term “Christian icons” to read about a tradition of icons: what icons are, what common styles look like, what common subjects are, and so forth. Look at examples you find during this search, and consider the reflection question that you will ask participants: *What story is this picture telling about God?* (Sites with iconography such as Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icon> or <http://www.goarch.org/resources/clipart> may be helpful places to start.)

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hopi Virgin Mother” by John Giuliani
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr>
- watercolor paints, brushes, and paper
- towels for cleanup

Invite the participants to look at “Hopi Virgin Mother” and reflect on this question: *What story does this picture tell about God?* Encourage participants to share their thoughts out loud. Introduce the term “icon” as one type of religious art from which this image draws. Explain that traditions of stylized images of Christ, Mary, and the saints have not only expressed artists’ devotion, but also invited viewers into worship and a deeper relationship with the divine. Share any information you found in your online search. Ask participants to consider what story of witness they have to tell about God these days and to use the art supplies to at least begin creating an image representing that witness story. Invite participants to share their creations with the group, and talk about what testimony is being presented and what is being perceived by the observers.

6 Trying It On for Size

Leader preparation: Do the activity’s Internet search to familiarize yourself with some of the results your participants may encounter.

Supplies:

- Internet access

Not all traditions are helpful or constructive. There are traditions of testimony and witness that some have experienced as ineffective and even offensive. Invite participants to work in pairs to do an Internet search using the phrase “how not to witness.” Allow time for participants to share their favorite results with the whole group. Talk about why these examples were ineffective. Invite participants to talk about experiences they have had with witnessing that have been detrimental to spreading God’s love. Discuss ways to counter this kind of witnessing.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 Moments of Blessing (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Write the following service outline on newsprint or a whiteboard and post it where everyone can see:

1. Welcome
2. Reading from Isaiah 52:7–10
3. Prayer of thanksgiving
4. Reading from 2 Peter 1:16–21
5. Prayer of blessing for givers of testimony and witness in many places and times
6. Benediction

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- markers, pens, and paper
- (optional) copies of any hymnals or worship books from your church's sanctuary or library

This activity is an opportunity for participants to create and share a brief service of blessing. It can be an opportunity to pray for blessing for themselves and the many people across the world and throughout the years that have been part of a Christian tradition of offering testimony about God's presence and power. Encourage participants to volunteer to lead the different parts of the service you posted. Explain that volunteers will have a few moments to jot down notes, prepare what they would like to say, or familiarize themselves with their parts. If hymnals or worship books are available, suggest browsing through these for examples of welcomes, offering invitations, prayers, and benedictions. Those who have not volunteered may use the time to reflect on people whose testimony or witness has made the most powerful difference in their lives over the years. Once everyone has had time to prepare, invite volunteers to lead the group in this service of blessing.

8 Traditions of Sending

Leader preparation: Arrange for the song "Tú has venido a la orilla" to be played during the activity. You could obtain sheet music and find a musician to lead participants in singing, or you could find a recording (such as at the YouTube video <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ytorilla>) to play it for participants during the activity. In the initial meeting room for this activity, lay out markers, pens, paper, and modeling clay.

Supplies:

- song: "Tú has venido a la orilla" (tune: Pescador de hombres 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla>
- markers, pens, and paper
- modeling clay
- a second meeting space separate from the one in which the group begins this activity

Describe a form of testimony that is a custom in many Christian traditions: telling a "call story," a story of a turning point in someone's life in which she or he encountered Christ, or the Spirit of God, in a new way and experienced a "calling" to respond. Invite participants to listen to or sing along with the song "Tú has venido a la orilla" as an illustration of a call story.

Invite participants who have had a "calling" experience to reflect on ways to give testimony about that. Encourage participants who have not had such an experience to reflect on ways to give testimony about some other experience they have had of Christ, or the Spirit of God. Invite those who want to reflect through discussion to go to the second meeting room and find some conversation partners. Invite those who would like to reflect quietly to remain in the current meeting room and draw, color, write, or model with clay what they would like their testimony to express.

9 To Creed or Not to Creed

Leader preparation: Visit <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs> and find the Nicene Creed. If possible, make copies for all members of the group. Spend time studying the creed prior to the session. There is a paragraph at the end of the creed that gives some background and history.

Supplies:

- copies of the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed
- paper and pencils or pens

Many churches use some of the ancient creeds as a regular part of worship, such as the Nicene Creed or the Apostles Creed. Some churches use affirmations of faith instead of creeds. Distribute the copies of the creed or creeds you chose. Read it aloud. Then invite the participants to circle, underline, or make other marks for words or phrases that stick out to them. *What speaks to you? What feels foreign or lacks relevance to you?* As a group, discuss whether the regular use of a creed in worship is helpful.

Consider writing your own creed as a group. What statement of faith would this group like to use? Include a statement about each of the following: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the church. While doing this, have participants think about the early church fathers (and yes, they were fathers) and what it took for them to come to agreement on an acceptable creed for the church.

Reflect

Christian tradition is loaded with gifts of grace from the past and issues that bog us down for our time. What have you learned about your tradition? How has it impacted your testimony? How can you grow in your own understanding of the faith and your own testimony of it?

Attachment: Activity 2

The Sound of Hope

Based on Ezekiel 37:1-14.

Parts:

Narrator 1 Narrator 2 Ezekiel

Narrator 1: What are you supposed to say when something is hopeless? What if there were two people who used to be close, but then one of them got busy and preoccupied and the other didn't understand, and they tried to talk about it, but that didn't go well? Eventually, they stopped talking altogether, and the distance grew, and now whatever connection, whatever life there may have been between them, is gone. What do you do now?

Narrator 2: Or maybe it's your whole family or the whole village you live in: they're a whole group of people who will barely talk to one another. If a group can't form a body that works together, you're not seeing a body. You're not even seeing a corpse, because at least a corpse has muscles and sinews still holding things together. You see something hopeless.

Ezekiel: That's how I feel when God says, "Ezekiel, come here," and puts me down in this valley of dry bones. This is hopeless. I know you'll tell me this is only a vision, but I'll tell you, our real world is not looking much better. Jerusalem has fallen to the Babylonian army, the temple is destroyed, and you and I are in exile here in Babylon. We're separated from home in the Promised Land. We're separated from the closeness to God that the Promised Land meant. We're separated from our people. Do you remember how we would all get together at the Temple to worship? It's gone, and what do we do now? Can these dead, dry, disconnected bones of a community-that-isn't-a-community-any-more live?

Narrator 1: That's what God is asking this prophet, and the question sounds crazy. The answer should be obvious: the bones are dead. Can dead things live?

Narrator 2: The answer should be obvious, but prophets know God's world well enough to know that God's questions are as crazy as they are powerful. When God asks, it's like God is pushing. God is pulling meaning out of the crazy things we find ourselves in the middle of, and "meaning" here seems to be that even the hopelessly dead can live.

Ezekiel: The hopelessly dead can live, and you and I get to be part of it.

Narrator 1: Being part of it isn't easy. God doesn't tell Ezekiel to prophesy to living people who might actually hear what he has to say. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to dry bones.

(continued)

Attachment: Activity 2 (continued)

Narrator 2: Have you ever had one of those moments? It's as if God is calling you to do something so crazy, so hopeless that if you really think about it, there's no reason for you to try it.

Ezekiel: God tells me to prophesy to these bones, and I do it. I look at these bones, and I tell them what amazing, glorious life God is bringing for them. And do you know what happens? It was so silent there in that valley of dry bones, but when I started speaking like I really believed what I was saying, this rattling started. "What is that sound?" I wondered. But then I realized what it was. The bones were responding. The bones were coming together!

Narrator 1: But remember that not everything comes together all at once. There was still no breath.

Ezekiel: That's when I hear God telling me: "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal." As if power was in my voice! Well, it wasn't my power. It's like when you do something that seems little enough, but then realize that something bigger is happening. You're not the only one involved. What we do is important. It can even be sacred. There can be hope and power in what we do.

Narrator 2: It's not our power. But, when our hands hold the tools or the pots and pans, when our voices hum and sing the songs of life and hope . . .

Ezekiel: God uses that!

Narrator 1: When we clean, build, bake, or sing when they seem like pointless things to do . . .

Ezekiel: God uses us with power for blessing. Just look at me: I prophesied to a valley of dry bones, and God brought them to life!

Narrator 2: Think about it. Isn't that exactly the kind of thing God does?

Ezekiel: God takes things and people and brings us to life. And God uses us to do it. God uses our hands, our voices, and our lives to set things into motion. So remember that even when your world looks dead and dry, even when your life sounds absolutely silent, you can still listen. Listen. Even the sound of dead bones rattling is the sound of hope. Listen. What do you hear?

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

The digital age makes it possible for this young adult generation to form connections across the globe. Many have grown accustomed to life in an ever-expanding community. This gives young adults good groundwork for a growing awareness of the contexts in which they may witness to God's presence and give testimony to God's love to the world.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Matthew 5:13–20**Romans 8:31–39****Leader Preparation**

Too often when we talk about mission in the church someone shouts, “We need to take care of our own first.” This is the classic tension between knowing our own context and yet being open to mission in the world. As you prepare to lead your group through these activities, keep in mind the needs of your local context and how you can respond to needs in a more global sense as well.

Prayer: God of grace, give us sharp minds and tender hearts so we can understand your creation enough to love it wisely. We ask in Christ’s name. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities**1 Let Your Light Shine (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Because we are surrounded by all kinds of lights everywhere, it’s difficult to imagine what it is like to be in total darkness. Those who live in rural areas have a better idea, but even there one has yard lights or motion sensor lights, and often the lights of neighboring towns can even be seen on the horizon. In Jesus’ day there were no electric lights, so when night came life was dark. To offer a candle in a dark room was to offer light to a dark world.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Matthew 5:13–20 together. There are a lot of images in this text to play with, but focus on being the light of the world. Think about places in your community, in your country, in the world where life is “dark,” where people suffer daily due to lack of food, housing, education, healthcare, employment, and security. List these in one column on newsprint or a whiteboard. How can your faith community be a light in just one of these places? What can your group do to be a light to the world where hunger, poverty, and homelessness exist? List suggestions in a second column on the newsprint or whiteboard. Through discussion, identify at least one idea your group can follow through on to live out their testimony to God’s love to the world.

2 Meeting the Neighbors

Leader preparation: We are often tempted to think there are only two alternatives for interacting with people of different religious beliefs: convert them to Christianity, or completely ignore the topic of religious belief. This activity presents a chance to practice a third option: interacting with people of other religious perspectives by exploring their beliefs, exploring the similarities and differences between their beliefs and ours, and honoring everyone involved as people made in God’s image. If possible, invite someone of a different faith to come to your group, or make arrangements to go visit a different community of faith.

Supplies:

- a guest of a different faith tradition

Present the idea of at least three options for interacting with people of different religious beliefs: try to convert others to Christianity, ignore the topic of religious belief in your interaction, or explore similarities and differences of beliefs and honor everyone as people made in God’s image. Introduce your guest, and invite that person to describe some basic beliefs of his or her faith tradition. *What might your faith traditions have in common? What is different? Invite conversation about what in each faith tradition has value for believers. What in your faith tradition is a struggle or obstacle for you?*

 **3 A Seeding Mission**

Leader preparation: When gathering supplies, make enough copies of the pictures so that each participant may have several pictures. Consider using pictures of local places that you have taken. You might visit the workplaces or schools of some of your participants to take photographs there, or you could photograph local stores, parks, neighborhoods, and other public places with which your participants are likely to identify.

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh
<http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR>
- a selection of pictures of stores, school, neighborhood, workplace, home, and other everyday settings with which participants are likely to identify

This activity is a chance to explore giving testimony and witness as being on a mission to sow seeds that God will eventually harvest. Our role is like taking care of seeds and soil, doing our best to help them nurture one another, and knowing that the actual harvest will be in God’s hands. Invite participants to look at Van Gogh’s “The Sower” and to wonder what it might be like to be that sower. After a while, give participants pictures of the everyday settings. Encourage them to find a partner, spend time looking at each other’s pictures, and discuss the following questions:

- What seeds could get planted in those places?
- What would it be like to be a sower in that place? What would you plant?

Gather the whole group together, and invite each pair to present a couple of answers they came up with. Ask the group if they would consider planting any of those seeds together as a group.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 **4 Insisting on Possibility (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Make a list of situations where you found it difficult to communicate or interact with people who were “different” from you. Spend time wondering why that may have been in order to help you offer examples or suggestions.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Present the idea of giving testimony as part of our mission of participating in God’s saving work with the world. In sharing testimony, we communicate with our fellow human beings (with or without words) about how we have caught glimpses of God and God’s work. Suggest that it can be a challenge to communicate with people who are different from us, who have different life experiences, who talk differently than we do, or who think about things differently than we do. Encourage participants to name examples of times they found it difficult to communicate or interact with people who were “different” from them. List their examples on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Ask: *What might be some ways to succeed in these situations by listening and communicating about one another's experiences of God?* Invite four volunteers willing to choose a situation from the list and create a short improvisation in which characters use some of these methods to listen and communicate about their experiences of God. Afterward, ask the group: *What worked well? What would you be curious to try differently?* Encourage participants to assume that in every situation there will be a way for them to love with God's love, forgive with God's forgiveness, listen with God's patience, or in some other way act on their experience of God.

5 Salt for the Earth

Leader preparation: Arrange for the song "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People" to be played during the activity. You could obtain sheet music and find a musician to be present, or you could find a recording (such as at the link below) so participants can listen and learn to sing the song.

Supplies:

- song: "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People" (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain Marty Haugen, 1986) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt>
- Internet access
- local newspapers or other print materials with event calendar listings for the area

Describe witness as recognizing God's gifts in the many different contexts we encounter. When we practice noticing gifts in places, experiences, lifestyles, perspectives, and cultures different from our own, we are practicing some of the tools of witness. Offer the song "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People" as an illustration of this worldview, encouraging participants to look over the lyrics as they listen. Draw attention to how the song tells people that they are "holy and bright," that they are "blessed," and that their lives are "seeds of mercy and justice."

Invite participants to browse the Internet, newspapers, or event listings to identify public places or upcoming public events that they would not normally attend, and talk together about why they might feel uncomfortable going to such an event. As a group, choose an event to attend together and to carry the "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People" song (or at least some of its lyrics) in their heads as they do so. Encourage them to blog, post on Facebook, or send an e-mail about where they went, what the place and people were like, what they learned, what surprised them, or what difference it made to have that song in their heads. Remind participants that expressing awareness of God's blessings in the world is a form of witness.

6 Practicing the Gift Hunt

Leader preparation: Engage in your own gift hunt, as the activity describes it, so that you can offer your reflections, as well as images or recordings, as part of your introduction.

Supplies:

- pens and paper
- (optional) camera or audio or video recording device

Witnessing can be based on our practice of watching, listening, and learning how God's Spirit and gifts are already at work in peoples' lives. Part of our mission with witnessing is to acknowledge God's Spirit and gifts as present in the world.

Describe witnessing as being on a “gift hunt” in which we assume that God has already gifted every person we meet, and we are hunting for what those gifts may be.

Invite participants to find a partner and practice a gift hunt with one another. They could casually talk, formally interview one another, share in some side-by-side activity, or engage in any other way that could help them learn about one another and glimpse God’s gifts in one another’s lives. Conclude by sending participants on a gift hunt this week, the results of which they will share with at least one friend.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Go into All the World (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 28:19–20. Spend time thinking about the different ways this can be interpreted and what it means in light of a faith practice of testimony and witness. Also consider what our world would look like if “everyone” were Christian. What would be our unique witness? How would this water down for us what our faith means?

Supplies:

- Bibles

Throughout the ages Matthew 28:19–20 has sometimes been used as a weapon against people of differing faiths. Rather than inviting people to faith in Jesus Christ, the crusaders, missionaries, and many others forced the faith on others, sometimes even killing them if they did not choose to be baptized. Talk about ways our witness has been harmful through the ages. *Think about how we have been talking about testimony and witness as a group. How will you share your testimony in ways that it can be heard by others without making them feel less of a person if they don’t share your testimony? Why is testimony important? Must we always use words to testify to our faith?*

8 Knowing People by Their Songs

Leader preparation: If you have contact with participants before the session, invite them to bring recordings of “popular” music they listen to. Find recordings yourself, and listen for the different longings they seem to express or suggest.

Supplies:

- Internet access
- MP3 player, CD player, or radio
- recordings of “popular” music
- pens and paper

Present the idea that sharing testimony and witness effectively often happens in the context of relationships in which we have gotten to know the people with whom we share. One way to get to know others is to pay attention to the music they like, since people often listen to music that expresses thoughts and feelings they identify with. Listen to some music that has been brought or that participants find on a radio or an online radio. With each song, listen for the hopes, dreams, struggles, or worries that it expresses. Allow time after each song for participants to name what they heard. Divide participants into groups of 2–3 people to focus

on one song, imagining that they are interacting with people for whom this is a favorite song. Encourage the groups to practice witnessing in that context by either writing new song lyrics that point to God or by role playing together a situation of witness with people experiencing some of the longings in that song.

⑨ Honoring One Another's Mission

Leader preparation: Consider the reflection prompts (below), coming up with ideas for honoring someone, and trying out one of them.

Supplies:

- recordings of celebration like music and a way to play them in the background
- markers, pens, and paper

Sharing witness in a setting that seems foreign to us can be as simple as celebrating and honoring the witness of someone else who gave us a glimpse of God's welcoming presence in a setting in which we would have otherwise felt like strangers. Even if the person may not have thought of her or his actions as witnessing to God, our witness can be that of naming the witness that person provided, pointing to God's blessing through that person's action. Encourage participants to scribble, draw, or somehow respond on paper to these reflection prompts:

- Think about a person who made you feel welcome or safe or who paid attention to you when you were in a new situation. What was that like?

Allow a few moments before asking the next question.

- Imagine doing something to honor that person as someone who shared God's goodness with you. What would you do?

Encourage participants in the week ahead to act on one of their ideas for honoring the person identified to be honored.

Reflect

Reflect on participants' reactions to the activities. Identify how many may have gained motivation to interact with someone they would not have normally interacted with or get to know better someone who is very different from them. Think about how your testimony is a living out of God's mission in your life. How can you continue to share that with others?

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

Young adults experience the world changing around them at a pace unheard of in previous generations. Many respond with flexibility, finding in change an opportunity for creativity instead of a reason for fear. As young adults give and receive testimony and witness, they practice naming how God has already been at work. A generation familiar with change, they are well-positioned to share their experiences of God in the confidence that the world has every potential for transformation by grace. There is an opportunity to offer glimpses of a future that God is redeeming.

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

You will encourage participants to practice living in ways that point to God’s new creation. Take time to ask yourself what you imagine God’s new creation will be like.

Prayer: God, give us eyes to see this world in light of you and your love. Deepen our vision so we may be bold enough to imagine possibilities in your name. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Exploring the Message (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on the discussion questions and think about the different school, work, and home situations that your participants are likely to bring. Try to imagine in advance some of the emotions or situations in 2 Timothy with which these participants might identify.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Prepare for the Bible reading by asking participants to listen for what kind of experiences Paul had in his life. Invite a volunteer read aloud 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. Begin a discussion by asking questions such as:

- With which experience that Paul describes could you identify?
- What messages about God’s future do you think Paul’s life might have given?
- How do you think Paul would have written this letter if he had studied at your school, worked at your work place, or lived with your family?

2 Recognizing the Challenge

Leader preparation: Choose a range of media, perhaps asking for old magazines from waiting rooms or from a library to expand choices beyond what you already have. Whether print or Internet media, whether fashion magazines or business journals, choose items that reflect ways your participants are used to finding news and popular culture and the topics that will interest them.

Supplies:

- newspapers, magazines, or sources of news and popular culture (including online sources)
- paper, scissors, markers, and pens

Invite the participants to browse the newspapers, magazines, or their favorite websites for news and cultural information. Pose questions such as:

- What is portrayed as common or acceptable that you think can be harmful—things such as dress, language, social habits, relationships?
- Where are people portrayed as offering something better than the status quo or what is typical?
- How do your beliefs about God and/or your commitment to following Christ change (or not change) your thoughts and feelings about what you are seeing in this media?

Invite participants to use the paper, scissors, markers, or pens to recreate one of the print media pages with articles and advertisements that give a glimpse of what God’s new creation might be like. Invite those using the Internet to tweet, blog, or update a Facebook page in ways that give a glimpse of what God’s new creation might be like.



3 Joining the Story

Leader preparation: Prepare enough copies of the attachment for each participant. Read both the attachment and Esther 4:10–16, on which the attachment is based. To help facilitate the discussion at the end, think about which character in the Esther story you identify with and imagine how you would have acted in that situation.

Supplies:

- “A Moment at the Door,” Attachment: Activity 3
- Bibles

Ask for 2–4 volunteers to act out the parts of “A Moment at the Door.” While the actors read over the script, everyone else may read Esther 4:10–16. After the reading, invite reactions, comments, and questions. You could also offer prompts such as:

- What “doors” have you, your friends or family faced in your lives?
- How have your responses to difficulties shown others that you assume God is blessing the world?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Sharing the Dreams (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the Philemon passage, and think about a time when you cast a vision (or wish you had cast a vision) about something good that could happen. Keep this memory in mind as you encourage participants to find ways to express their hopes and dreams.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers, pens, and newsprint or posterboard
- (optional) Internet access

Witnessing to God’s future involves sharing hopes and dreams with one another in ways that build up rather than threatening or tearing down. Give the example of Paul writing to the slave owner, Philemon. Paul does not criticize Philemon or tell him what he should do when his slave, Onesimus, returns. Instead, Paul casts a vision of what the reunion between Philemon and Onesimus could be like. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Philemon 1:1–25, and suggest that, during the reading, participants listen for how Paul shares a dream with Philemon.

Invite participants to discuss how they might create a project that could invite other members of their faith community to practice expressing some hopes and dreams for that community. Some possibilities include creating a dream catcher where people may tape up notes that share a dream for the community, or starting a blog where people may post and comment on one another’s dreams for the community. Before the end of the activity, encourage participants to divide into smaller groups to take responsibility for finishing the project and for talking with other people in the faith community about the project, encouraging them to participate by sharing their dreams.

5 Naming the Fear

Leader preparation: Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18, and read through the activity, reflecting on what your stone would represent.

Supplies:

- small stones that fit in the palm of the hand, one for each participant
- Bibles
- recordings of soft instrumental or reflective music

Explain that the participants will not be asked to speak, respond, or share anything out loud during this activity. It will be a time for internal reflection in response to the Bible reading. Suggest that during the reading they wonder about the people, possibilities, or things that the speaker Paul may have lost as a result of his witness about the gospel. Read aloud 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. Play the music in the background. Give participants a stone, asking them to imagine that it represents everything they could lose as a result of expressing their gospel-related hopes: respect, opportunities, relationships—anything that an unusual set of hopes might cost them. Invite them into a moment of silence. Afterward, pray this or a similar prayer: *We offer this for your future, God.*

6 Practicing Dialogue

Leader preparation: Imagine a setting in your own life where you find that you have the most trouble maintaining hope in a future that God is redeeming. Consider keeping a journal to reflect on why it is so difficult for you to muster hope in that setting. These reflections will help you prompt participants who may have trouble engaging this activity’s role playing.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- pens and paper

Invite discussion about why people may find it difficult in some situations to speak about their experiences of God, the kind of hope they take in God’s promised new creation begun with Christ, or the ways they have glimpsed that new creation already alive in their own communities. Ask for 2–3 volunteers to enact an impromptu role play where someone is finding it difficult to express hope in God’s new creation. Assure them up front that the volunteers will be able to create their own situation and roles and that everyone else will watch share what they observe.

As you give the volunteers time to prepare, continue the discussion with the other participants. When the volunteers are ready to offer their role play, encourage the others to watch for effective moments of testimony and witness. After the role play, invite observers to make comments on what happened as well as suggestions about actions and words they might have tried as different options. If time remains, ask others to present another role play.

Sending & Serving Activities

**7 Blessing the People (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Write this question on newsprint or whiteboard and post it where all can see it: *How would you like to offer others a hint of what God's redeemed creation may be like?* Try to come up with your list of answers to this question.

Supplies:

- "A Litany of Blessing for People of Possibility," Attachment: Activity 7
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper, pens, and markers

Compare giving testimony and witness to giving one another a hint of what God's redeemed creation may be like. Invite a discussion about possible ways to offer a hint of what God's redeemed creation would look like. If participants need encouragement, offer examples of people acting with God's kind of love, justice, and peace: giving one another a chance to use God-given gifts and talents, making sure a stranger or visitor is well fed and cared for, spending time with the ill or elderly and treating them with dignity, and so forth. When the conversation seems to have come full circle, read aloud the question you posted. Assure participants that they will not be asked to share their answers with anyone else. Then invite them to take a few minutes to draw a picture, write a poem, or create something with paper, pens, and markers that answer the question. When everyone has finished, read the "Litany and Blessing for People of Possibility."

8 Offering the Gift

Leader preparation: Think about each participant and consider these questions: *How has this person given me a glimpse of God's future? How can I imagine this person using her or his gifts to give an effective witness?* Write these questions on newsprint or whiteboard where all can see. (Note: This activity is designed for groups whose participants already have familiarity with one another; it is not ideal for people who barely know one another.)

Supplies:

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

Explain that it is not possible for any one person alone to give testimony and witness. No one person has a complete perspective on God's work, and we need one another to notice what we would miss by ourselves. This is an opportunity to offer one another a gift: a new perspective on the special glimpse of God's future that we may have.

Read aloud the questions you posted, and invite participants to write some notes in response to one of those questions about the person sitting on the right. Take the remainder of the time to allow participants to share their responses with the group and, when they are finished, to give their notes as gifts to the person to the right about whom they have spoken.

9 Singing the Future

Leader preparation: Arrange for the song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” to be played during the activity. You could obtain sheet music and find a musician to be present for the activity, or you could find a recording (such as at the YouTube link below) and a way to play it during the activity. Gather the rest of the supplies. Obtain enough percussion instruments or noisemakers for each person. Take some time prior to the session to practice teaching the song to someone who does not know it yet.

Supplies:

- song: “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb>, or on YouTube at <http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-ytsiyahamb>
- drums, tambourines, maracas, or any other percussion instruments or noisemakers

Encourage the group to imagine giving testimony and witness as something like expressing awareness of God’s grace and blessing all over the place. Suggest that participants hear the song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” with this in mind. Play the song for the group, and invite everyone to sing along or keep the beat as soon as they know it.

Have participants create lyrics for a new verse, such as “We are [participants’ new word] in the light of God,” so you might issue this invitation with a prompt such as: “Walking, singing—what other things have you done where you have found God’s light, grace, or blessing with you?” Sing the song again using the original verses and adding the new verses. Conclude by encouraging participants to share the song with someone else this week, perhaps with a child in the family or with a friend who enjoys music.

Reflect

Consider when it was that participants seemed the most energetic or engaged about testifying and witnessing to God’s future. Was it about a certain idea or vision of the future? Was it about a specific kind of activity or practice that resonated for them? Was it about a certain setting or situation with which they could identify? Ask yourself what seemed especially meaningful for them as a way of thinking about who these participants are and what ways God’s future may be coming to life in them today.

Attachment: Activity 3

A Moment at the Door

Based on Esther 4:10–16.

Parts: Esther Mordecai

Esther: Have you ever found yourself standing at a door in your life? You don't know what's on the other side of the door, but you do know it's going to be hard. Life can be hard, and to be honest, I've spent much of my life avoiding the difficult things.

Mordecai: She lived a pretty quiet life. I'd encouraged my cousin to live faithfully, but neither of us always lived up to that. When king Ahasuerus called for Esther to be queen, she went. There wasn't much choice, of course. But, I told her not to reveal her Jewish heritage. Sure, everybody loved her, but they didn't really know who she was. That was her life.

Esther: That was my life until I came to this thing I couldn't avoid. Oh, I tried! Believe me. You see, one day my cousin Mordecai sent a message. He'd found out about plans to kill all the Jewish people in the kingdom. He sent me word:

Mordecai: Esther, you've got to tell the king what's happening and beg him to help your people!

Esther: It's not that easy! I sent word back to Mordecai and told him, "Everybody knows that if you go to the king's inner court when you haven't been called, you'll be killed. The law applies to everybody, even the queen."

Mordecai: Would you go through that door if it meant death? Worst-case scenarios can scare us to death. It's like when you risk putting yourself out there for something, and you're afraid someone will reject your idea and never take you seriously again!

Esther: Or, maybe you're afraid that if you make a big deal about something with your friend or child or parent or spouse or sister or brother, things might blow up! I'm not the only one who's not wanted to do something because I was afraid of what might happen.

Mordecai: Esther, if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish.

(Esther paces. Then she and Mordecai both kneel in silence, as if praying.)

Mordecai: If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but . . .

Esther: That was when I heard something. Have you ever heard the same words over and over again, but suddenly heard something different? I heard "relief and deliverance will rise," and I heard that if I have a chance to do something for my people and I don't do it, God will still save them. I may mess things up beyond belief, but I cannot stop God from setting things right. The question is, do I want to be part of it?

Mordecai: Do you want to be part of it?

(continued)

Attachment: Activity 3 (continued)

Esther: It sounded like an adventure, and for the first time in my life, I was ready for an adventure. I was ready for the world to be different from what it had always been. I was ready for me to be different from what I had always been.

Mordecai: I know. I know she didn't have the slightest clue what was coming next.

Esther: I had no idea what God redeeming the world was going to look like in *my* life. I was still scared to death. But now, something was becoming more powerful than my fear.

Mordecai: God is creative enough to make even you part of the blessing, and that possibility can become more powerful than your fear.

Esther: For the first time in my life, I found myself looking at my fear, at the worst thing I could possibly imagine, and I said, "If it happens, it happens. If I perish, I perish."

Mordecai: That was when the story changed.

Esther: That was when I changed. I started acting like God really was blessing the world and I would be part of the blessing.

Mordecai: Assume that God will make you part of the blessing.

Esther: I started speaking up. I started using some pretty creative ideas for dealing with a very nasty situation. I went to the door of the king's inner court, and I had no idea what to expect in there. But, I was willing to be surprised.

Mordecai: Are you willing to be surprised? Whatever you're in the middle of—do you believe God can use it? That God can use you? God is blessing this world.

Esther: So, know that God will find a way to make you part of the blessing.

"A Moment at the Door," © 2009 by Callie J. Smith. Used by permission.

Attachment: Activity 7

A Litany and Blessing for People of Possibility

Leader: God of creation, we celebrate the world you have made and are making new. Ready for the time when all will be healed, we walk, speak, and imagine in honor of your future . . .

All: We celebrate your past.

Leader: We celebrate with one another the moments we have tasted, touched, and glimpsed a corner of life as you want it to be. We celebrate and encourage one another to imagine our days as shot-through with your grace . . .

All: We tell stories of you with us.

Leader: We will live on behalf of neighbors as well as strangers, assuming they are your treasured people . . .

Left Side of Room: We sing our songs for you.

Leader: We sing and build, care and work as if we expect your new creation to greet the people who come after us. Let us find your blessing, God, so that we may live on behalf of many.

Right Side of Room: We do our work as if it blessed you.

Leader: We offer our lives as part of your new creation, ourselves your partners. Let us live as signposts that point to your possibilities for the world.

All: We who offer what we are.

Leader: Let us touch one another with your blessing . . .

(All place their hands on the shoulders of the people beside them.)

All: . . . and acknowledge one another as your people.

Leader: Let us live God's story. Amen.

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