

“When You Gather Together”: A Worship Curriculum



2015



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Introduction

By Bob Fox & John Inscore Essick

What does every church need? That is the question that led to the production of the curriculum that is now in your hands. The Kentucky Baptist Fellowship is a network of Baptist churches partnering to do missions in service to Christ. But our churches are in no way the same. Some of our churches are small and rural, some have big steeples in small towns and others reflect the size and broad diversity of their urban setting.

In order to determine what every church needed, the question became even more basic. What does every church do? We could have chosen to address ministry in an urban context, preaching with the small congregation, singles ministry or some other worthy and good effort, but they would be, by their very nature, limited in effectiveness to certain types of congregations.

It did not take long to realize that what every church does is also its most important effort. Every church worships. Large, small, farming community, suburban, sanctuary, converted Walmart, cowboy, liturgical, liberal or conservative every church gathers for times of formal worship. Worship enables us to hear and respond to God's call to surrender ourselves to God as God's people, individually and together.

With the organizing topic in sight, our question became "What does every church need regarding worship?" And almost as soon as we asked it, we realized that in the past twenty to thirty years there has been too much heat and too little light generated by discussions preoccupied with worship *style*. Unfortunately, so many well-intentioned worship discussions rarely advance beyond questions of style. We are deeply saddened that discussion of worship in our churches has become so heated that a military metaphor is often used to describe it. But, must talking about worship necessarily descend into "worship wars"? We think not, and our work with KBF churches during the last year suggests that deep and reflective conversations about worship are both possible and popular.

"When You Gather Together": A Year-Long Look at Worship

When we began to dream about and plan a year-long focus on worship we chose to focus on several of the deeper aspects of worship which are often neglected in surface-level discussions of style. And so our question became "What does every church need to enrich the content of their worship?"

We posed this question to the faculty of the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky early in the summer of 2014, and the consensus was that a year-long look at five basic components of Christian worship could be fruitful. We concluded that worship in our churches involves (or ought to!) at the very least some form of gathering, confession of sin, intercessory prayer, proclamation, and sending. Christian worship certainly involves more than this, but there was no doubt that these five topics could sustain a year's worth of study and conversation at the local, regional, and state-wide level. We had a vision, and soon we had a title – “When You Gather Together: Building Up the Church In Worship.”

Step 1 – Kentucky State Gathering at CBF General Assembly

The KBF year of worship began at the Kentucky State Gathering at the CBF General Assembly in Atlanta (June 26, 2014). State meetings usually proceed by attending to various business matters, reports, and a presentation of some sort. This is well and good, but we wanted to use our state meeting to publicize this project by having those in attendance worship together. So, we spent time reflecting on the following aspects of worship that would shape a year-long process: 1) Gathering, 2) Confessing (Sin), 3) Interceding, 4) Proclamation, and 5) Sending. The worship guide from that meeting is included as Appendix A.

Step 2 – Regional Listening Conversations

In the fall of 2014 representatives from KBF and BSK organized regional “Listening Conversations” in Corbin, Lexington, Louisville, and Owensboro. The aim of the conversations was two-fold. First, we wanted to ask good questions about worship and listen to what KBF laity and clergy had to say. Second, we wanted to get a sense of which topics or questions to address more fully at a KBF-BSK Worship Conference in February 2015. At each of these gatherings BSK faculty facilitated discussion of the five focus areas using a set of questions designed to help participants question and examine their assumptions about worship (the questions are attached as Appendix B). The faculty found these questions to be helpful building blocks for fruitful dialogue, and you are welcome to weave these questions into your own discussions. In listening to folks respond to these questions, we learned that laity and clergy in our churches care deeply about worship, desire to talk about worship, and are looking for ways to enrich their worship.

Step 3 – Worship Conference

Building on the regional listening conversations, more than 80 folks gathered at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky on Friday, February 6, 2015 for a conference dedicated to helping congregants and worship leaders address several of the deeper and more substantive habits of Christian worship. Workshops led by BSK faculty considered

ways God’s people can more faithfully talk about worship, confess sin, pray, and proclaim the power of God’s Word. Again, it was clear to us that laity and clergy care deeply about worship and desire to worship more faithfully.

Step 4 – KBF Worship Curriculum

The fourth and final step of this year-long focus on worship is this five-lesson worship curriculum. As the list of contributors shows, this curriculum is a collaborative effort. Authors and co-authors representing at least 17 different congregations from across the state graciously and capably wrote introductions and lesson plans on each of the five worship topics for four age groups (preschool/kindergarten, elementary, youth, and adult).

Each section begins with an introductory essay aimed at teachers, adults, and possibly youth. The essay 1) defines the topic and describes its role in worship, 2) offers an analysis and explanation of the topic, and 3) concludes with the implications of fully integrating the topic into worship.

Each lesson plan begins with an introductory statement defining the topic broadly and making a case for why it is worthy of our attention. A “Materials/Preparation” section is included at the beginning of the lessons so that teachers can see what planning and preparation the lesson requires. All lessons focus on a particular scripture passage (some include more than one), followed by age-appropriate activities designed to take the group deeper into the topic and provide some handles for thinking and talking about it. Most lessons close with a short benediction that draws together a theme or salient point from the lesson.

We are particularly proud of the “Considerations for Working With Congregants Who Have Intellectual Disabilities” section. We encourage everyone to read it and consider how all teaching and discussion might improve in light of it. While principally targeting those whose classes include students with IDD (Intellectual or Developmental Delays), the material also provides helpful information for any teacher who wants to communicate well with a variety of students. In addition, this section calls us as worshiping communities to be attentive to *all* people. This includes intentional planning and making accommodations for those with IDD so that we all rightly know our place in the worshiping body of Christ.

Using the Curriculum

These units are intentionally modular. It is our hope that each church will adapt and use them in ways they find helpful. Some churches may use this as an all-

encompassing emphasis for five weeks and go straight through the curriculum. We envision some churches using the lessons for Sunday School and crafting worship and preaching around the weekly theme. Others may wish to use these materials for discipleship study. Still others may wish to use the children and youth lessons during a Wednesday night program. A worship planning committee or small group may want to examine how current practices might incorporate these facets more fully and intentionally.

We have chosen to present this material as five discrete units in what is essentially the order in which they generally appear in a traditional worship service. There is no need to use our order or to use all of the material. This means that a youth leader who has a Sunday to fill could pull one of the lessons and use it as a discrete learning opportunity. Or, a church might want to study only the gathering, proclaiming and sending pieces in an order that makes the most sense in its context.

In short, the number of ways you might use these materials is limited only by your imagination. We will have achieved our goal for this curriculum as people use it and make it their own. This work is the result of a conversation, but our prayer is that it is not the conclusion of that conversation but the starting point for new and fruitful conversations in and among the churches that use it.

Acknowledgements

This curriculum has been produced by KBF Baptists for KBF Baptists (and anyone else who is interested in fostering deep conversations about worship) and is the fruit of a year's worth of work by so many people. We want to thank first the ministers who wrote this curriculum. They endured many e-mails with grace and patience. Their work will, undoubtedly, build up our churches in worship. Second, we are thankful for the valuable insight, advice, and counsel given by the faculty of Baptist Seminary of Kentucky. This curriculum is a powerful reminder of how helpful a theological institution when it is committed to helping shape the questions rather than providing all the answers. Finally, we must call attention to the excellent editing, proofreading, and formatting work provided by Elizabeth Sands Wise, Jarrod Lopez, Carrie Bearden, and Peggy Foskett. Their work is a gift given with humility and cheerfulness. May your church be built up as you gather together around this curriculum to talk about worship.

Grace and peace,

Bob Fox & John Inscore Essick

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Gathering: An Introduction

By Ande Myers & Paul Sims

Definition

Gathering for worship is a response to God's call to join with others as we follow Christ with our lives, our thoughts, our energy, and our substance. When we gather to worship, we declare our desire to listen to God's instruction and to follow God with all that we have. We declare that we need God's guidance. We declare that we rely upon God's strength.

Explanation and Analysis

Imagine this scene: It is Sunday morning, worshipers are walking together toward their neighborhood church. There is laughter along the way as some hurry, some stroll, and some walk with a purpose. As they make their way into the church building they join the others who arrived earlier. These early arrivals are in the basement enjoying coffee together and catching up on the events of the week.

Or perhaps this one: People are pulling into open parking places at a strip mall on Saturday night and avoiding the flashy neon signs. Instead, they are entering an open space with folding chairs, a drum kit and a projector. The dress and atmosphere are casual as energetic music embraces those who arrive.

However we gather for worship, we ought to recognize that it is God who gathers us. God has called us together as the body of Christ. Paul challenged the church in Corinth: *For just as the body is one and has many members ... so it is with Christ.* (I Corinthians 12:12, ESV)

And in this body, Paul said, there are *varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.* (I Corinthians chapter 12:4-7, ESV)

When we gather together for worship we recognize that God is forming us into the body of Christ. And through God's formation we can do together what we cannot do alone. We hear God's call in relationship with each other in ways that are not possible when we are alone. When we gather together we embody Jesus' call as he declared, *You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14-16, ESV)

So we gather together as we praise, as we serve, and as we witness. Gathered we become the salt, the light, the city set on the hill. In gathering we find we are the body of Christ divinely equipped with a vast array of gifts.

Consider again the local church with its many iterations. The bells in the steeple ring. In the sanctuary or worship center a PowerPoint presentation highlights opportunities for missional service, the praise team encourages a time of singing together, the prelude music begins to play, conversation slowly ceases, and attention turns to worship.

These opening moments of worship vary by setting, but they are sacred moments for the gathered by God. This time has been set apart through custom and tradition. As the prelude begins worshipers are beckoned to “come away from rush and hurry.”¹

As the church family gathers together they share their concerns, hopes and dreams and perhaps most importantly disappointments. They lift up the needs of the world and encourage one another. These worshipers have come to depend on one another, for gathered they have become members of Christ’s body being sent to do Kingdom work.

Worshipers gather for many reasons and with a variety of needs and intentions. Certainly Augustine was onto something when he wrote in the opening lines of his *Confessions* that God “stirs” people to take pleasure in offering praise. Augustine prayed to God, “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”²

For many of the gathered, preparation did not simply begin in the moments they entered the doors or the prelude began. Some prepared as they read blogs throughout the week. Some began preparing on Saturday afternoon as they studied their Sunday School lessons and lifted up the worship service in their prayers. Some prepared early on Sunday morning with private rituals or quietness reserved especially for that day. Some prepared by reading the lectionary scriptures for the day. Others prepared in the walk, or on the drive, or in the sharing of hot coffee and conversation with church family. Still others prepared for their next gathering as they were sent from worship the week before.

¹From the hymn text “Come Away from Rush and Hurry,” by Marva J. Dawn (1999)

²Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

Pilgrim Songs

There is a short portion of the Psalms called the ‘Psalms of Ascents’ or the ‘Pilgrim Songs.’ (Psalms 120-134) It is believed that worshipping pilgrims sang or recited these songs like a prelude as they journeyed and made their way up toward Jerusalem and up the steps to the Temple. Here are a few examples.

- *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.* (Psalm 121:1, ESV)
- *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"* (Psalm 122:1, ESV)
- *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side ... if it had not been the LORD who was on our side ... then they would have swallowed us up alive ... then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters.* (Psalm 124:1-5, ESV)
- *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.* (Psalm 126:1, ESV)

In the Pilgrim Psalms, early worshipers lifted up their eyes to the hills and as they did they saw shrines built to honor other gods. When the pilgrims declared, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth,” they pronounced their allegiance to God Almighty alone. We pronounce our allegiance to God as we gather in Christ’s name and lift up our petitions and intercessions, when we read scripture, testify, sing songs of the faith, and depart as ones sent by God. Gathering, we prepare to serve God in the world.

Will Willimon wrote in his personal examination of Sunday worship that “People must be called to worship, gathered. Our faith requires continual refocusing, remembering, re-collection. A major focus of the church is to help us pay attention.”³ God does that calling. When we gather together for worship we respond to God’s call to follow him with our lives, our thoughts, our energy, and our substance. When we gather to worship we declare that it is our desire to listen to God’s instruction and to follow God with all that we have.

³Will Willimon, *With Glad and Generous Hearts: A Personal Look at Sunday Worship* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1986), 28-9.

Sometimes we gather out of habit. Other times we gather with intention. Frequently we gather seeking to praise, to ask for forgiveness, and to give God our tithes and offerings. We gather sometimes because we desire a sense of the sacred. Within each of us is implanted this deep desire to praise and worship God in community. We set a particular place and time to call out to God from lives fragmented by many demands. God gathers us to reorient us as we seek together our created peace and purpose.

Implication

It is important that we as worshipers recognize that it is God who gathers us for worship. In Scripture we see examples of intentional preparation for gathering to worship. Our preparation will vary from place to place and time to time. Our response to God's call is to gather for worship. We set aside intentional time to offer our praise to God. We set aside a place and create a space for encounter with the Divine. It is so very easy to lose focus and to succumb to compartmentalizing the different parts of our lives. When we gather we remember how God has been at work throughout history, even in the comings and goings in the lives of our church family and in our own lives. When we gather and offer gratitude for God's steadfast love in the world, we focus our attention on and declare our allegiance to God. We listen for God's guidance, and we prepare to go forth as faithful witnesses. This is the purpose for which we have been gathered.

Gathering Lesson
Preschool/Kindergarten
By Joyce Oliver & Amanda Standiford

Learning Objective: Children will learn that Jesus calls us to gather together for worship and learning.

Bible Story: Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to follow him (Matthew 4:18-22).

Key Verse: Jesus said, *“Come, follow me.”*

Matthew 4:19a

Materials/Preparation: Bible, construction paper, tape, crayons, a church bulletin or order of worship, a megaphone (if you have access to one), blocks in a variety of shapes and sizes for building, clothespins or other small objects to represent people (one per child)

Session format: This session is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour. Adjust activity times to fit your schedule and your group.

Classroom setup: This curriculum is designed for a classroom with centers that the children can visit, plus a gathering space (a rug or other marked area on the floor works well). The centers might include home living, blocks, puzzles, art, games, sand, water play, nature, books, and others. If you have a large group and multiple adult leaders, consider allowing the children to move from center to center at their own paces. If you have a small group, you can lead the children through centers together. The specific centers used in this session are:

- Blocks, art, games

Arriving (5-10 minutes)

Supplies needed: none

1. As children arrive, invite them to engage in a few minutes of free play in the classroom. Be sure to let the children know if there are any centers that are off-limits during this time.

2. Once most of the children have arrived, announce that you are going to play a game. Instruct the children to continue to play until they hear you call out, "Come and gather!" When they hear those words, the children should drop what they're doing and hurry to the gathering space.
 3. Repeat this activity several times. You can continue it during center time if you choose.
-

Story Time (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Bible

1. Have the children clean up their free play areas and join you in the gathering space.
2. **Ask:** "What was it like to leave behind what you were playing with to come to the gathering space? How did you feel?" Allow children to respond.
3. **Say:** "Our story today is about Jesus, and it is found in the New Testament." Open your Bible and show the children the story.
4. **Say:** "In our story today, Jesus asks two people to leave behind what they are doing to follow him."
5. Tell the following story in your own words. Be as interactive as possible.

We often hear stories about Jesus' disciples. Sometimes, we may just call them Jesus' friends. But do you know how those disciples became disciples? Jesus went to them and asked them to follow him.

Have you ever played follow the leader? What happens in that game?

That's a little like what happened with Peter and Andrew. One day, they were out on their father's boat. They were fisherman. Their job was to cast out nets and to pull in fish. Can you cast out your net? Can you pull fish onto the boat? (Invite children to act out these motions with you).

But as they were casting out their nets and bringing them in, a man walked by. That man was Jesus. Jesus said, "Come, follow me."

Just as you put down your toys or your work a few minutes ago, Peter and Andrew put down their nets. They left behind what they were doing to follow Jesus. It wasn't exactly like playing follow the leader. They didn't have to step exactly where Jesus stepped or make the same faces he made, but they did change their lives to be with Jesus and to learn from him.

When we come to worship, we put away our toys and our work and we come to be with one another and with Jesus.

6. **Say:** In our centers today, we will spend some time learning about what it is like to put other things down and to just be with Jesus.
7. If you are allowing the children to choose their own centers, give a brief overview of what is happening in each one.

Centers (20-30 minutes)

(Utilize as many of the centers as you need to fill the time you have available)

Art: Make a Megaphone (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: construction paper, tape, crayons, a church bulletin or order of worship, a megaphone, (if you have access to one)

1. Show the children where the Call to Worship is located in your church's bulletin. If this is not a regular part of your worship, point out whatever event serves as the beginning of worship.
 2. **Say:** "The call to worship is a way of saying that it's time to stop whatever else you are doing and get ready to be with Jesus."
 3. **Say,** "You can imagine someone holding a megaphone, shouting, 'Come and gather!'" If you have a megaphone, show it to the children and demonstrate how it works. If you don't have one, roll a piece of construction paper to create one and show the children how to use it.
 4. Invite the children to choose a piece of construction paper and to decorate it with crayons. Suggest that they draw pictures of people worshiping God. (This may make a good conversation starter as the children work.)
 5. Help the children to roll their papers into a cone shape to create a megaphone. Use tape to hold the paper in place.
 6. Allow the children to take turns calling the group to "Come and gather!" with their megaphones.
-

Blocks: Gather the People (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: blocks in a variety of shapes and sizes for building, clothespins or other small objects to represent people (one per child)

1. **Say:** "Let's practice gathering for worship."
2. Ask the children to use the blocks to create a simple model of your church's sanctuary.
3. Give each child a clothespin or a block to represent a person. Invite each child to take his or her "person" somewhere in the classroom and to share with the group what that "person" is doing (cleaning the house, playing the piano, coloring, etc.).
4. Invite the children to take turns calling out, "Come and gather!" Each time the command is given; each child should collect his or her "person" and bring it to the sanctuary model.
5. Repeat as time allows.

Game: Go Fishing (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: five paper fish (instructions below), five paperclips, fishing poles (instructions below)

To make the paper fish:

Write each of the following words on a fish cut from different colored construction paper. Attach a paperclip to each fish.

- Jesus
- said,
- “Come,
- follow
- me.”

To make the fishing poles:

Tie a piece of yarn to the end of a dowel rod. Attach a magnet to the opposite end of the yarn.

1. Remind the children that before Peter and Andrew came to follow Jesus, their work was fishing. Announce to the children that you are going to practice fishing.
 2. Lay the fish face down on the floor.
 3. Show the children how to use the fishing pole to pick up a fish by its paperclip.
 4. Allow the children to take turns picking up fish and laying them upright.
 5. When all the fish have been collected, help the children put the fish in order. They should make the verse, “*Jesus said, ‘Come, follow me.’*”
 6. Repeat the activity, allowing the children to continue to take turns fishing and to take increasing ownership in putting the words in order. (Even if the children cannot yet read, they may be able to remember the color order). Read the words of the verse aloud each time they are put in order.
-

Connecting and Closing: (5-10 minutes)

1. Announce that it is time to “Come and gather!” Invite the children to join you in the gathering space.
 2. Invite the children to take turns sharing their work or their favorite activities from the session.
 3. Practice the key verse together, “*Jesus said, ‘Come, follow me.’*” If time allows, invite the children to help you create motions that will help them to remember the words.
 4. **Say**, “Just as Andrew and Peter stopped what they were doing to be with Jesus, we stop what we are doing each week to come and spend time with one another and with Jesus in worship.”
-

Pray: “God, thank you for time to gather and to be with each other and with you. Amen.”

Gathering Lesson Elementary

By Amanda Langlands & Bob Fox

Learning Objective: God gathers us together to worship.

Key Verse: *“All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.”*

Psalm 86:9

Materials/Preparation: Large 25 to 30 piece puzzle; orange, yellow, and red tissue paper; oyster crackers; orange construction paper balled up to be the fire.

Before class, cut out flames shapes (template is at the end of this lesson). Make headbands from strips of paper and glue the flames to the front of the headbands. Write one word from the key verse on the front of each headband.

Each child will need a small notebook to use as a journal throughout the teaching series.

Introduction: (10 minutes) Puzzle Activity

Supplies Needed: Large 25 to 30 piece puzzle

1. **Ask:** “Why do you think that we gather together as a church?” (allow time for answers) **Say:** “Let’s do an activity that will help us understand why.”
 2. Give each child a puzzle piece from a large 25 to 30 piece puzzle. (If there are just a few children, give each child more than one piece or have part of the puzzle already assembled.) Have them work together to complete the puzzle, making sure that each child places his/her piece(s) in the completed puzzle.
 3. **Ask:** What would happen if one of the pieces were missing?
 4. **Say:** “We each are a piece of God’s puzzle. If one piece of the puzzle is missing, God’s family is not complete. We each have gifts that God has given to us. God calls us together as a family to worship and praise God.”
-

Bible Storytelling: (20 minutes)

Supplies Needed: 12 inch strips of orange, yellow, and red tissue paper; oyster crackers

1. Have the children each look up Acts 2: 1-4 & 42-47 in their Bibles and read the passage out loud with one another.
2. Have them try to talk about what each line means.
3. Following the reading and directions below, have the children stand up and do the motions to the story to help commit it to memory. The scripture is in *italics* and the actions are in **red (bold italics** if you print in black and white).

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

(Have everyone sit close together)

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

(Have everyone make the sound of loud wind)

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

(Give them red, yellow, orange tissue paper to wave like the fire)

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

(Hand out an oyster cracker to each child.)

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

(Have everyone link arms)

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

(Have them put their hands in the shape of a house above their heads)

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God

(Have everyone cheer)

and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:1-4 & 42-47

Discussion Questions

1. What did these early Christians do when they gathered together? Why do you think they did those things together? Do they seem similar to what we do?
 2. During these five weeks we will be talking about different things we do when we gather together for worship.
-

Activity (10 minutes) – Tongues of Fire Bible Verse Review Game

Supplies Needed: Before class, cut out flames shapes (template is at the end of this lesson). Make headbands from strips of paper and glue the flames to the front of the headbands. Write one word from the key verse on the front of each headband.

1. Give each child a headband. Mix them up and then time them to see which team can line up in order to make the Bible verse.

http://www.daniellesplace.com/html/bible_themes_o_-_p.html

Who Has The Fire?

Supplies Needed: Orange construction paper balled up to be the fire.

1. Ask the children to sit in a circle close together.
2. Have the children (or the teacher) select the child who is “It”, and have the child who is “It” stand away from the circle and hide their eyes while the fire is passed around. When “It” says “STOP!” the child holding the fire hides it (under their legs, up their sleeve, etc.). The child who is “It” guesses who has the fire. The child who had the fire is now “It”.

<http://catholicblogger1.blogspot.com/2009/04/lesson-plan-pentecost.html>

Prayer (5 minutes)

Tell the children that there are many different ways to pray. Today, you are going to do a responsive prayer together. You will lead it, but when you pause, the children are to say together: “As we gather together.”

Leader: Almighty God, We give you thanks,

Group: As we gather together.

Leader: May we take time to notice your presence,

Group: As we gather together.

Leader: Help us to hear your voice.

Group: As we gather together.

Leader: And to love one another,

Group: As we gather together.

Leader: May we take time to notice the beauty in your creation

Group: As we gather together.

Leader: In your name we pray. Amen.

Journal (10 minutes)

Supplies needed: a small notebook for each child.

Ask children to write their names on the cover of their journal. Tell them that they will be using them during the emphasis on worship. They will be asked to write in words or draw pictures to respond to questions each week.

Have children write this week's focal verse in their journals. Then have them compare and contrast their church to the early church described in Acts 2.



<http://www.pic2fly.com/Fire+Flame+Template.html>

**Gathering Lesson
Youth**
By Andrew Noe

Learning Focus

In Genesis we read that God created humans in God's image. In addition, Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed the very breath of life into humankind. As humans we bear the image and live by the breath of God in us. In Matthew 18:20, we are assured that God is present when we gather together. When these images are brought together, we get a clear picture of who God is and who God has created us to be.

This lesson will help youth explore who they are in God, and how when we gather together for worship we all bring gifts to the table.

Materials/Supplies: 25-50 piece puzzle; large poster or paper taped to the wall (or several small poster boards or paper); markers/pens/crayons; one scripture sheet per student (at the end of this lesson); blank paper

Scripture Reading

Invite two or three students to read the following scriptures aloud to the group.

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV)

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7 (NRSV)

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Matthew 18:20 (NRSV)

Group Game – "Gathering Together"

Supplies Needed: Use a 25-50 piece puzzle. Distribute these evenly among the youth. If you have fewer pieces than you have youth, have them share a piece.

1. **Say:** "Each of you is like a piece of the puzzle; only when we are gathered together do we get a better idea of the image. Remember that an image is not the real thing, but a mirror or copy of the real thing"
 2. Have them work as a group to complete the puzzle. For added fun give them a time limit to complete it by (for example, 25 pieces – 2.5 minutes, 50 pieces – 5 minutes).
 3. Explain how this is like the church. When we gather together for worship we get a better idea of how God wants the world to be. Like puzzle pieces, each of us brings gifts to contribute but not every piece of the puzzle is the same.
-

Group Activity – “We Are All images of God”

Supplies Needed: Large poster or paper taped to the wall; or several small poster boards or paper. Markers/pens/crayons

Options for groups: 1) Tape a large poster or paper on the wall and complete as a whole group activity. 2) Divide up in groups of 5 with small poster boards and complete the same activity. Afterwards the groups share their lists with the large group and someone combines the lists on a large poster board.

1. Ask the youth to write a word or characteristic that describes God. Make sure there are markers for the youth to use. Each youth may write his or her own word or the group may select a scribe.
 2. Ask the youth to get in groups of three.
 3. Have each group pick one person to be “**It.**”
 4. **Say:** “The person who is **It** cannot speak. The other two must pick one of the words we used to describe God to describe the person who is **It**. Once you have picked a word for the person who is **It**, it becomes someone else's turn to be **It.**”
 5. Once everyone has a word, ask folks to share what they think of the word they were given to describe themselves.
 6. After some sharing, discuss how when we gather together for worship we are trying to give our all to God.
 7. **Say** “When we see ‘Susie’ (use an example from your group) being loving during worship, it’s a chance for us to see God through Susie's actions. She is made in the image of God, and through her actions that image was made clearer and helps us understand and worship God more fully.”
-

Large Group Activity: Scripture Reading and Discussion

Supplies Needed: One Scripture sheet per student (at the end of this lesson)

1. Hand out the scripture sheets. Ask each youth to read the scriptures aloud to the group one at a time.
2. After each reading, ask:
 - What stands out about this verse?
 - What does this verse have to do with gathering for worship?
3. After all have been read, ask:
 - How do these connect?

- Would you use the phrase "images of God" to describe our gathering for worship?
-

Small Group Activity

Use the following questions to facilitate discussions in small groups:

1. Why and how does God gather us for worship?
 2. What do you appreciate and learn from gathering with others who are unlike you, to worship God?
 3. What do you appreciate and learn from gathering with others who are like you, to worship God?
 4. What would we miss out on if we never gathered together to worship?
 5. What do you like to contribute to worship when we gather? (Examples: prayers, music, scripture reading, preaching, testimonies, etc.)
 6. What are you thankful that others contribute to worship when we gather? (Examples: prayers, music, scripture reading, preaching, testimonies, etc.)
-

Closing Prayer Activity – “Praising God for Gathering Us”

Supplies Needed: Paper, Pens/markers/crayons. Helpful tip: It may help to play some soft worship music or instrumental music during this time.

1. **Say:** "When we gather together for worship, we strive to please God with our words and actions. Today we will be praising and thanking God for the wonderful creations found in this room."
2. **Say:** "I would like each of you to grab a piece of paper and a few markers or crayons. Find a spot in the room or the hallway to be alone. Take time to pray and thank God for the others in our group. Use the paper and crayons to draw your prayer, or doodle the names of those in our group that you are lifting up. Thank God for the specific gifts you see in others. Praise God for making such wonderful creations. You have 3-5 minutes to do this, so please do not distract each other by talking."

Scripture Sheet for Gathering Youth Lesson

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said,

"Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Matthew 18:20

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Gathering Lesson
Adult
By Ande Myers & Paul Sims

Introduction

Gathering for worship is a response to God's call to follow with our lives, our thoughts, our energy, and our substance. When we gather to worship we declare our desire to listen to God's instruction and to follow God with all that we have. We declare that we need God's guidance. We declare that we rely upon God's strength.

Preparation: computer/projector for showing YouTube video; copies of hymn lyrics (at the end of the lesson)

Opening Prayer

"Gracious God, we are here today for many reasons. Some of us are tired, and need a place to rest. Some are lonely, and seek relationship. Some are afraid, and look for courage. We all recognize that it is you who meets our needs; it is you who has called us into your presence for worship, praise, and reflection. We gather today to celebrate your steadfast love and faithfulness. We also remember that you send us and equip us to be your faithful witnesses. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."⁴

Scripture

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills.
 From whence does my help come?
 - 2 My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.
 - 3 He will not let your foot be moved,
 he who keeps you will not slumber.
 - 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.
 - 5 The LORD is your keeper;
 the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
 - 6 The sun shall not smite you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
-

⁴This prayer is adapted from John Killinger, *Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise: Prayers for Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 18.

- 7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- 8 The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.

Psalm 121 (RSV)

Opening Thoughts on “Gathering” for Worship

Watch/listen to video (approx. 2:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aio3lyY53og>

This is a live performance of Marva J. Dawn’s hymn, “Come Away from Rush and Hurry.” These lyrics describe the process of seeking God, carrying burdens to God, and finding God’s nurture and rest.

Note: It would be helpful to provide copies of lyrics to participants so they can reflect upon the lyrics as the video plays. The lyrics are provided at the end of this lesson.

Discussion Questions

- How do the lyrics to this hymn resonate with your experience of gathering for worship?
 - According to the hymn, what is being abandoned as we gather for worship? Sought?
 - According to the hymn, what needs are part of our gathering for worship?
-

Bible Study

There is a short portion of the Psalms (120-134) called the “Psalms of Ascents,” or the “Pilgrim Songs.” It is believed that worshipers sang or recited these songs like a prelude as they journeyed and made their way up toward Jerusalem and even as they walked up the steps to the Temple. Psalm 121, for example, takes the perspective of the pilgrim on a journey. It is not hard to imagine the dangers travelers might face on long trips through difficult terrain.

Divide the class into two groups and read Psalm 121 responsively as a group. See Appendix Two for responsive reading.

Read Psalm 121:1-2

It is easy to imagine the setting as the psalmist penned Psalm 121. During this time of Israel’s history, when the Hebrews would look up toward the hills, they might see something more than beautiful scenery. Eugene Peterson writes that

During the time this psalm was written and sung, Palestine was overrun with popular pagan worship. Much of this religion was practiced on hilltops. Shrines were set up, groves of trees were planted, sacred prostitutes both male and female were provided; persons were lured to the shrines to engage in acts of worship that would enhance the fertility of the land, would make you feel good, would protect you from evil.⁵

Discussion Questions

- Psalm 121 speaks of lifting eyes to the hills for help that cannot come from within. How might gathering for worship be an act of lifting our eyes to the hills?
 - How is gathering for worship an act of seeking God's help?
 - What are some ways we call out to, or respond to, God as worship begins?
-

Read Psalm 121:3-6

The psalmist refers to three specific threats potentially encountered on a pilgrimage.

First, there is the physical harm caused by a slip of the foot.

Second, the heat of the sun can cause harm. Extended time under intense sunshine can cause many problems.

Third, the light of the moon is understood to be a threat. It was believed that the moon caused lunacy, and we know that long time periods of night travel can produce quite a bit of anxiety.⁶

Also, in scripture the sun and the moon can describe rulers or powers over the environment.

Discussion Questions

- What do you make of the dangers and vulnerabilities faced by the pilgrims in these verses?
 - What anxieties or vulnerabilities do you think travelers face today?
 - Can you describe a time in your life when travel coincided with anxiety and/or vulnerability?
 - What kinds of vulnerabilities are associated with being a pilgrim people?
 - How might gathering together for worship be helpful as we come to terms with our identity as a pilgrim people?
-

⁵Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 36.

⁶Erma Bombeck, *When You Look Like Your Passport Photo, It's Time to Go Home* (HarperTorch, 1992).

Read Psalm 121:7-8

On reflecting upon these verses Peterson writes that

The promise of the psalm – and both Hebrews and Christians have always read it this way – is not that we shall never stub our toes, but that no injury, no illness, no accident, no distress will have evil power over us, that is, will be able to separate us from God’s purposes in us.

No literature is more realistic and honest in facing the harsh facts of life than the Bible. At no time is there the faintest suggestion that the life of faith exempts us from difficulties. What it promises is preservation from all the evil in them.⁷

Discussion Questions

- How is gathering for worship a reminder and acknowledgement that God has “kept” us throughout the week?
 - We should strive to remember that there are probably those among us who feel that God has not necessarily “kept” them throughout the week? Some people are barely present when worship begins. Still others are not present for any number of reasons. How can what we say and do as worship begins help us be attentive to those who are barely present or not present at all?
-

Option for Further Discussion

Have someone read from Justin Martyr’s description of worship in the early church (text included at the end of the lesson). This description dates to around 150 CE.

Discussion Questions

- What aspects of “gathering” can you discern in Justin’s description?
 - How is our gathering like and/or unlike what Justin describes?
-

Benediction

“Gracious God, we have come into this place to seek your guidance and your blessing. As we gather here we cherish time spent with fellow believers. We recognize your hand in our lives and the steadfast love you have demonstrated throughout the generations. Our hearts are filled with gratitude. Lead us from this place; enable us to be faithful witnesses of your love and mercy. We ask all this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

⁷Peterson, *A Long Obedience*, 38.

“Come Away from Rush and Hurry”

Words © 1999 Marva J. Dawn

Come away from rush and hurry
to the stillness of God’s peace;
from our vain ambition’s worry,
come to Christ and find release.
Come away from noise and clamor,
life’s demands and frenzied pace;
come to join the people gathered
here to seek and find God’s face.

In the pastures of God’s goodness
we lie down to rest our soul.
From the waters of his mercy
we drink deeply, are made whole.
At the table of his presence
all his saints are richly fed.
With the oil of his anointing
into service we are led.

Come, then, children, with your burdens –
life’s confusions, fears, and pain.
Leave them at the cross of Jesus;
take instead his kingdom’s reign.
Bring your thirsts, for he will quench them –
he alone will satisfy.
All our longings find attainment
when to self we gladly die.

Psalm 121 (RSV) – A Responsive Reading

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
**My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.**

He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber.
**Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.**

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
**The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.**

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
**The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.**

Excerpt from Justin Martyr's *First Apology*

The following description of early Christian worship is found in Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, a document written to defend and explain the Christian faith to non-Christians.

On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray.

On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give assent by saying, "Amen". The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons take it to those who are absent.

The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need. We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration.



Confessing (Sin): An Introduction

By Zachary Bay & Curt Lowndes

Definition

Confession is the naming of and taking responsibility for our sin—in all its forms, known and unknown, individual, communal, and systemic. In confession, we admit that our sin breaks down our relationships with God, others, and creation. Honest worship makes space for all of human life and prepares us to live as God desires. Confession in worship opens us to reconciliation and joy-filled relationship with God and one another.

Explanation and Analysis

Reading 1 John 1:5-2:2 and Psalm 51 together provides a foundational word on confession and its importance in worship and daily living. The letter of 1 John speaks to the realities and issues around sin in the human experience and suggests correctives. Psalm 51 stands as one of the Bible's most well-wrought and effective prayers of confession. Together, they provide apologetic description and poetic example.

The Importance of Confession: 1 John 1:5-2:2

The writer of 1 John, commonly referred to in scholarship as “the elder,” spends significant portions of this short letter describing the nature of God and atonement for human sinfulness. The elder weaves together two sets of statements in 1 John that serve as an argument for the naming of and taking responsibility for sin. The primary set (vv. 1:6, 1:8, and 1:10) describes conditions which are misguided and destructive, and the secondary set (vv. 1:7, 1:9, and 2:1b-2) offers correctives. Together, these words ground confession of sin ultimately in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

All six statements appear in the NRSV as conditional clauses—that is, they begin with “If we...” or “If anyone...” and then move to offer a corresponding (and often implied) “then” declaration. The first of these statements in 1:6 reads: “If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, [then] we lie and do not do what is true.” This statement speaks a word about the hypocrisy, and points out the danger, of purporting to live one way but actually living another way. Such a contradiction undermines obedience to and witness of Jesus’ example.

The second statement, found in 1:8, speaks a warning against the denial of sin: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us.” When sin is denied, people deny the reality that relationships with one another, God, and creation are flawed and always in need of work and reconciliation. Alan Culpepper points out, “Denying the presence of sin excludes any possibility for dealing with it effectively. One who denies the presence of sin cannot have the cleansing of confession, the freedom born of forgiveness, or the triumph which came from conscientious effort to change one’s pattern of life.”⁸

The third statement, found in 1:10, speaks a related word to that in 1:8-9, this time focused not on the human condition, but on the nature of God. “If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and God’s word is not in us.” Denying sin not only gets human nature wrong as is purported in vv. 8-9, but it also misunderstands the nature of God and undermines the revelation of Scripture. To deny sinfulness is to put oneself in God’s place.

The corrective set of conditional statements inverts the conditions—and thereby the results—of the primary set. They draw contrast and offer snapshots of how living honestly and with integrity (i.e. confessing) (1) fights against our natural inclination to hypocrisy and the denial of sin, and (2) corrects and restores relationship. Inverting 1:6, 1:7 proclaims, “But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” First John 1:9 contrasts with 1:8 saying, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Lastly, the elder makes clear that confession brings humility and honesty to the lives of human beings. And, as 2:1b-2 proclaims, once confession has worked honesty and humility into human lives, the promise of forgiveness through God in Christ is given.

Practicing Confession: Psalm 51

The First John passage discussed above teaches us what confession of sin accomplishes and why we need to confess. Psalm 51, on the other hand, is an excellent example of biblical confession. First John instructs us *about* confession; Psalm 51 shows us *how* to confess.

All confession begins with God’s mercy and unfailing love: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love” (51:1). God’s love and mercy are the foundation upon which we rely for forgiveness. God’s grace precedes confession

⁸Alan Culpepper, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John (Knox Preaching Guides)* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 18.

because without grace we have no hope for reconciliation. If there is no hope for reconciliation, there is no need for confession.

Scripture inseparably links together confession of sin and the forgiveness of sin. The one is incomplete without the other. The confession of sin is not an end in itself. We confess our sins so that we may be forgiven and reconciled to God. Without forgiveness, confession is guilt, shame, and self-loathing. Similarly, without confession, forgiveness is empty and worthless. We could ask, “Forgiven for what?” Sin must be real and acknowledged if forgiveness is to be real and received.

Psalm 51 makes the connection between confession and forgiveness abundantly clear. In the first two verses there are three different nouns for sin: “transgressions,” “iniquity,” and “sin,” and each noun is paired with its own metaphor for forgiveness: “blot out,” “wash,” and “cleanse.” The honest admission of sin against God is clear and direct in verses 3-5. The Psalmist leaves no doubt as to who is the responsible party for the breakdown in the relationship: “Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight” (51:4). Yet, in spite of being responsible for the broken relationship, the psalmist boldly pleads for forgiveness and restoration using imperative verbs (51:7-9). The writer uses this audacious language because of his confidence that God will forgive. God promises to forgive those who confess their sins (Psalm 32:5; 1 John 1:9).

Confession is not simply the awareness of sin, but genuine sorrow, expressed in a “broken and contrite heart” (51:17), and a desire for transformation: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (51:10). This transformation leads to right living and the avoidance of future sin. Ultimately, the transformation ends with praise and rejoicing because God has reconciled the relationship, as only God can (51:8, 12, 14-15). Praise is the inevitable response to confession and promised forgiveness: “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (51:15).

Implication

Honest worship makes space for all of human life and prepares us to live as God desires. 1 John 1:5-2:2 highlights the need for individuals and churches to live confessionally, to live lives marked by humility and honesty. Psalm 51 walks the reader through the movements of confession. The kind of confession that 1 John points toward and that Psalm 51 models calls us to practice being fully ourselves in worship before a God “in which there is no darkness at all.” Regularly confessing sin together and receiving an assurance of forgiveness in response to that kind of honesty teaches the fullness of God’s grace.

Furthermore, practicing confession in worship is a “formative act that spills over into everyday life.”⁹ By integrating confession into worship, we learn the language of apology and forgiveness (and the honesty and vulnerability it requires), habits which we then use as those sent by God into the world to be participants and imitators of God’s graciousness.

⁹John Witvliet, “Three Views: Why Confess Sins in Worship When it Seems so Rote? To Experience Grace,” *Christianity Today* (November 22, 2013). Accessed February 12, 2013. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/december/why-confess-sins-inworship-when-it-seems-so-rote.html>

Confessing (Sin) Lesson
Preschool/Kindergarten
By Joyce Oliver & Amanda Standiford

Learning Objective: Preschoolers and kindergarteners will learn how we can make wrong things right with Jesus' help.

Bible Story: Zacchaeus Met Jesus and Made Wrong Things Right (Luke 19:1-9)

Key Verse: *"Zacchaeus stopped and talked to Jesus."* Luke 19:8

Materials/Preparation: puppet (a store bought man puppet or make a sample of one that the children will make later in center time); indoor tall tree (if available); socks (one per child); red or pink felt for tongue; buttons or googly eyes for eyes; yarn for hair, glue dots or hot glue gun; puzzles of people helping one another OR pictures of people helping one another; paper lunch bags; magnetic alphabet letters OR an alphabet puzzle

Session Format: This session is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour. Adjust activity times to fit your schedule and your group.

Classroom Setup: This curriculum is designed for a classroom with centers that the children can visit, plus a gathering space (a rug or other marked area on the floor works well). The centers might include home-living, blocks, puzzles, art, games, sand, water play, nature, books, and others. If you have a large group and multiple adult leaders, consider allowing the children to move from center to center at their own paces. If you have a small group, you can lead the children through centers together. The specific centers used in this session are:

- Art, puzzles, games
-

Arriving (5-10 minutes)
Supplies Needed: none

As children arrive, invite them to engage in a few minutes of free play in the classroom. Be sure to let the children know if there are any centers that are off-limits during this time.

Story Time (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Puppet (use either a store bought man puppet or make a sample of one that the children will make later in center time); indoor tall tree (if available)

1. Have the children clean up their free play areas and join you in the gathering space.
2. Tell the children that today's Bible story is about Jesus and a man who needed to say, "I'm sorry" to some people.
3. Tell the following story in your own words. Use the puppet as Zacchaeus in the "tree."

Jesus walked from town to town to share God's love. People in Jericho (one of the towns he was passing through) heard that he was coming and gathered in the streets to see him.

There was a man who lived in Jericho whose name was Zacchaeus. He was a rich tax collector. People did not really like him because he was dishonest and charged them more money than they were supposed to pay – this is how Zacchaeus became rich. But Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, too.

But there was one big – or actually 'little' problem – (show the puppet), Zacchaeus was too short to see over the crowd of people. He tried standing on his tiptoes. Still he could not see Jesus. He tried jumping up and down. Still he could not see Jesus.

Then he had an idea: Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a tree to see Jesus. (Use the tree prop to demonstrate Zacchaeus climbing in the tree.) It worked! He was so happy. He was going to get to see Jesus.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus reached the tree, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down now. I must stay at your house today." So you know what Zacchaeus did? He climbed down out of the tree! Some of the people saw this and talked about why Jesus would go to Zacchaeus' house. After all, Zacchaeus was not nice.

After Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house, a very surprising thing happened. Remember that Zacchaeus was rich, but that he had taken more money from people than they were really supposed to pay for taxes. Well, after Zacchaeus met Jesus he realized that he had done wrong and wanted to make it right. Zacchaeus said to Jesus, "I will give half of everything I have to the poor people. And to those people who I cheated and got more money than they

were supposed to pay, I will give them four times that money.”

In other words, Zacchaeus “confessed” his sin. He was ready to make it right with people – to make his wrongs right. He told Jesus about the things he did wrong and made it up to the people. The Bible tells us that Jesus was happy about Zacchaeus’ decision.

4. Sing the song, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man” (Google it – lots of variations.)
5. **Say:** When we are in worship, one of the things that we must do is “confess” our wrongs. We must tell Jesus, “I’m sorry” for the wrong things we have done. This is called “confession.” Sometimes that also means that we must tell other people that we are sorry and make the wrongs right.
6. **Say:** “In our centers today we are going to be doing some things to make wrong things right.”
7. If you are allowing the children to choose their own centers, give a brief overview of what is happening in each one.

Centers (20-30 minutes)

(Utilize as many of the centers as you need to fill the time you have available)

Art: Make a Zacchaeus Puppet and Tell the Story (15 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Socks (one per child), red or pink felt for tongue, buttons or googly eyes for eyes, yarn for hair, glue dots or hot glue gun

1. Remind children that Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd of people who had gathered to see Jesus. This is why Zacchaeus climbed the tree.
2. Tell the children that each of them can make a Zacchaeus puppet. Tell them that the purpose of their puppet is so they can tell other people the story of Zacchaeus.
3. Help each child to make a puppet. If using a hot glue gun, the adult teacher will need to be the one to assemble the puppet. The child can choose the pieces to apply. If using glue dots, the children can assemble their puppet.
4. After the puppet is assembled, have each child tell the story of Zacchaeus. You may want to first retell the story from Group Time so the children can know how to repeat it. Encourage each child to tell the story at least once. They may enjoy (and benefit) from telling the story several times.

Puzzles: People Doing Good (5 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Puzzles of people helping one another OR pictures of people helping one another; Paper lunch bags

1. If you use pictures, prior to the session mount the pictures on construction paper. Then cut the pictures into 6-8 pieces and put in an envelope or paper lunch bag.

2. If you use puzzles, prior to the session put the puzzle pieces for each puzzle in a paper lunch bag and place beside the puzzle board.
 3. Invite the children to make a picture out of the pieces from the bag.
-

Game: Messy Alphabet (5 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Magnetic alphabet letters OR an alphabet puzzle

1. Prior to the session, mix up the alphabet letters.
 2. Tell the children that sometimes when we have done something wrong, we need to do more than just say, "I'm sorry." Often we need to make things right or put things back in order.
 3. Show the children the mixed up alphabet letters. Encourage the children to put the letters back in order.
 4. As the children work, say: "Zacchaeus told people he was sorry. Then he did more. He repaid the money to people that he had taken. He worked hard to make the wrong right. He worked to straighten out his mess."
-

Connecting and Closing (5-10 minutes)

1. Have the puppet Zacchaeus in hand to invite children to join you in the gathering space to review the story. Help them remember the Bible truth that it is always important to be honest and, when we have wronged someone, to ask for forgiveness. Have each child put their Zacchaeus puppet on their hands. As you review the story, have the children act out the story or repeat after you. This repetition will help the children to remember the story and the Bible truth for today.
2. Practice the Bible verse together, "*Zacchaeus stopped and talked to Jesus.*" (Luke 19:8) If time allows, invite the preschoolers to help you create motions that will help them to remember the words.
3. Remember together the Bible verse from last session.
4. As time allows, play a game.

Say: "Two friends were playing with blocks. They had built a tower very tall. Another child came up and knocked the tower down. How can we make this wrong right? What should the two friends do? What should the other child do?"

Say: "You asked your mom if you could have a friend over to play. Mom said, 'Yes, but only after you pick up your toys in your room.' You tell your mom you did, but really you just hid the toys under your bed. Mom says you may have the play date. You start feeling guilty. How can we make this wrong right? What should you do?"

Prayer: "God, help us to know right from wrong. Help us to choose to do right, and when we have done wrong, help us to make it right. Amen."

**Confessing (Sin) Lesson
Elementary**
By Amanda Langlands & Bob Fox

Learning Objective: A part of worship is being honest about ourselves with others and God.

Key Verse: *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

James 5:16

Materials/Preparation: Bibles (NIV); variety of inflated balloons; selection of permanent acetate (OHP) pens

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Review the previous week’s learning objective and key verse.
 2. Say: “One of the things that we do as a part of our worship is to confess. Why do you think we confess? Why do you think it is important for us to confess?”
 3. Say: “When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray Jesus prayed what we refer to today as the ‘Lord’s Prayer’. In that prayer Jesus gives an example of how to confess our sins. We confess our sins because Jesus taught us to.”
 4. Say: “Our bad choices or sins take us away from God and in order to get back to God we have to say/admit what we did wrong. And when we do that, admit our wrong doings, God forgives us.”
-

Story Time (20 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Bibles (NIV)

1. Have the children each look up Matthew 6:9-13 in their Bibles and read the passage out loud with one another.
2. Have them try to talk about what each line means.
3. Following the reading and motions below, have the children stand up in a circle and do the motions to the prayer to help commit it to memory. The scripture is in *italics*, the motions are in **red** (bold and italics if printing in black and white), and the questions are in **bold**.

9 *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven, (**put your arms straight out so your body is a cross**)*

hallowed be your name, **(circle your arms like they are rolling up until your arms are pointing to the sky)**

What does it mean that God's name is holy? What are other names we call God? Healer, Helper, Savior

10 your kingdom come **(bring one arm down, bent at the elbow, palm up), your will be done (do the same with the other arm), on earth (both arms down)**

as it is in heaven. **(both arms up)**

What do you think that means? What do you think Heaven looks like?

11 Give us today our daily bread. **(one palm flat, the other hand like it is chopping food on the flat palm)**

What is our daily bread? Why do you think Jesus uses the word daily?

12 And forgive us our debts **(cross wrists in front of chest), as we also have forgiven our debtors. (break wrists apart and put arms down)**

What are debts? When God forgives us what is expected of us in return?

13 And lead us not into temptation **(turn away from the circle), but deliver us from the evil one.' (face circle again)**

What does it mean to be tempted?

We finish the prayer usually like this:

For yours is the kingdom **(both arms down by side)**

and the power **(both arms straight out at sides)**

and the glory **(both arms straight up)**

forever. Amen. **(praying hands)**

Activity (10 minutes): Balloon Confessions

<http://circle.adventist.org/files/download/TeachingChildrenAboutConfession.pdf>

Supplies Needed: A variety of inflated balloons, a selection of permanent acetate (OHP) pens.

1. **Say:** "Choose a balloon."
2. **Say:** "As you hold it, think about a few things you would like to ask God to forgive."
3. Write a few words, or draw a picture or shape that symbolizes the different things you want to ask God to forgive."
4. **Say:** "Stand in a circle and silently ask God for forgiveness."
5. **Say:** "When everyone has finished asking God for forgiveness, celebrate by popping all the balloons."
6. **Say:** "Just as you cannot find the air that has come out of the balloons, your sins also disappear completely when God forgives you."

Prayer (5 minutes)

"Almighty God, sometimes we don't always tell the truth. Sometimes we may hurt feelings and not be the light in the world that you want us to be. Forgive us God, so that we may be closer to you. Amen."

Journaling (10 minutes)

1. Close by having the children write the key verse in their journals.
2. Ask them to write about a time when they had to say they were sorry for something.
3. How did it make them feel?

**Confessing (Sin) Lesson
Youth**
By Sharon Felton

Learning Focus: “We can never have true confession until we are completely honest with ourselves and God.”

Materials/Preparation for Teachers: read “Confessing (Sin): An Introduction;” paper, pens, pencils; world map or globe; Clorox; water; iodine; three clear cups or glasses

Opening Activity

Supplies Needed: Paper, pens, pencils

1. Begin the session by playing “Two Truths and a Lie”. On a single piece of paper, have each student write down two facts about themselves that people generally do not know *and* one lie about themselves. Have them pass them in to you. Randomly read aloud the three statements on each paper and have the group decide which paper belongs to which student. After this, then have the group decide which statement is a lie.
 2. Debrief the game by discussing the importance of being completely honest. Emphasize the need to be honest with ourselves and especially with God.
-

Scripture Reading:

1. Invite two or three students to read the following scripture aloud to the group.

⁵ Jesus told us that God is light and doesn't have any darkness in him. Now we are telling you. ⁶ If we say that we share in life with God and keep on living in the dark, we are lying and are not living by the truth. ⁷ But if we live in the light, as God does, we share in life with each other. And the blood of his Son Jesus washes all our sins away. ⁸ If we say that we have not sinned, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth isn't in our hearts. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his message isn't in our hearts.

2 My children, I am writing this so that you won't sin. But if you do sin, Jesus Christ always does the right thing, and he will speak to the Father for us. ² Christ is the sacrifice that takes away our sins and the sins of all the world's people.

1 John 1:5-2:2 (CEV)

Discussion

1. **Ask:** "What does living in the dark mean? How do we live in the dark in our everyday lives?" Discuss with the students that darkness hides things, including sin and hurt.
 2. **Ask:** "How can we change things in our lives if we keep them hidden and in the dark? Do things get better when they are hidden and covered up? Why? Or, why not?"
 3. **Ask:** "What does living in the light mean? How can we choose to live in the light? What steps need to be taken to move into the light with Christ? How does living in the light bring healing and help?"
 4. Have students explain and discuss what confession is and how it is done. Make sure to discuss the differences between public and private confession. Public confession should never be a gossip time or a time to "spill everything in front of the group". Most teens should focus on private confession and having possibly one or two other people to hold them accountable.
 5. **Say:** "Confession is the time to be honest with God and yourself, to bring everything out into the light so that healing can begin and forgiveness can happen. We all sin, no one is perfect. Everyone has areas in their lives that keep them from having a better relationship with Christ. These are places of sin and need to be brought to the light with confession so that forgiveness can be given and received and relationships can be restored."
-

Scripture Reading: Reread 1 John 1:7-10.

1. Have students define sin. Talk about God's forgiveness of sin if we confess and repent.
 2. **Ask:** "What does the word 'repent' mean?"
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Activity

Supplies Needed: World Map or Globe; Clorox, water, iodine, three clear cups or glasses (see directions in #8 below)

1. Have a student stand up and face you, then turn them around to face the opposite wall and say: "To repent means to do a 180. It means to turn completely away from what you have been doing that keeps you away from God and in the dark, unable to move forward and heal." (The student can sit down after you explain.)
2. Explain that this must happen with God and our relationship with God but that it also needs to happen in our relationships with other people as well.

3. **Ask:** “What happens in forgiveness? What does God’s forgiveness look like? Does it ever go away?”
4. Bring out the globe or the world map.
5. Ask the students to find out how far the east is from the west (It is an impossible task!).
6. Scripture Reading: Psalm 103:8-12 (CEV)
⁸ The Lord is merciful! He is kind and patient, and his love never fails. ⁹ The Lord won’t always be angry and point out our sins; ¹⁰ he doesn’t punish us as our sins deserve. ¹¹ How great is God’s love for all who worship him? Greater than the distance between heaven and earth! ¹² How far has the Lord taken our sins from us? Farther than the distance from east to west!
7. **Say:** “God’s forgiveness is immeasurable! It never ends, just like we can’t find the end point where east meets west. God wipes our sins away and completely forgives us, as long as we are honest and ask for His forgiveness. This is where being honest with ourselves and with God come into play. In order for there to be real forgiveness we must be honest. Without real confession and repentance, there is no real forgiveness and nothing changes or begins to heal.”
8. Place the three previously prepared glasses or clear cups in front of the youth. Have one cup half full of water, one cup half full of water with several drops of iodine (enough iodine to make the water turn dark) and one cup with half Clorox and half water. You may label the cups Me (You, Humans, etc.), Sin, and God. The Clorox cup should be labeled God, the iodine cup, sin and the plain water, humans.
9. Talk about how sin causes us to live in darkness, etc. and take the Sin cup and pour it in to the “You” cup. The water will turn dark. Then talk about how God’s forgiveness and love washes away our sins and bring us into the light again. Pour the “God” cup into the “Human” cup. (The contents should turn completely clear)
10. Scripture Reading: reread 1 John 1:5-2:2.
11. Pour the “Sin” cup into the “God” cup and it will change the water completely clear. Reread the beginning of verse 5, “*Jesus told us that God is light and doesn’t have any darkness in Him.*” (CEV)
12. Conclude by having a time of silent prayer. Encourage the students to begin the practice of being honest with God and themselves, to confess and ask forgiveness. As they are praying, encourage them to talk to people who they need to ask forgiveness from, to begin to repair any broken relationships they have so that they can truly begin to live in the light of Christ.

Closing: Close with a prayer for the group reminding them that God’s love and forgiveness extends as far as the East is from the West and washes us clean.

Confessing (Sin) Lesson
Adult
By Zachary Bay & Curt Lowndes

Introductory Statement

Confession is the naming of and taking responsibility for our sin—in all its forms, known and unknown, individual and systemic. In confession, we admit that our sin breaks down our relationships with God, others, and creation. Honest worship makes space for all of human life and prepares us to live as God desires. Confession in worship opens us to reconciliation and joy-filled relationship with God and one another.

Preparation: computer/projector for showing YouTube video; copies of closing prayer (at end of lesson); copies of *Wild Geese* (at end of lesson)

Prayer

“Gracious God, some things are difficult to talk about. Some things sap our courage and steal our words. Confession is one of those things. And yet, we have chosen to be present this day in spite of our discomfort. As you promised to do over and over again, abide in our hearts and in our conversation. Open our hearts and our minds that we might learn that even Baptists—perhaps especially Baptists—need to learn the discipline of confession in our worship services and in all our lives. As the rabbis say, ‘An hour of study is equal to an hour of prayer.’ May it be so today. Amen.”

Scripture

*⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. **2** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

1 John 1.5-2.2 (NRSV)

Reflection

Confession is hard work. Admitting we are wrong and owning up to our mistakes is not something any of us enjoys doing. Reflecting on our sin and the ways we have failed to love God and love neighbor is a painful process. So why should we confess our sins in the first place? Wouldn't it be easier and less painful if we avoided confession altogether and jumped straight to forgiveness and reconciliation? It might, but Scripture inseparably links together confession and forgiveness. Our first step in the reconciliation process with God and with others is honest confession.

1. **Watch** – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQoGfOBTx6E>. *The West Wing's* President Josiah Bartlett (Martin Sheen) concealed the fact that he had multiple sclerosis from all but fifteen people. In the moments leading up to this scene, he has admitted to White House Chief of Communications Toby Ziegler (Richard Schiff) that he has been lying to his closest friends and to the country. Watch their interaction.
2. **Discuss** – Confession is hard work, and it is seldom neat and clean in real-life relationships. Sit with the messiness of this conversation between two good friends for a few moments. What do you notice about their posture, their words, their emotions around the revelation of the lie?

Confession cultivates honesty. 1 John 1:5-2:2 speaks to the need for living confessionally—with honesty and integrity. 1 John 1:6 warns that hypocrisy undermines obedience to and witness of Jesus' example. When sin is denied, people deny the reality that relationships with one another, God, and creation are flawed and in need of reconciliation. As Alan Culpepper points out, "Denying the presence of sin excludes any possibility for dealing with it effectively. One who denies the presence of sin cannot have the cleansing of confession, the freedom born of forgiveness, or the triumph which came from conscientious effort to change one's pattern of life."¹⁰ Denying sin not only gets human nature wrong (1 John 1:8-9), but it also misunderstands the nature of God (1 John 1:10). Confession helps us to practice being fully (honestly) ourselves in worship before a God "in which there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

1. **Discuss** – How are we honest about ourselves before God in worship, and why is it important? How are we honest about God's relationship with sinful humanity in worship, and why is it important?

Confession brings us to forgiveness and restoration. Confession is not an end in itself. Scripture unites confession and forgiveness. The one is incomplete without the other. We confess our sins so that we may be forgiven and reconciled to God (1 John 1:9). Without forgiveness, confession is guilt, shame, and self-loathing. Similarly, without confession, forgiveness is empty and worthless. Sin must be real and acknowledged if forgiveness is to be real and received. Regularly receiving an assurance of forgiveness in response to confessional honesty teaches the fullness of God's grace.

1. **Read** – Read the short citation from Rick Riordan's book *The Lost Hero*, from the book series *Heroes of Olympus*.

¹⁰Alan Culpepper, *1 John, 2 John, 3 John (Knox Preaching Guides)* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 18.

2. **Discuss** – What roles do resentment and anger play when an unconfessed sin stands between two people? How does confession change that, and thereby redefine the relationship? How does this happen in corporate worship?

Confession leads to transformation. Confession is not simply the awareness of sin, but genuine sorrow, expressed in a “broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17, NRSV), and a desire for transformation: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). This transformation leads to right living and the avoidance of future sin. Ultimately, the transformation ends with praise and rejoicing because God has reconciled the relationship, as only God can (Psalm 51:8, 12, 14-15, NRSV).

By integrating confession into worship, we learn the language of apology and forgiveness (and the honesty and vulnerability it requires), which we then use outside of corporate worship in our daily relationships with one another. In these relationships, we imitate God’s graciousness with us and open ourselves to reconciliation with one another.

1. **Watch** – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv_4xmh_WtE. Poet Mary Oliver reads her work, *Wild Geese*. The text of the poem is provided at the end of the lesson.
2. **Discuss** – What kind of “transformation” does confession make possible? What does transformation look like when a person wears it? What does transformation feel like in a person’s gut? Is it worth the pain and risk of sharing your despair with another? With God? How do we share this together in corporate worship?

Closing Prayer

Talking about confession is difficult enough. Practicing it may be the hardest part. Christians like the brothers at the Abbey of Gethsemani—people who have devoted their lives to prayer—teach their visitors that when words won’t come but prayer must, the Psalter can pray through us. As we turn now to one of the great prayers on confession, your job is to say the words aloud and to lean into them to both learn the way of confession and to embody that way. Let us pray together...

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
 according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin.
³ For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
 and done what is evil in your sight,

so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

¹⁹ then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Amen.

Psalm 51 (NRSV)

From Rick Riordan's book *The Lost Hero* (from the series *Heroes of Olympus*)

Leo lowered his screwdriver. He looked at the ceiling and shook his head like, "What am I gonna do with this guy?"

"I try very hard to be annoying," Leo said. "Don't insult my ability to annoy. And how am I supposed to resent you if you go apologizing? I'm a lowly mechanic. You're like the prince of the sky, son of the Lord of the Universe. I'm supposed to resent you."

(Jason) "Lord of the Universe?"

(Leo) "Sure, you're all-bam! Lightning man. And 'Watch me fly. I am the eagle that soars-"

(Jason) "Shut up, Valdez."

Leo managed a little smile. "Yeah, see. I do annoy you."

(Jason) "I apologize for apologizing."

(Leo) "Thank you."

He went back to work, but the tension had eased between them. Leo still looked sad and exhausted-just not quite so angry."

Wild Geese

By Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.



Interceding: An Introduction
By James Byrd & Amanda Phelps Taylor

Definition

Intercessory prayer in corporate worship speaks to God about the difficult struggles of those next to us in worship and the broader, larger needs of the world.

Explanation and Analysis

Mark 2:1-12 tells the story of a group of friends bringing their paralyzed companion to Jesus. Their first attempt to reach Jesus failed on account of the crowds, so they tried a different approach: lowering their friend through the roof. Just as these companions interceded for their paralyzed friend, so believers today want to bring before Jesus their friends, family members, acquaintances, and global neighbors.

Throughout scripture we find instructions to intercede on behalf of others. James 5:13-16 is but one example:

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. (NRSV)

The example that James uses to describe intercession is familiar to us. Churches nearly universally spend time in worship praying for the sick within their congregation. We would be wise though to consider that this is merely one type of intercession. Our experience of worship is vastly enriched when we beseech on behalf of others for areas beyond their health. We intercede for others security, safety, and circumstance. This way of praying and worshiping is a continual reminder that our experience with God is not only about ourselves. Learning to pray for others helps us to remember that worship is not a private affair between us and our creator.

When we are concerned with one another's well-being, we might name that person aloud in worship or have their name printed on a prayer list to be sent home as a reminder to pray throughout the week. In addition, names of the sick are often added to phone prayer chains or circulated on social media to remind us to practice intercessory prayer in worship and in private. James reminds us that in our intercessory prayers we should be clear and direct about what we want God to do and be for us and for the world.

James tells us that prayers of intercession are powerful and effective, but doubts about the power of intercessory prayer persist. The New Testament tells of how Jesus, Stephen, Paul, and others were moved to intercede on behalf of others, even those who sought to take their lives. We, too, are nudged to pray, but sometimes the results of our prayers are not what we expect. Our “prayer of faith” does not always restore the sick to health, restore broken relationships to wholeness, or provide protection for the vulnerable. It can be tempting in these times to feel that intercession has failed us or that God has failed us, but we must also remember that intercessory prayer is at its core an act of remembrance and reorientation whereby God’s purpose in creating the world and gathering the church is both named and sought.

Notice the ways that Jesus’ own intercessory prayer in John 17:12-24 remembers and reorients those for whom he is praying:

While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (NRSV)

Jesus prays using strong verbs and clearly articulated desires. He reminds those praying with him that they have been protected and guarded while reorienting them away from flight from the world and instead toward a future protection from that which is truly dangerous: the evil one. Second, Jesus’ prayer names unity, holiness, truth, and presence as marks of God’s answer to this prayer. Throughout this prayer the refrains “so that...” and “that...” signal intercession’s progression from a specific desire/petition to describing an observable outcome. One can see this movement, for example, in the petition “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Finally, Jesus intercedes with balanced attention to the needs of those gathered around him in the present and

the concerns of those who follow him in all times and places. Intercessory prayer, then, reflects and reveals the ways that we live and worship in unity with believers past, present, and future.

Implication

Intercessory prayer is a necessary and worthwhile act of worship for the people of God. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the apostles in praying for healing, peace, reconciliation, understanding, and forgiveness. Intercessory prayer assumes that what we say and desire matters to our creator, and in this prayerful act there is a holy mystery at work. In intercession we speak to a God who is reconciling the world through Jesus Christ about those things which concern, confuse, and confound us. This means that we must pay attention to the life of the world near and far and allow it to prompt us to pray, to talk back to God. Just as dialing 911 in an emergency acknowledges that something has gone wrong and that we do not know how best to handle the situation, so intercessory prayer forces us to name the ways and places where we believe all is not as God intends and to call on God to bring restoration. We do this understanding that we do not have omniscience and that our prayers may at times reflect more our wishes than the divine will. We pray anyway because the power and effect of prayer for others may be clearly answered as we wish or may be answered as we learn to place others before ourselves and become better disciples of Christ.

**Interceding Lesson
Preschool/Kindergarten**

By Joyce Oliver & Amanda Standiford

Learning Objective: Children will learn that when we pray for others, it's as if we are bringing them to see Jesus.

Bible Story: Jesus heals a paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12)

Key Verse: *They brought a man who was paralyzed to Jesus.*

Mark 2:3

Materials/Preparation: Bible; chenille stems; construction paper; tape; shoebox with a large flap cut out of the lid (so that the children can open and close it); a piece of felt or fabric to serve as a mat; toy people or small blocks to represent them; puzzles with pictures of people praying in a variety of different settings (If you do not have access to these, you can make your own by printing out pictures of people praying and then cutting them into squares)

Session format: This session is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour. Adjust activity times to fit your schedule and your group.

Classroom setup: This curriculum is designed for a classroom with centers that the children can visit, plus a gathering space (a rug or other marked area on the floor works well). The centers might include home living, blocks, puzzles, art, games, sand, water play, nature, books, and others. If you have a large group and multiple adult leaders, consider allowing the children to move from center to center at their own paces. If you have a small group, you can lead the children through centers together. The specific centers used in this session are:

- Art, blocks, puzzles
-

Arriving (5-10 minutes)

Supplies needed: none

1. As children arrive, invite them to join you in a game. Begin by asking the children to line up against one of the walls in your classroom.
 2. This game is much like "Mother May I?" Give each child, in turn, a direction like, "Take two giant steps forward," or "Take one frog leap forward."
 3. To move forward, the child must reply with, "May I bring (name of classmate)?" Always respond affirmatively.
 4. Encourage the children to help one another move forward. If someone is behind, instruct the children to be sure and help that child catch up with the group.
 5. The game is finished when everyone has reached the opposite wall (or whatever place you designate) in the classroom.
 6. Repeat as time allows.
-

Story Time (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Bible

1. Invite the children to join you in the gathering space.
2. **Ask:** "Was anyone a good friend to you during our game today? How did he or she help you?" Allow the children to share their thoughts.
3. **Say:** "Our story today is found in the New Testament." Open your Bible to show the children where the story is located.
4. **Say:** "In our story today, we see some people being good friends. Listen to the story. When you hear someone doing something kind for someone else, give a thumbs up!"
5. Tell the following story in your own words. Be as interactive as possible.

Jesus taught and did amazing things. This made many people interested in finding out more about him and hearing what he had to say.

One day, Jesus was teaching in someone's home. Can you imagine the crowd that gathered to hear him? They filled up the house. They blocked the doorway. They flowed out into the yard. It was so crowded that it was hard to hear and definitely hard to get close to where Jesus was teaching.

But there was a group of friends there that day for whom it was very important to get to Jesus. You see, they had a friend with them who was paralyzed. He couldn't walk or move. They hoped that Jesus could heal him.

So they came up with a plan. You see, the roof of the house was flat. They climbed up on the roof. They used a mat to lift their friend up, too.

Then, they made a hole in the roof. Very carefully, they lowered their friend down so that he landed right in front of Jesus.

Jesus saw what was happening. He saw the man who could not walk, and Jesus said to him, "Get up, take your mat, and go home!" The man stood up and walked out in front of everyone. People were amazed at what Jesus had done.

When we pray for someone else, we are like the friends who brought the man to see Jesus. They loved their friend and wanted to be helpers to him in the best way they knew how. So they brought their worries to Jesus. When we pray, we bring our gladness, our concerns, and our worries to Jesus.

1. **Say:** In our centers today, we will spend some time learning about what it is like to pray for other people.
2. If you are allowing the children to choose their own centers, give a brief overview of what is happening in each one.

Centers (20-30 minutes)

(Utilize as many of the centers as you need to fill the time you have available)

Art: Make a Prayer Person (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: chenille stems, construction paper, tape

Note: It may be helpful to make a sample of this project ahead of time to help the children visualize what they are doing.

1. **Say:** "We can pray in many different ways. Sometimes we bow our heads and close our eyes. Sometimes we might kneel. Sometimes we may pray with our eyes open as we're working or playing."
2. Help the children shape bodies from chenille stems. This website has instructions with photos for making a chenille stem person.
<http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-make-a-Pipe-Cleaner-Stick-Figure/>
3. Use construction paper and tape to add a face, hair, hands, and feet. Encourage each child to make the person look like him or herself.
4. Invite the children to pose their people into different positions in which they might pray.

Blocks: Act Out the Story (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: shoebox with a large flap cut out of the lid (so that the children can open and close it), a piece of felt or fabric to serve as a mat, toy people or small blocks to represent them.

1. **Say:** "Let's take turns telling one another our Bible story."
2. Reenact the story for the children using the shoebox, fabric, and people.

3. Invite the children to take turns telling the story. If you'd like you can involve more than one child at a time by allowing children to "play" one of the four friends as another child tells the story.
 4. **Say**, "This man could not walk, so his friends brought him to Jesus. Who do we bring to Jesus in our prayers?" Allow the children to name people.
-

Puzzles: Praying People (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: puzzles with pictures of people praying. If you do not have access to these, you can make your own. If you have pictures of children in your church or others praying, print a few out and cut them into squares that the children can put together. If you don't have photos, use a search engine to find photos or drawings of people praying online and print those to cut into puzzles. Look for people in a variety of different settings.

1. **Say**: "When we pray, sometimes we bow our heads and close our eyes. Sometimes we pray with our eyes open. Sometimes we pray in big groups. At other times, we pray all by ourselves. Tell me about some times when you have prayed." Encourage the children to share answers.
 2. Introduce the puzzles and allow the children to work together to solve them. As the children work, continue to dialogue with them about ways they and others in your church might pray.
-

Connecting and Closing: (5-10 minutes)

1. Tell the children that it is time to clean up their centers and return to the gathering space.
 2. Invite the children to take turns sharing their work or their favorite activities from the session.
 3. Practice the key verse together, "*They brought a man who was paralyzed to Jesus*" - Mark 2:3. If time allows, invite the children to help you create motions that will help them to remember the words.
 4. Remember together the verses you have learned during the previous sessions.
 5. **Say**, "Just as the friends brought the man to Jesus, we bring one another into Jesus' presence when we pray for each other. Let's finish our time together by praying as a group."
 6. Allow the children to name a friend or family member for whom they would like to pray.
-

Pray: Pray a closing prayer, allowing each child to name aloud the person they chose.

**Interceding Lesson
Elementary**
By Bob Fox & Amanda Langlands

Learning Objective: In worship, we ask God to help others.

Materials/Preparation: drawing paper; crayons; bed sheet; church prayer list (if available)

Pre-select five places in and around the church that will serve as stops for your group on a prayer walk.

Key Verse: *The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how for everyone you know.*

I Timothy 2:1 (The Message)

Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Review the previous week's learning objective and key verse.
 2. **Ask:** Opening Questions
 - When you pray do you pray for other people?
 - What do you ask God to do to help other people?
 - Have you seen our church prayer list?
 - Do you know any of the people on this list?
 - What kind of problems do we ask God to help other people with?
 - When in our worship service do we pray for other people?
 - When in worship could we pray for other people?
 3. **Say:** "Today's key verse is "*The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how for everyone you know.*" (I Timothy 2:1, The Message).
-

Opening Activity

Supplies Needed: Paper, crayons

1. Have students trace their hand on a sheet of paper.
2. Once they have completed this tell them that this is a way to help them to remember to pray for others.
 - a. By the thumb have them write the name of someone who is close to them.
 - b. By the index finger have them write the name of someone who points the way to God.

- c. By the middle finger ask them to write the name of a community servant who stands tall as a leader.
 - d. Remind them that the ring finger is the weakest and ask them to write the name of someone who is sick or having a difficult time.
 - e. Finally, have them write the name of someone who is far away who they love by the pinky finger.
3. Explain to students that these prayers can be said anywhere. If in the worship service there is a time of silence or at any point during worship, they can look at their hand and pray.

Bible Storytelling (15 minutes)

1. Explain to the children that this scripture reading tells of a paralyzed man who was brought to see Jesus (you may want to explain what “paralyzed” means).
 2. Assign roles for the children who are present. Choose one person to be Jesus, one person to be the paralytic, four children to be the friends (or fewer if your class is small), one person or more to be the teachers of the law, and all the rest of the children will be in the crowd. Initially set up the child as Jesus on one side of the room and the paralyzed person and friends on the other. Have the children in the crowd surround Jesus (if you have enough). Tell the children that as the story is read they are to act out their parts. The scripture is in *italics* and the actions are in **red** (bold italics if printing in black and white).
3. **Read:**
2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.
(Have all children, regardless of their particular roles, act like the crowd gathered around Jesus listening to him in worship.)
4. **Read:**
3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”
(Have the friends bring the child who is paralyzed to Jesus, making their way through the crowd. This can be done in a variety of ways (If there is enough supervision, perhaps the teacher can bring a bed sheet to carry the child in or the child can be led through the crowd and lay down when he or she gets to Jesus.). Tell the student playing Jesus to look at the ones who bring their friend and then to speak to the paralyzed one.)

5. **Read:**

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

(Have the person(s) playing the teachers of the law act angry, waving their hands in the air.)

6. **Read:**

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’ 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, 11 “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

(Have the student playing Jesus reach down and touch the paralyzed one. Have the healed one get up and walk away excited and happy.)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the friends bring the man to Jesus?
2. What did Jesus do?
3. Did Jesus do what they wanted? Did Jesus do what they wanted first? Help the children understand that the friends asked Jesus to do one thing, but Jesus did more. From Jesus we learn that God knows not only what we want but also what we need.
4. How do you think the friends felt when they saw the crowd around Jesus?
5. How did the paralyzed man feel when he was healed? How did the friends feel?

Prayer Activity (15 Minutes)

Tell the students that you have selected five locations around the church that will serve as stops on an intercessory prayer walk. Lead the students to each location and explain what the space is used for and why it is important. At the first stop, model an intercessory prayer for the people who use that space. At subsequent locations, invite a student to lead the prayer.

Example of prayer stop:

Step 1: Take children to the sanctuary and say: “This is the sanctuary. It is the place we gather together for worship. We can pray for those who lead us in worship that God will help them know what to do and say. We can pray for the people who will be sitting in these seats that they will learn and know more about

God. We can pray for the people who come into worship with problems and ask that God help them.”

Step 2: Ask them how else they might pray for those who worship in this space.

Step 3: Lead the children in a simple prayer such as “Lord, we bring those who worship to you because we know that you can give them what they need.”

Journaling (10 Minutes)

Have the children write the key verse in their journals. Then have them write about the people that they can pray for during worship. Ask them to write down a specific time during worship when they can bring their friends to Jesus.

**Interceding Lesson
Youth**
By Kristin Belcher

Learning Focus

Intercessory prayer is an opportunity to put others before ourselves. It is an intentional time of prayer offered for others in need. Teenagers have a lot going on in their lives and in the lives of their friends. It is important to offer tangible ways they can hold one another in prayer. This lesson offers hands on activities that will teach students the value of and practical how-to advice on intercessory prayer.

Materials/Preparation: Bibles (NRSV) or copies of Philippians 1:3-11 (included below); plain paper; crayons; pencils; markers

Prayer (5-8 minutes)

The opening prayer time together is a chance to practice intercessory prayer. For this prayer, you will use your hand. Each finger on your hand will represent a different group of people. Allow students the opportunity to voice their requests out loud to the group. Begin with your thumb, since it is the closest to your heart, offer up prayers for those people who are closest to you, your family and friends. When no more requests are being shared aloud, move on to your pointer finger. Since this finger directs and instructs, offer prayers for the teachers in our lives. Moving on to the middle finger, since it is the tallest, offer up prayers for the leaders in our lives and world. The ring finger is the weakest finger, allow students to offer prayer requests for those who are weak, needy and under-served in their lives. Finally, the little finger represents our self. Only after we have offered up prayers for others are we able to better see what we need in our own life.¹¹

Close the prayer time by saying “Amen.”

Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

Invite two or three students to read the following scripture aloud to the group.

¹¹Whitney Booth, “The God We Can Know: Exploring the ‘I am’ Sayings of Jesus – Youth Group Guide,” The God We Can Know, accessed May 8, 2015, http://www.thegodwecanknow.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/UR1362_Fuguay_God-We-Can-Know-YouthGuide.pdf.

I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:3-11 (NRSV)

Say: "This scripture is an example of intercessory prayer. Paul says, '*I thank my God every time I remember you.*' Paul has been praying for the people of Philippi. He prays with thanksgiving each time he remembers them. He goes on to offer an interceding prayer on behalf of the people by saying, '*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best.*' From Paul's model we learn to remember to pray for and on behalf of others in our lives. One way we can do that is by praying in color.

Activity and Discussion (30-35 minutes) – "Praying in Color"

Supplies Needed: Plain paper, crayons, pencils, markers

Before beginning the exercise, ask the following questions:

1. What is prayer?
2. What is intercessory prayer?
3. Why do we do it?
4. How do we do it?
5. Why is it important?

Say: Praying in color is an activity that allows students to express their prayers through drawing. When we take time to write the names of those we are praying for and draw shapes around those names, we are better able to recall those images throughout the day. The idea is by adding color we will remember each person or request separately and be able to continually pray throughout the day for that person.

The process is outlined below:

1. Draw a shape on your paper. It can be any shape you want.
2. Write the name of the person you are praying for inside the shape.
3. Add detail to the drawing with color or other shapes. Think of each line or shape you draw as a prayer for this person.
4. Continue drawing until the image feels complete.

5. Repeat the process with another shape and another name in the shape. Continue repeating until you have prayed for everyone you wanted.
6. Allow time to sit with the finished product. After a moment, close your time of prayer by saying 'Amen.'¹²

Alternatively, if no colors or crayons are present, a pen or pencil is all that is needed to offer prayers in this way.

Connecting and Closing

After completing the exercise, ask the students the following questions.

1. How did this activity change your view of intercessory prayer?
 2. How likely will you be to use the form of prayer in the future?
 3. Did you enjoy in the act of praying in color?
 4. How did it feel to pray for others?
 5. Which type of prayer was most meaningful to you? (hand or drawing prayer)
 6. What are other ways you can use intercessory prayer in your life? (one suggestion is keeping a journal of either written prayers or praying in color prayers to help you remember to pray for others).
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Benediction

Say: "Let us now offer prayers for those who we prayed for earlier..." Ask students to say the name of one person they prayed for while coloring.

Close with "Lord, hear our prayers. Amen."

¹²Sybil MacBeth, *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007).

Interceding Lesson
Adult
By Amanda Phelps Taylor & James Byrd

Introductory Statement

Intercessory prayer in corporate worship speaks to God about the difficult struggles of those next to us in worship and the broader, larger needs of the world. Whether interceding for health, peace, comfort, or strength, Christians feel compelled to bring the struggle to the congregation and share them together in worship. Who and what we pray for reveals a great deal about our congregation, therefore it is important to consider the role of intercessory prayer in worship.

Preparation: computer or projector for showing a webpage OR make copies of webpage content (<https://www.teachervision.com/creative-writing/activity/3139.html>)

Responsive Prayer

One: Gracious God, You give us hearts that long to love like you love.
Many: **Help us to pray with love.**

One: You give us eyes to see our loved ones hurting.
Many: **Help us to pray with compassion.**

One: You give us ears to hear the news of wars around the globe.
Many: **Help us to pray with wisdom.**

One: You give us hands to do your work on Earth.
Many: **Help us to pray with a desire to become the help for which we pray.**

All: **Amen.**

Scripture

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you

be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Colossians 1:9-12 (NIV)

Reflection

Interceding is a complex and mysterious act of prayer. It is important that we take time to work through our beliefs and share our thoughts on prayer. The New Testament is clear that Christ's followers are to pray for others. We read of Jesus, Stephen, and Paul interceding for others. Still, intercession can be a struggle, especially as it reveals and challenges many of our assumptions about prayer.

In the reading from Colossians we read one of Paul's intercessory prayers. Here Paul asks specifically that his brothers and sisters might (1) be filled with knowledge of God's will, (2) lead lives worthy of the Lord, (3) bear fruit, and (4) grow in strength and knowledge of God.

Paul requests a great deal in verses 9 and 10, but exactly how are we to think about the impact of his prayer for the Colossian Christians? How would we know if this prayer was "answered"? Perhaps part of the answer to these questions can be found in his desired outcome as expressed in verses 11 and 12. He asks for these things **so that** his brothers and sisters might remain strong, endure everything, and give thanks. Paul is clear about both the needs and the desired outcome of his intercession. When we read this prayer in this light, Paul could know his prayer was answered as the Colossians remained strong, lived with endurance, and offered thanksgiving.

Interceding Exercise

Some of you may remember the children's series of "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. For those unfamiliar with the books, each chapter ends with a list of options (example available here: <https://www.teachervision.com/creative-writing/activity/3139.html>).

Each option directs you to a different point in the book. Hopefully you get the idea!

During the next few minutes I would like us to go on our own "prayer adventure" using the following fictional scenario:

1. Read aloud:

One Sunday morning, Nancy, an active church member and prominent member of the community, suffers a heart attack. She is rushed to the hospital and

placed in an intensive care unit, where she remains in critical condition. By the time corporate worship begins, some members of the congregation know of her condition.

During worship her situation is mentioned before a congregational prayer is offered for her and other people and situations.

2. Ask the class to assume the position of the one called upon to offer the communal intercessory prayer on this day.

Say: “As the one called upon to offer the communal prayer on this day, you quickly consider that there are **at least** three possible outcomes in a situation like this.

- First, Nancy’s condition begins to improve following surgery and eventually she returns home.
- Second, Nancy’s condition stabilizes after surgery but her quality of life is greatly diminished.
- Third, Nancy’s condition begins to worsen after surgery and Nancy does not survive.

3. Crafting an Intercessory Prayer

Using Paul’s intercessory prayer in Colossians as a template, lead the group in crafting or outlining an intercessory prayer. Have the group work together to craft/plan a prayer for a morning like this. The following suggestions and questions might be helpful as you lead the discussion.

- Intercessory prayer should be rooted in scripture. What scripture(s) come to mind when thinking of the scenario under consideration? How might they be incorporated into a prayer?
- Intercessory prayer should be clear and direct. What is it that we want? What are a few strong, imperative verbs that might help name what it is we want God to do in this situation?
- How might our prayer in this moment expand our attention from the local to regional and global concerns?
- Intercessory prayer often revolves around healing and health, but it should not focus exclusively on healing and health. How might we pray in such a way that congregants are challenged to move beyond simply equating intercession with health and healing? For what purpose do we seek Nancy’s good health? How might Nancy’s poor health be a platform for God to be glorified?

As the group works on this prayer, try to help them notice how intercessory prayer reveals, reflects, and even challenges assumptions about ourselves, our world, and God.

4. Wrap up the exercise by having the participants reflect on what they learned about intercessory prayer and its place in corporate worship.

Benediction

“May we leave this lesson and this time of discussion with a renewed sense of the importance of intercessory prayer, not only for those for whom we pray, but also for our own sense of connection with God’s work in this world.”



Proclamation: An Introduction

By Amber Inscore Essick & Bob Browning

Definition

Proclamation communicates the truth of God so that we encounter Jesus Christ, the Word of God. In short, it is the presentation of Jesus Christ. Broader than the preaching event, proclamation also occurs in the reading of scripture, in baptism and the Lord's Supper, in song and in silence. To proclaim is to speak the word of God.

Explanation and Analysis

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (I John 1:1-4, NRSV)

If you polled 1,000 Baptists and asked “What is the Word of God?” they might all say, “Scripture.” The same 1,000 Baptists, if asked, might say that proclamation is equivocal to preaching. So, proclaiming the word of God would mean, to them, *preaching from Scripture*. This comes from a longstanding pair of Baptist habits of (1) focusing solely on Scripture as an authoritative revelation from God, and (2) emphasizing preaching as the pinnacle of Christian worship. The concept of the Word of God includes, but is not limited to Scripture, however, and proclamation is broader than the preaching event (although certainly, when we preach, our aim is to proclaim the word of God—or a word *from* God—to our fellow worshipers). In order to discuss proclamation, we must also understand what is being proclaimed. So what is the Word of God?

Jesus Christ

The Word of God is first and foremost Jesus Christ (John 1).¹³ While the Greek concept of the *logos* of God (translated in Scripture as “word of God”) might require us to bend our understanding of language, it is not beyond our grasp to see Jesus as God's Word. Just as words go out from someone speaking, so Jesus as God's

¹³Leanne Van Dyk, “Proclamation: Revelation, Christology,” in *A More Profound Allelujah: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne Van Dyk, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 59.

communication, or self-revelation to us, was sent to us, in order that we might see, touch, and otherwise encounter God. So, Jesus is the Word of God, God's proclamation to the world.

Scripture

Scripture is another word of God because it communicates God's truth to us and reveals Jesus Christ to us. In telling the story of God and God's relationship to humanity, Scripture presents the person of Christ to its readers and hearers. This is why Christian worship is centered in scripture, whether through reading it together, singing it in the form of hymns, or praying words of scripture. Thus words *to* God and *to* one another can be simultaneously a word *from* God. Preaching itself is the word of God: preachers are tasked with giving a message from God in sermons, but also with presenting Christ himself and ushering hearers into a divine encounter. However humbly the preaching task is carried out, it seeks to present the resurrected Christ to humanity.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

In proclamation the word of God not only goes out to us but draws us into a divine encounter, so it should be no surprise that the Lord's Supper and baptism are also the word of God. In celebrating the Lord's Supper, God makes Jesus visible and tactile to us. Coming to God's table, we participate in a meal that embodies the words from 1 John 1:1-4. That is, we see and touch the representation of Jesus' body and blood, we experience fellowship with God and with God's church, and we dine along with Christians through the ages who have found fellowship with God to be the defining reality of our shared life. That is why we also call it communion. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper God says to us,

- "You are a part of me,"
- "I am given for you,"
- and "I forgive you."

We, in turn, proclaim words of God in the meal: the reality of Christ's death, the forgiveness we receive in Christ's sacrifice, our gratitude for the grace of God, and our participation with him in the life of God.

Likewise, in baptism, the believer and community participate in the life of Christ (following his footsteps in baptism) and act on behalf of/with God to welcome a person into the Kingdom of God. Baptism is a word of welcome from God and a believer's response/echo to God's call. In and through the baptismal waters, God says to us,

- “You are cleansed of your sins;”
- “You are born again;”
- “You have been buried with Christ and raised into the new life;”
- and “Come, follow me.”

Our proclamation of God’s word in baptism is our echo of this message. We say to God,

- “Make us clean;”
- “We die to ourselves that we might live in you;”
- “We will follow you;”
- and “We give ourselves to you.”

Words spoken to those being baptized also echo the proclamation of God. They might be told,

- “Welcome to the kingdom,”
- or “In this death and rebirth, you are born into our community of faith.”

Ministers might call congregants to “remember your baptism,” so that, in remembering, we might continue to proclaim ourselves fellow followers of Christ. In baptism, just as in the Lord’s Supper, Christ communicates to us our status as believers, followers, and people of God.

Silence

A less obvious element of proclamation, of communicating the truth of God, is the role that silence plays. Silence is the space that makes both proclamation and reception possible.

Silence makes possible the clearing of one’s mind so that it can be reoriented toward the message of God. It can also be the void out of which God speaks life into the world. Additionally, silence can be the time Christians spend in contemplation of God’s word. However it is understood, silence is always married to proclamation in the sense that it exposes the dry ground that needs water; it makes evident our desire for God; it displays aspects of God otherwise hidden: God’s patience, God’s rest, God’s presence in the abandoned places. Silence is both the intake of breath before the speech of God and the reverberation of God's speech in the heart of believers.

Preaching

Proclamation occurs in the preaching event, then, but it is much broader than the sermon. There is a burden on the preacher's sermon to proclaim the truth of God, but proclamation is also a shared burden of the entire gathered community. All those who preach, pray, and sing; all those who read Scripture; who speak or dance or otherwise communicate—in other words, all gathered—share the task of proclaiming Christ, presenting Christ, of receiving and reflecting Christ to those around them. As everyone gathered engages in proclamation, many aspects of our worship become avenues of proclamation.

Implication

As we begin to understand that proclamation is grounded in the Word of God in its various forms, we will be able to imagine various avenues for proclamation in the worship context. We will begin to see additional elements of worship as opportunities for hearing from God, encountering Jesus Christ, and entering into communion with God through the Holy Spirit. As our definition of proclamation broadens, so does our ability to understand ourselves as proclaimers and share in the joy of presenting and reflecting Christ to one another through the Holy Spirit. Thus, as the burden of proclamation is understood by the community to be a shared task, it can also be a shared joy. We hope this will free us to engage in proclamation rather than merely viewing ourselves as the recipients of God's word.

**Proclamation Lesson
Preschool/Kindergarten**

By Joyce Oliver & Amanda Standiford

Learning Objective: Preschoolers and Kindergarteners will learn that our church teaches “Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”

Bible Story: Woman at the Well Meets Jesus (John 4:1-42)

Key Verse: “*Jesus really is the Savior of the world.*”

John 4:42

Materials/Preparation: photos of Bibles or scrolls (if available); Bibles (all types and sizes); crayons/markers/colored pencils; flower seeds; potting soil; container for planting; water; a label for each plant; blocks; toy people

Ahead of the session, obtain a digital picture of your sanctuary or church. Convert it into a coloring page. This free website turns photos into coloring pages (<http://www.reallycolor.com/>).

Session Format: This session is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour. Adjust activity times to fit your schedule and your group.

Classroom setup: This curriculum is designed for a classroom with centers that the children can visit, plus a gathering space (a rug or other marked area on the floor works well). The centers might include home-living, blocks, puzzles, art, games, sand, water play, nature, books, and others. If you have a large group and multiple adult leaders, consider allowing the children to move from center to center at their own paces. If you have a small group, you can lead the children through centers together. The specific centers used in this session are:

- art, nature, blocks
-

Arriving (5-10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Photos of Bibles or scrolls OR actual Bibles (all types and sizes).

1. Prior to the children's arrival, place the Bibles or pictures of Bibles/scrolls around the room for the children to find.
 2. As children arrive, invite them to search and find the Bibles (pictures or real) that you have 'hidden' around the room. Tell the children how many they are looking for. Remind them to quietly find them so other friends can quietly find them, too.
 3. After finding the Bibles, invite the children to engage in a few minutes of free play in the classroom. Be sure to let the children know if there are any centers that are off-limits during this time.
-

Story Time (15 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Bible

1. Have the children clean up their free play areas and join you in the gathering space.
2. **Say:** "In our story today, a woman met Jesus and her life was changed forever. Our story comes from the New Testament part of the Bible." Show the children where this part of the Bible is.
3. Tell the following story in your own words. Be as interactive as possible.

Jesus was kind to people, even to people who were not treated well by others. Jesus was kind.

One day when Jesus was traveling, he came to Samaria. When Jesus traveled, he walked. When he walked he would get thirsty and would then find a watering place, called a well, and get a drink of water.

On this particular day, Jesus sat down by the well and was resting. A woman from the nearby town came to get some water.

Jesus asked the Samaritan woman if she would help him get a drink. The Samaritan woman was not used to people being kind to her and so she questioned why Jesus was even talking to her.

The Samaritan woman learned that Jesus was kind. Jesus was kind even to her. He taught her about God. He told her that God loved her. He told her that God would be her friend and could save her and help her have a better life. The Samaritan woman realized that this man talking to her was Jesus.

The Samaritan woman came to the well to get water. Meeting Jesus changed her life forever. She then went back to town to invite lots of other people to meet Jesus. She proclaimed to them that Jesus is the Savior of the world. When the people came to meet Jesus, they too said, "We know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world."

4. Tell the children that every Sunday someone “proclaims” a message at your church that “Jesus really is the Savior of the world.” This is told through Sunday School/Bible Study classes. This is told through worship times. During worship we have a sermon, which is a time when a preacher will help people to understand from the Bible that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. This is preached or “proclaimed” so that everyone will know Jesus.
 5. Tell the children that you are going to go on a field trip to the sanctuary/worship center to see where this happens.
 6. Ahead of time, have arranged for your preacher/pastor to be there to meet the children. Ask him or her to have a Bible present, too. When you are there, invite the children to stand in the pulpit area, look or hold a Bible, and “proclaim” “Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”
 7. Look around the sanctuary. Talk about how people are invited to come. Talk about how children can invite their neighbors to come. Talk about how Jesus is taught from the pulpit. If your space has Bibles in the pews or chairs, show these to the children. We want children to know that the Bible is an important book/tool.
 8. Invite the pastor to have a prayer for the children that they will continue to grow in their understanding that Jesus really is the Savior of the world.
 9. Walk back to your class. Invite children along the way to say to anyone they may pass in the hallway, “Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”
 10. Once you get back to the room, say: “In our centers today, we will spend some time learning even more that Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”
 11. If you are allowing the children to choose their own centers, give a brief overview of what is happening in each one.
-

Centers (20-30 minutes)

(Utilize as many of the centers as you need to fill the time you have available)

Art: Your Sanctuary or Church Coloring Page (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: crayons or markers or colored pencils. Ahead of the session, obtain a digital picture of your sanctuary or church. Convert it into a coloring page. This website turns photos into coloring pages. It is free. <http://www.reallycolor.com/>.

Give each child a coloring sheet. Ask them if they recognize what it is. Help them to know that this is a special place where people learn that “Jesus really is the Savior of the world.”

Nature: Plants for Jesus (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Flower seeds, potting soil, container for planting, water, and a label for each plant

1. Prior to the session, make the labels that children will later put on their containers. Either print or type out the labels to read: "The Samaritan woman went to the well to find water. She found water and Jesus. Jesus really is the Savior of the world."
 2. **Say:** "Today we are going to plant seeds. After we plant the seeds they will need sunshine and water to grow."
 3. Help the children plant seeds. As you work remind the children how Jesus went to the well to get some water. So did the Samaritan woman. We need water to grow. So do the seeds.
 4. After planting, ask the children to put a label on the flower/seed container. Read the label to the children.
 5. Lightly water the plant.
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Blocks: Build a Well or a Pulpit or Both (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: blocks, toy people

1. Engage the children in building either a well or a pulpit for the toy people to dramatize the Bible story or the preaching/proclamation. As children play, encourage them to have the toy people say, "*Jesus really is the Savior of the world.*"
-

Connecting and Closing: (5-10 minutes)

1. Tell the children that it is time to clean up their centers and return to the gathering space.
 2. Invite the children to take turns sharing their work or their favorite activities from the session.
 3. Play the telephone game: Using a toy telephone, speak the Bible verse into the phone and then pass the phone around the circle for each person to share the good news with someone over the phone. As time allows, send the phone around a second time and allow each child to share a Bible verse from a previous session. You may want or need to remind the children of the previous Bible verses. As children play the telephone game, help them to understand that they are proclaiming good news, or the Bible message or Bible truths with others.
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Pray: "Thank you, God, for the Bible and all the good stories from the Bible. Help us to share these stories with other people. Amen."

**Proclamation Lesson
Elementary**
By Bob Fox & Amanda Langlands

Main Idea: In worship, you have the opportunity to proclaim your faith in Jesus.

Key Verse: *O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.*

Psalm 105:1 (ESV)

Materials/Preparation: lunch sack; fish crackers; round Ritz-style crackers; bowl; artistic representation of Jesus; paper bags; construction paper; googly eyes; napkins

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

1. Review the previous weeks' learning objectives and key verses. Ask children to recall the key verses and the main ideas.
 2. **Ask:** "What does it mean to 'proclaim'?" Help them to understand that proclaim means to tell, announce, or let others know.
 3. **Ask:** "What do we proclaim in worship?" Help them to understand that in worship we proclaim that God loves us, that we need God's presence, that we trust God, and that we love God.
 4. Share that today's key verse is "*O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.*" Psalm 105:1
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Opening activity (5 minutes)

Select one student to lead the group in pantomime. Explain that they may not use anything but their body to help others guess the answer. Use the following prompts—preaching, praying, singing, Lord's Supper, dancing, reading the Bible, giving an offering.

Bible Storytelling (15 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Lunch sack, fish crackers, round Ritz-style crackers, bowl, picture of Jesus. Prior to the Bible study, take a lunch sack and place in it two fish crackers and five round Ritz style crackers. Also, prepare a bowl that the children cannot see through

with more than enough fish crackers and round crackers for everyone. Cover the bowl with a picture of Jesus.

Select a child to read aloud each of the scripture sections from John 6:1-14 (NIV). After each reading ask the questions and do the activities.

First Reading:

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

Ask:

- "What were the people doing in the countryside?" Suggest that they were worshiping Jesus if this is not brought up by the children.
- "What is a time when we eat in worship services?"
- "Where does your family buy food?"
- "What would you do if your family could not find or buy food?"

Second reading:

6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Ask:

- "What did Philip want to do to feed the people? Why would it not work?"
- "What did Andrew do? Why would his idea not work?"

Take the bag you have prepared and pull out the five round crackers and two fish crackers.

Ask:

- "Would this be enough to feed a crowd?"
- "What did the boy proclaim when he shared his lunch?" Help them understand that the boy trusted Jesus and that Jesus wanted him to share. The boy wasn't worried about what he needed.

Third reading:

10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

Explain that Jesus gave thanks—he **proclaimed** to everyone that God had given him what he needed.

Take the picture of Jesus and lift it so that the five round crackers and two fish crackers slide into the bowl. Show the children the full bowl, then pass out the napkins and invite them to share (make sure that there are leftovers!).

Fourth reading:

12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

Ask:

- "Why were there leftovers?"
 - "What do you think the people said to their friends when they got home?"
-

Craft (15 Minutes)

Supplies Needed: Paper bags, construction paper, googly eyes, napkins

1. Go to a craft area and give each child an empty paper bag. Tell the children that the empty bag is a reminder that the boy proclaimed his faith in Jesus by giving Jesus what he had as an act of worship.
 2. Have the children use their empty bags to make a hand puppet of themselves.
 3. Explain that during worship we give what we have to God and when we leave worship we tell others about what God has done.
 4. As the children finish their puppets, have them use the puppets to act out different ways that they can proclaim their trust in God during worship.
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Journal (10 Minutes)

Have the children write the key verse in their journals. Ask children to write a definition of "proclaim." Then, let them list, draw, or describe ways that they can proclaim in worship.

Proclamation Lesson
Youth
By Charles Conkin

Learning Focus

During worship, God proclaims good news to us and we proclaim good news to each other.

Materials: worship guides from a recent worship service at your church; pens or highlighters

Scripture References

Mark 1:4-15
Luke 4:16-22
Acts 8:26-39

Preparation for Teachers

Proclamation is the sharing, telling or declaring of God's grace and peace. Worship allows a space for proclamation to take place. It does not solely dwell within the context of worship, but for the purpose of this study we will only discuss proclamation in worship.

We are familiar with proclamation coming in the form of a sermon and particularly for Baptists; we build the worship service around the proclamation of the sermon. However, many different elements of worship can hold this power of proclaiming the good news.

- Reading scripture allows the congregation to hear the proclamation of God's good news throughout salvation history.
- Prayers communicate the difficulty and hardship of life, but they also proclaim the hope of God's comfort and care.
- Communal confessions are important to congregational worship. Confession is important to proclamation because of the assurances traditionally spoken after them. Those assurances remind worshipers of the forgiveness and grace brought by God.

When teaching proclamation through scripture and its use in worship, I tend to follow the theological understanding on "Word of God" from Karl Barth. Barth thought that

there are three ways that the Word of God is communicated to humanity, or for our lesson, a threefold way to proclaim the grace of God.

1. The Word of God is Christ. Found in John chapter 1, Jesus is the logos (word) from which all things are created and created new. We talk about Jesus in this way often and worship should proclaim this truth.
2. The word of God told to us through the reading and use of scripture. This is not to make a statement on the inerrancy of scripture but on the authority to which we use it. When proclamation is important to the worship service, scripture is read and reflected upon by the leaders and congregation during the service.
3. The words we use for God. We use our words to interpret and communicate what we know of God. This can be through the use of testimony, sermon, prayers, etc. Anytime we share about God we proclaim.

The scriptures chosen for this study are scriptures that indicate the importance of proclamation in the life and ministry of Jesus. We begin with Mark's narrative of Jesus' purpose and continuation of John the Baptist's message. They both proclaimed the kingdom of God. They shared the benefits of a kingdom built on forgiveness and repentance.

Luke's reading is post-baptismal, as Jesus returns from the wilderness. Jesus' first action is to attend a worship service at the synagogue in Galilee. It is not happenstance that Jesus walks into this community gathering and unrolls a scroll that proclaims again his purpose from God. Jesus is here to set us free and bring peace. Jesus is familiar with scripture and he shows the importance of proclaiming that scripture.

For the reading of Acts, I thought it important to communicate to youth the use of proclamation in multiple forms. We have Philip receiving these proclamations from God to go a certain place and visit an Ethiopian. Then we meet the Ethiopian who is already reading God's proclamation through scripture. Philip then proclaims (shares) God's good news to the Ethiopian and the Ethiopian in turn is baptized.

Up to this point all proclamation we have discussed is verbal. The Ethiopian can help you bring a non-verbal form of proclamation to the discussion. Baptism is a way that we proclaim God's call to our lives. Baptism is also a communal event where we connect with the other. Proclamation in worship is not one-sided and baptism helps us participate in proclamation in worship.

God proclaims to us through internal contemplation, worship allows us to hear the proclamation of God's grace from others, and each of us are called to participate in that continuous proclamation to the world.

Opening Prayer

“O God, be present with us in this time as we listen to others and share our own words. May we know what it means to proclaim your goodness in our lives. Amen.”

Group Activity

This is a debate game meant to help youth understand the power and influence they have as "proclaimers." Each group's task is to proclaim why their choice is best to certain questions. Their task is not to convince you but the members of the opposite group.

1. Form two groups. After the groups are formed, separate them on opposite sides of the room.
2. Ask the questions below and let the group have 1 minute to decide on a debater to represent the group and proclaim their answer. After that time invite the debater from each group to the middle and allow them 1 minute each to convince their peers on both teams why their group's answer is best.
3. When both groups have had a chance to give their opinions, ask your youth to individually choose the better answer by moving groups. If a team member feels his or her group was best, then remain it. If not, switch groups.

Potential debate questions:

- What is the best food?
- What is the best band/singer?
- What is the best movie of all time?
- What is the best book of the Bible? (This question can lead to a discussion of how it is sometimes easier to talk about movies and music than God or the Bible.)

(Feel free to change or add questions that fit your group. After the game have a discussion time with the youth about the power of words and opinions. You may find that your youth have never understood the power of speech or proclamation before.)

4. After the debate, **ask** the following questions:
 - Why was it easy to debate your answers?
 - How did it make you feel when someone switched groups?
 5. **Say:** “What you just did was called proclamation. You had an opinion or belief and felt compelled to try and convince others to see your way.”
-

Scripture

1. Invite two or three students to read the following scripture aloud to the group.

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the

people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news."

Mark 1:4-15 (NRSV)

2. **Ask:** "Who does the proclaiming in these verses?"
3. **Ask:** "What were they proclaiming?"
4. **Say:** "It seems that John and Jesus both thought that proclaiming the good news of repentance and the kingdom of God was important. This becomes the central message for the ministry and life of Jesus."
5. **Ask:** "Have you ever had something so important happen to you that you had to run and tell everyone you encountered?" "Or, is there something so meaningful or special in your life that you spend your life spreading its significance to others?"
6. **Say:** "Jesus and John are proclaiming something that is very personal and important to them, just like you were doing earlier in the game."

Transition Activity

Supplies Needed: Worship guides from a recent worship service at your church; pens or highlighters

1. **Say:** "Let us transition from a broad understanding of proclamation to focusing on proclamation in a worship context."
2. Ask the youth to highlight or circle any time in the service that proclamation is happening. Do not share at this time. Ask the youth to hold onto the bulletin and you will return to it later.

Scripture

1. Invite two or three students to read the following scripture aloud to the group.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the

scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Luke 4:16-22 (NRSV)

2. Tell the youth that before this story took place, Jesus was in the wilderness. In the wilderness he was tempted several times and when he returned to Galilee he went to the synagogue to proclaim the good news (the same good news discussed from Mark 1). Highlight for the youth that this was a worship service where Jesus read scripture and proclaimed God's news.
3. **Ask:** "Do you think it is a coincidence that Jesus unrolls the scroll and reads this passage from Isaiah?"
4. **Ask:** "Do you think Jesus was familiar with scripture?"
5. **Ask:** "What is the message of Jesus found in verses 18-19?"
6. **Ask:** "What is our role in proclamation during a worship service and beyond a worship service?"
7. Direct the attention of the youth to the bulletins and talk through the points in the service that the youth circled or highlighted. Each part of the service should be proclaiming something about who God is and how God interacts with humanity. Some parts of the service may be for introspection and personal reflection (instrumentals, silence, confession). These parts of the service allow us to hear what God is proclaiming to us personally.

Scripture and Discussion

1. Either read or tell the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, found in Acts 8:26-39.
2. **Ask:** "Where did proclamation happen in this story?"
 - Angel telling Philip to go
 - Spirit prompting Philip to approach the eunuch
 - The eunuch reading scripture
 - Philip proclaiming the good news
 - The eunuch being baptized (which is a proclamation of his acceptance of God)
3. **Ask:** "What does this story say about our role as proclaimers of the gospel?"
4. **Ask:** "How do you personally proclaim in the worship service?"
 - If youth pray or read scripture, they participate as proclaimer during worship.
 - Proclamation happens when we sing with, to, and for one another.

- The practice of passing the peace of Christ, for example, allows us to encounter each other in a spiritual way.
-

Connecting and Closing Prayer

In worship we wait for God to bring truth to our lives. In worship we acknowledge and experience the love of God. This happens in and through several elements of our worship and is not exclusive to the sermon. When we hear scripture, pray, sing, or sit in silence, we hear and proclaim the goodness of God. And as followers of Christ, we are called to proclaim that same good news beyond worship as we are sent back into the world.

Conclude by offering a prayer.

Proclamation Lesson Adult

By Bob Browning & Amber Inscore Essick

Introductory Statement

Proclamation is communication of the truth of God so that we encounter Jesus Christ, the Word of God. In short, it is the presentation of Jesus Christ. Broader than the preaching event, proclamation also occurs in the reading of Scripture, in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in song, and in silence. To proclaim is to speak the word of God.

In this lesson, we shall discuss various "Words" of God and various elements of worship where proclamation happens as well as how the entire congregation participates in the task of proclamation.

Preparation: collect copies of your worship guide for class members.

Prayer

"God, open our hearts and minds to understand how you speak to us in worship so that we may enter every worship service expectant and eager to encounter Jesus Christ. Amen."

Scripture

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:1-4 (NRSV)

Lesson

Questions for discussion:

1. When you think about "the word of God," what is the first concept that comes to mind?
2. When you hear the word "proclamation," what words first come to mind?

A longstanding pair of Baptist habits is likely come to mind when you answer these questions: 1) Baptists tend to focus solely on Scripture as an authoritative revelation from God, and 2) many Baptists emphasize preaching as the pinnacle of Christian worship. The “Word of God” includes but is not limited to scripture, and proclamation is broader than the preaching event (although certainly, when we preach, our aim is to proclaim the word of God—or a word *from* God—to our fellow worshipers). In order to discuss proclamation, we must also understand what is being proclaimed. So what is the “Word of God”?

Logos

First and foremost, the Word of God is Jesus Christ (John 1).¹⁴ As the Word of God, Jesus is God’s proclamation to a world “deaf and blind to the truth.”¹⁵

The Greek concept of the “*logos*” of God (translated in Scripture as “word”) might require us to bend our understanding of language. Just as words go out from someone speaking, Jesus, as God’s communication, God’s self-revelation to us, went out to us, in order that we might see, touch, and encounter God.

Questions for discussion:

1. How is Jesus, as God’s *logos*, present to us in worship?
2. What occurred in a worship service you attended which led to one of your most memorable encounters with the Word of God, Jesus Christ?
3. Were you surprised?
4. How did you react?
5. What did you learn from this experience?

Scripture

Scripture, too, is the word of God. In telling the story of God and God’s relationship to humanity, scripture presents the person of Christ to readers and hearers. This is why our worship is centered in scripture, whether we read it together, we sing it in the form of hymns, read it responsively, or pray the words of Scripture. Thus our words *to* God and to one another can be simultaneously a word *from* God.

Questions for discussion:

Have participants search the worship guide for words that come from scripture (in hymns, readings, prayers).

1. Who is proclaiming?
2. How do the words change when we are saying them to each other?

¹⁴Leanne Van Dyk, “Proclamation: Revelation, Christology, in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 59.

¹⁵Van Dyk, 61.

Preaching

Preaching itself is the word of God: preachers offer a message from God which presents Christ himself and ushers our hearers into a divine encounter. The sermon seeks to make God 'audible'.¹⁶ However humbly the preaching task is carried out, it seeks to "re-present Jesus Christ...to a generation of Christians who no longer can see or hear him except by the eyes and ears of faith."¹⁷

Questions for discussion:

1. How might the dynamics in the room shift when all the worshipers own the task of proclamation, sharing it with the preacher?
2. How do you personally proclaim in worship?

Lord's Supper

The word of God, in proclamation, goes out to us but draws us into a divine encounter. It should be no surprise that the Lord's Supper and baptism (these are often referred to as ordinances, but some refer to them as sacraments) are also the word of God. In celebrating the Lord's Supper, God makes Jesus visible and tactile to us. Coming to God's table, we participate in a meal that embodies the words from 1 John 1:1-4. That is, we see and touch the representation of Jesus' body and blood. We experience fellowship with God and with God's church. We commune with Christians through the ages who have found fellowship with God to be the defining reality of their shared life. That is why we also call it communion.

Questions for discussion:

1. What does God proclaim to us in the Lord's Supper?
2. What do we proclaim to one another in the Lord's Supper?

Baptism

Likewise, in baptism, the believer and community participate in the life of Christ (following his footsteps in baptism) and act on behalf of/with God to welcome a person into the Kingdom of God. Baptism is a word of welcome from God and a believer's response/echo to God's call. You often hear the minister's call to the congregation to "remember your baptism," so that, in remembering, we might continue to proclaim ourselves fellow followers of Christ. In baptism, just as in the Lord's Supper, Christ communicates to us our status as believers, followers, and as the people of God.

Questions for discussion:

1. Reflecting upon your baptism and the baptism of others, what statements do you recall being proclaimed in the act of baptism?
2. Were those statements from God to us, from us to God or from the community to new believers?

¹⁶Van Dyk, 73.

¹⁷C. Clifton Black, "The First, Second, and Third Letters of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1998), 384.

Silence

A less obvious element of proclamation, of communicating the truth of God, is the role that silence plays. Whether, by silence, we mean the clearing of our minds to reorient us toward the message of God, or the void out of which God speaks life into the world, or the time Christians spend in contemplation of God's word, silence is the space that makes both proclamation and reception possible. Silence is always married to proclamation in the sense that it exposes the dry ground that needs water. It makes evident our desire for God and displays aspects of God otherwise hidden: God's patience, God's rest, God's presence in the abandoned places. Silence is both the intake of breath before the speech of God and the reverberation of God's speech in the heart of believers. "Silence is the context in which faith's reflection does its most creative work."¹⁸

Questions for discussion:

Let's take our worship guides out and examine the spaces of silence in our worship.

1. What is happening there?
2. What should be happening there?
3. How is the silence we experience in our particular context teaching us about God?

Proclamation is a shared burden of the entire gathered community. All who preach, pray, and sing; all who read Scripture; who speak or dance or otherwise communicate—in other words, all gathered—share the task of proclaiming Christ, presenting Christ, and receiving and reflecting Christ to each other. When we enter into the presence of God in worship, we all become proclaimers of the Word of God, offering and reflecting Jesus Christ to one another.

Conclusion

As we understand how proclamation occurs, we are prepared to encounter Jesus upon entering worship. "Worship is a miracle of grace. You have to be alert to how God is going to speak to you, because if you are not alert, if you are not ready, you will miss it. You have to go to church expectant, ready to catch what God is going to say."¹⁹

As worshipers, if we feel any time spent in the place of worship is incapable of providing an encounter with the Word of God, we might miss a divine encounter. The Holy Spirit wants to meet us at our point of need to deliver "*the word of life*, which is the truth of life, the meaning of life, the innermost source and purpose of life."²⁰ If we accept our vocation as proclaimers, we then become conduits through which God brings the word of life into the world.

¹⁸Colin Harris, e-mail message to author, March 14, 2015. Harris is Professor of Religious Studies at Mercer University, Macon, GA.

¹⁹Van Dyk, 57-58.

²⁰Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 287.

Questions for discussion:

1. What will you do differently the next time you go to worship in light of this lesson?
 2. Where and how can God use you to help people encounter the Word of God and receive the words of life in worship?
-

Group Exercise:

Look at your worship guide and discuss where and how proclamation occurs.

Benediction

Gracious God, help us to be prepared to encounter the Word of God, Jesus Christ, from the moment we enter worship. Grant us openness during worship to receive the word of life and to share what we have learned with others so all believers might be inspired, equipped and empowered as the people of God in our journey of faith.



Sending: An Introduction
By Brittany Krebs & Jason Crosby

Definition

As worship comes to a close we find ourselves at a crossroads looking toward our next destination. True worship sends us out into the world to live out our calling as God's gathered, blessed, and commissioned children. This often takes place in the form of a benediction: a prayer offered at the conclusion of worship reminding us that we have been sent to be God's hands, feet, and voices of love and grace in the world and that we can do so because we are blessed by the God who sends us.

Explanation and Analysis

Benediction as Commissioning: Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20, NRSV)

This passage, often referred to as the Great Commission, provides a glimpse of the sending aspect of worship. The disciples have been gathered in worship by Christ on the mountain in Galilee, and in this moment Jesus sends them with a benediction.

The act of sending can be a very powerful moment. David Stubbs writes that while the ending moments of a worship service are brief, they are, like all endings and partings, filled with meaning.... Such moments of ending are opportunities to reflect on and understand all that has gone before and direct our thinking about what comes after. Thus, the ending of our worship services or liturgies can help us see if and how our worship is connected to the rest of our lives.²¹

In worship God's people take time to practice the habits we will need in the world. We learn and refine the disciplines of praise, thanksgiving, confession, proclamation,

²¹David L. Stubbs, "Ending of Worship = Ethics," in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne Van Dyk, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

communal living, feasting, and compassion when we gather to worship each week. We are then sent out to embody these disciplines in the world. We are commissioned to go into the world to be the hands and feet of Christ often through a short prayer of benediction.

This short prayer is different than other prayers offered throughout the worship hour. Instead of being offered to God, this prayer is prayed over the people. The person offering the benediction extends God's charge to the congregation. The charge can be a broad reminder to be God's people in the world or a specific command related to a previous element of worship.²² Regardless, this benediction carries weight as we are given concise and direct instructions about our mission as God's people.

Benediction, however, does not simply present us with a difficult and demanding task and then say, "Good luck." The charge is accompanied with a word of blessing, an assurance that the God who sends us will accompany us as we go. We find a classic example of this blessing in what is often referred to as a priestly benediction found in Numbers 6.

Benediction as Blessing (Numbers 6:22-27, NIV)

²² *The Lord said to Moses,*

²³ *"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:*

²⁴ *"The Lord bless you
and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace."*

²⁷ *"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."*

The book of Numbers describes many ways in which the Israelites organized life so that they might honor God after fleeing from Egypt. A census was taken, jobs were assigned, and rules governing social and religious practices were established. All this gave some order to life in an unordered situation. However, drought, famine, and the potential for rebellion against leaders and God were always threatening. Life was full of anxiety. Sanctuary was not easy to find.

²²Deborah M. Clark, *O Come, Let Us Bow Down and Worship: A Spiritual Guide for Leadership* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 117.

In the midst of their difficult time in the wilderness, God instructed Moses to tell the Israelite priests to bless the people with the words printed above from Numbers 6. When the Israelites, under God's direction, were busy doing what they needed to do to survive and honor God, God reminded them that God will be with God's people. God will bless and keep, shine upon and give grace, turn toward and grant peace to the people of Israel because God's name would be upon them as they made their way through the wilderness.

As worship begins to end and we come down from the mountaintop, the anxiety generating realities of life begin to creep back over worshipers. As the final hymn progresses, a minister standing at the front of a sanctuary looking out upon the congregation can see the end of the service approaching. People begin checking watches to make sure that the day remains on schedule. Worshipers begin collecting their coats and scarves and other belongings. The return to our own wildernesses is at hand. Like the benediction entrusted to priests to bestow upon the Israelites then, at the conclusion of our times of worship when we prepare to go forth into our wildernesses, we often conclude with words to remind us that our God will keep and bless, shine upon and give grace, turn toward and grant peace, and that God's name will be upon us.

Benedictions are a form of prayer. Most prayers during the course of worship are ones spoken to God, but the benediction is prayer spoken over the people.²³ Therefore, we conclude worship with God's prayer for us to remind us that God desires nothing more than that we might know our blessedness in those places we encounter as both sanctuary *and* wilderness.

Furthermore, benedictions inform us that by God's grace we have been converted. We are no longer just people wandering aimlessly, but we have been called and transformed to be God's children. Craig Barnes writes, "The church has a tendency to call people first to conversion. Later it gets around to their responsibility to help out with missions. But in the Bible we find men and women who were being constantly converted by their vocations."²⁴ The blessed word that we have been converted to be God's people comes with a calling to do God's labors of love, and through that labor we come to understand more fully our blessedness. The words of blessing and commissioning found in a benediction work together to reveal to us our blessedness.

²³Ibid.

²⁴M. Craig Barnes, *When God Interrupts: Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 22.

Furthermore, not only is the substance of benedictions we hear similar in nature to that given to the Israelites long ago, but the form is as well. These words of good blessings are brief for a reason. Benedictions function best when they are packaged in a manner that enables us to take them with us as we go. Benedictions call for brevity so that as we gather up the other belongings we need to survive in the wilderness we can make room for the most important item we need as we go those – well spoken words from God to us that tell us we are blessed and commissioned by God until we meet again.

Implication

The sending element of worship is a significant portion of our worship together. In worship God sends us into a world that, at best, sees our churchy behavior as an oddity, and at worst is hostile to our beliefs and actions.²⁵ Knowing this, we depart worship with words of benediction in our ears and hearts. The benediction concludes our corporate worship, but it also informs us that our worship continues beyond the church doors. This act of sending may be best understood as a gateway that moves us from one room of worship, the sanctuary, into another room to worship, the world around us. These words of benediction carry us through the week. They remind us that God sends us out into the world with both divine purpose and presence. Sending should be intentional so that we are sent out from worship with an important reminder ringing in our ears: we have been blessed, we have been marked for participation in the divine life, and there is much work to be done until we are gathered to worship again.

²⁵Harmon L. Smith, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Liturgy and the Moral Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

Sending Lesson
Preschool/Kindergarten
By Joyce Oliver & Amanda Standiford

Learning Objective: Children will learn that every time we come to church or to worship, we come to learn and leave to be like Jesus. We are sent to tell others in our world about Jesus.

Bible Story: Jesus Sent His Friends (Matthew 28:16-20)

Key Verse: Jesus said, *“Go and share this good news.”*

Matthew 28:19

Materials/Preparation: Bible; green and blue paint; two marbles; box top; white paper; pre-made labels that read **Jesus said, “Go and share this good news.”**; chairs

Session Format: This session is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour. Adjust activity times to fit your schedule and your group.

Classroom setup: This curriculum is designed for a classroom with centers that the children can visit, plus a gathering space (a rug or other marked area on the floor works well). The centers might include home-living, blocks, puzzles, art, games, sand, water play, nature, books, and others. If you have a large group and multiple adult leaders, consider allowing the children to move from center to center at their own paces. If you have a small group, you can lead the children through centers together. The specific centers used in this session are:

- Art, games, dramatic play
-

Arriving (5-10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: none

1. As children arrive, invite them to engage in a few minutes of free play in the classroom. Be sure to let the children know if there are any centers that are off-limits during this time.

2. As children play, get their attention by flicking the lights. Tell them that today we are learning how the disciples were “sent” into the world to tell other people about Jesus. Tell the children that you are going to “send” them to certain places and people in the room for them to say, “Jesus loves you.” Then call a child by name and say, “I send you to the puzzle area to tell (name a child) that Jesus loves them.” Or, “I send you to the home living area...”
-

Story Time (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Bible

1. Invite the children to join you in the gathering space.
2. **Ask**, “Where did you get sent to tell someone about Jesus?”
3. **Ask**, “Who tells you stories about Jesus?”
4. **Say**: “In our story today, we will hear about some of the disciples being sent to tell other people about Jesus. This Bible story is about Jesus so that means it is from the New Testament part of the Bible.”
5. Tell the following story in your own words. Be as interactive as possible.

Jesus did many wonderful things. He healed people who were hurt. He taught people what God is like. He died on the cross and rose again. After all of this, he went to be with God and to get things ready for us.

Today’s story takes place just before Jesus went away to be with God. You see, he had one last lesson for his friends.

Jesus gathered his friends together. He said to them, “God has put me in charge of heaven and earth. Here is what I want you to do: Go out into the world. Tell everyone you meet this good news that I have given you. Teach them to be my friends and to follow me. Baptize them into God’s family. And know that I will always, always, always be with you.”

Jesus told his friends to continue the work that he had begun. He gave them the job of showing the world what he had taught them and what God is like.

Our church has the same job. At the end of worship each week, we exit the building and enter the world. We, too, have the job of telling people who Jesus is and what he has taught us.

6. **Say**: “In our centers today, we will spend some time learning about what it is like to share God’s good news with the world.”
 7. If you are allowing the children to choose their own centers, give a brief overview of what is happening in each one.
-

Centers (20-30 minutes)

(Utilize as many of the centers as you need to fill the time you have available)

Art: Swirling Paint (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Green and blue paint, two marbles, box top, white paper, pre-made labels:

1. Prior to the session makes labels that read: Jesus said, "Go and share this good news." (Matthew 5:19) We are asked to go all over our earth to tell others about Jesus.
 2. Tell the children that the paint colors represent the earth – the blue represents the water and the green represents the ground/grass.
 3. Place a piece of paper in a box top. Put a teaspoon of the two colors of paint on the paper. Place two marbles in the box top. Tell the child to roll the marbles through the paint by tilting the box top. Remind the child to keep the marbles in the box top. When the child is finished painting, remove the painting to dry.
 4. Put a premade label on each painting.
 5. As children work, read the label to them. Remind them that Jesus wants us to tell other people about him.
-

Game: So Send I You (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: none

1. Tell the children that Jesus often sent his special friends, also called disciples, to do things and said, "So send I You." Often the friends were to go in pairs to do the job Jesus sent them to do.
 2. Invite children to listen to your instruction and then invite a friend or two to do the activity with them. Be sure that all children are included through the game. Children are not to begin activity until you say, "So send I you."
 3. **Instructions:** (1) Hop; (2) Walk around the room and tell people, "Jesus loves you."; (3) Do five jumping jacks; (4) Say the Bible verse. Make up other instructions based on the children's abilities and your space.
-

Dramatic Play: As You're Going (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Chairs

1. Ask the children to help you assemble chairs to look like a car and imagine that they are going to school, the playground, daycare, or wherever else they might go. At each place, they can get out of the car and tell the people in that place that Jesus loves them.
2. The children will likely get more out of this learning activity if a teacher models for them how to engage in this dramatic play.

Connecting and Closing: (5-10 minutes)

1. Tell the children that it is time to clean up their centers and return to the gathering space.
 2. Invite the children to take turns sharing their work or their favorite activities from the session.
 3. Practice the Bible verse together, "*Jesus said, 'Go and share this good news.'*" (Matthew 5:19)
 4. Fingerplay – "Here's the church, and here is the steeple. Open the door and see all the people. Close the doors and hear them pray. Open the doors and send them to say, 'JESUS LOVES YOU!'" (There are great YouTube videos to show you the fingerplay.) It ends with the people walking away. Do this fingerplay several times to help the children learn it.
 5. Remember together the Bible verses you have learned during the previous sessions.
 6. Give each child 5 stickers that are Bible-themed. Invite the children to give the stickers away to other people and tell the people that God loves them. Help children understand that you are "sending" them out to love others as Jesus loves them.
-

Pray: "Thank you, God, for Jesus who came and lived and loved so we can live and love, too. Send us out to do your mission. Amen."

Sending Lesson Elementary

By Amanda Langlands & Bob Fox

Learning Objective: Because of what God has done for us we are to go out and share the Good News and invite others to follow Jesus.

Key Verse: *“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Matthew 5:16

Materials/Preparation: a glow stick OR tea light battery candle for each child; Bibles; poster board/large piece of paper for each group; glue; card stock; paper, pens; crayons; markers; things to decorate cards; make copies of the Bible story and images (found at the end of this lesson) on variously colored paper.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: a glow stick or tea light battery candle for each child

1. Review the previous week’s learning objective and key verse.
 2. **Say:** “The very last thing that Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven after he had risen from the dead was, ‘Go.’ What this tells us is that worship is not just about getting together but that it also requires going out into the world.”
 3. As you continue to talk, pull out the lights or sticks one at a time and turn them on or break them and then pass them around the circle. At the end each child should have one.
 4. **Say:** “We come together to worship God so that God can fill us with peace and love. But Jesus told us that it only begins there. We have a job to do. We are followers of God and so we become God’s light here on earth. It is our job to go out and shine God’s light to the world. That can seem scary if we are on our own. But when all our lights shine together we can make a big difference.”
-

Bible Storytelling (20 minutes)

Supplies Needed: Print out the Bible story and images (found at the end of this lesson) on different color paper; Bibles, poster board/large piece of paper for each group, glue,

1. **Read:**

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** Then

*Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV)

2. Divide the group into pairs or small groups of three or four.
3. Assign each group a color (e.g., Group 1 is red, Group 2 is yellow).
4. Have the supplies already placed around the room and have each group find their color to make the story.
5. Provide a large piece of paper or poster board for each group to glue their story to. Let them use their Bibles if they need help.

Activity (10 minutes)

Supplies Needed: card stock, paper, pens, crayons, markers, things to decorate cards
Have the children make and decorate cards, and write messages to send to shut-ins in your church. (Or the cards can be given to someone who is sick or they can be taken and given to a nursing home.)

Prayer (5 minutes)

Leader: Almighty God, as we gather together

Group: Let us shine your light.

Leader: As we confess our wrong doings and proclaim your love.

Group: Let us shine your light.

Leader: Thank you for giving us a heart that can love.

Group: Let us shine your light.

Leader: Help us be aware of your presence in all things.

Group: Let us shine your light.

Leader: As we go now from here.

Group: Let us shine your light.

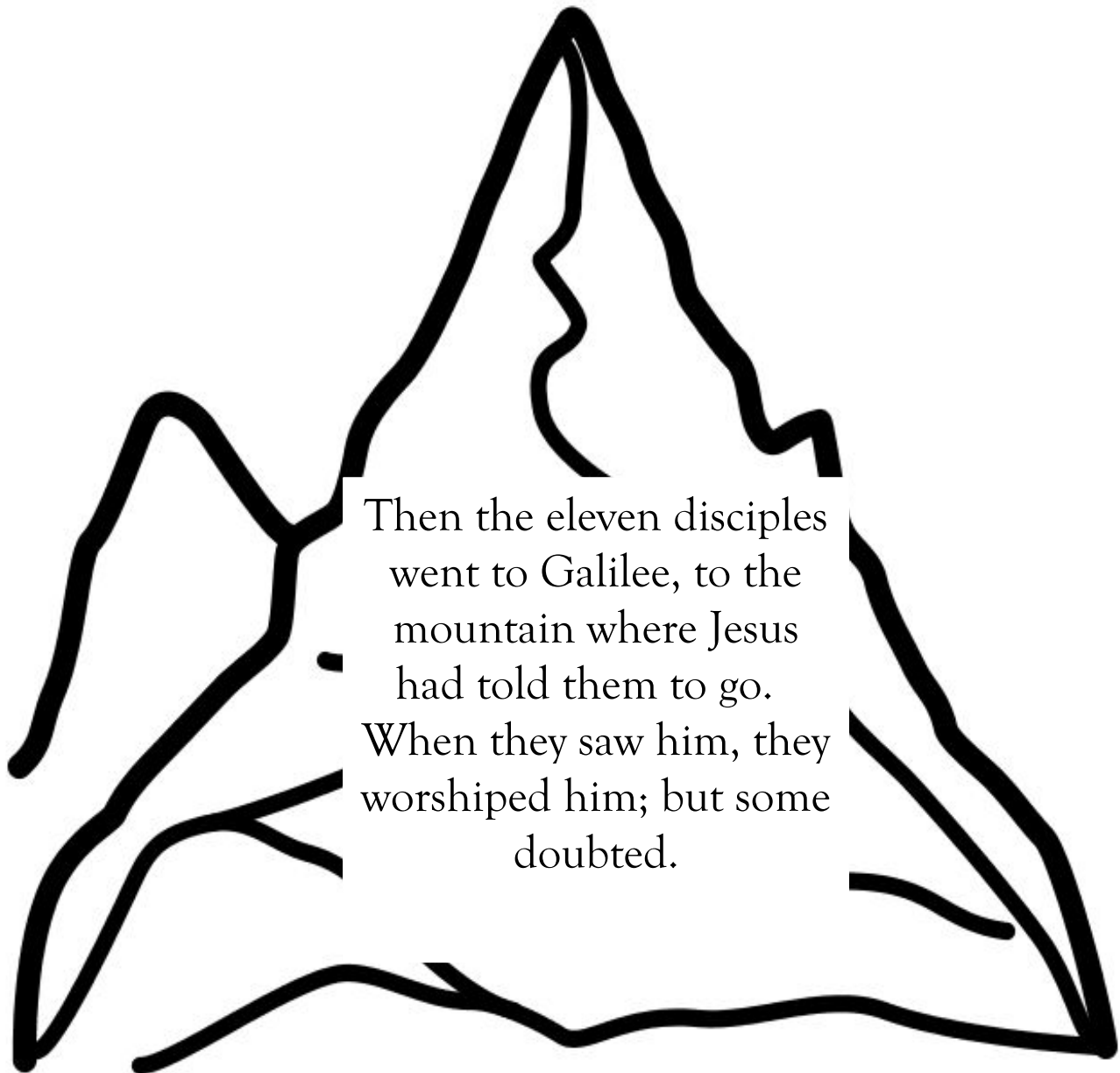
Leader: So that others may know your love.

Group: Let us shine your light.

Leader: And help us to remember that you are with us always. Amen.

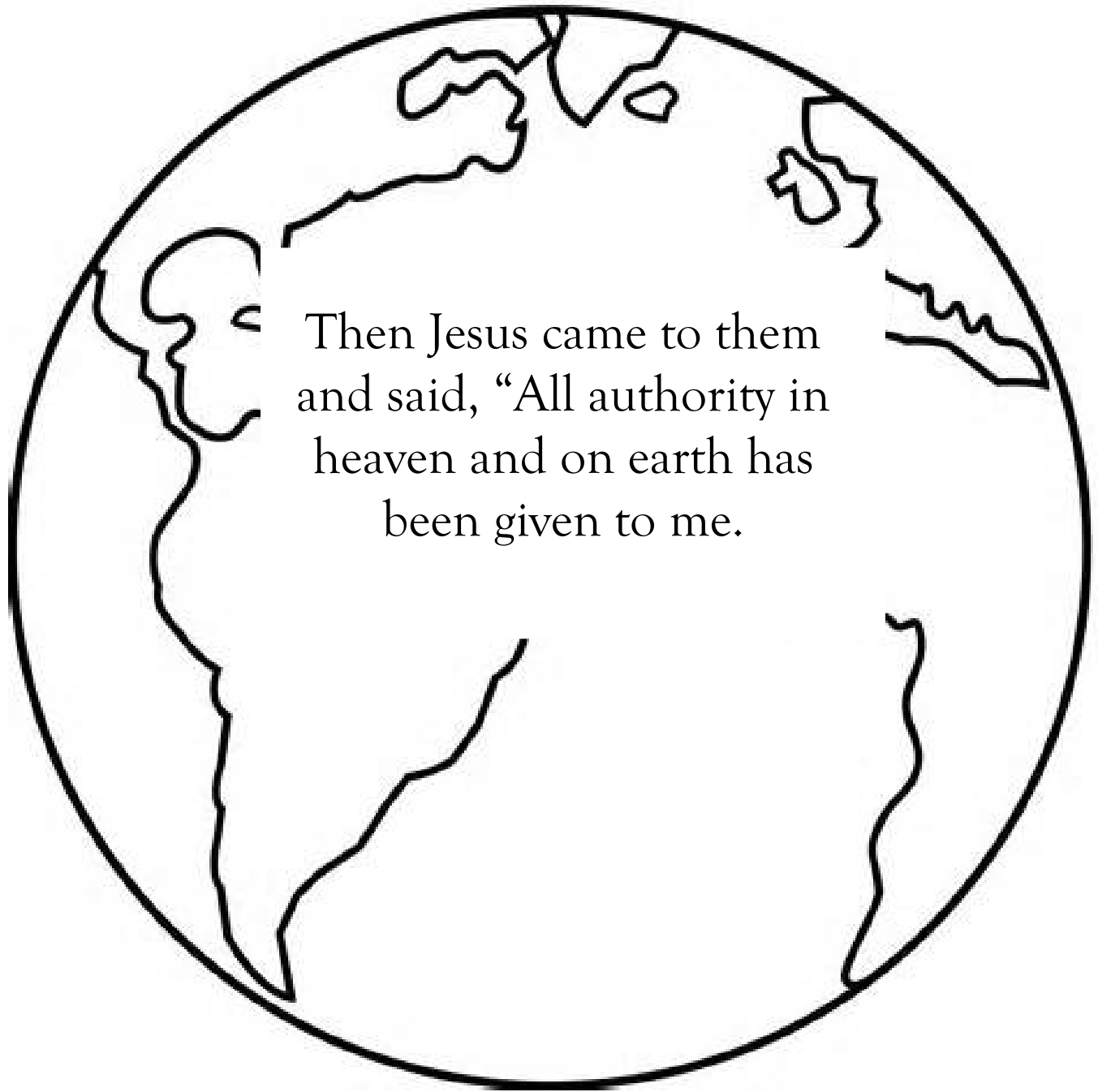
Journal (10 minutes)

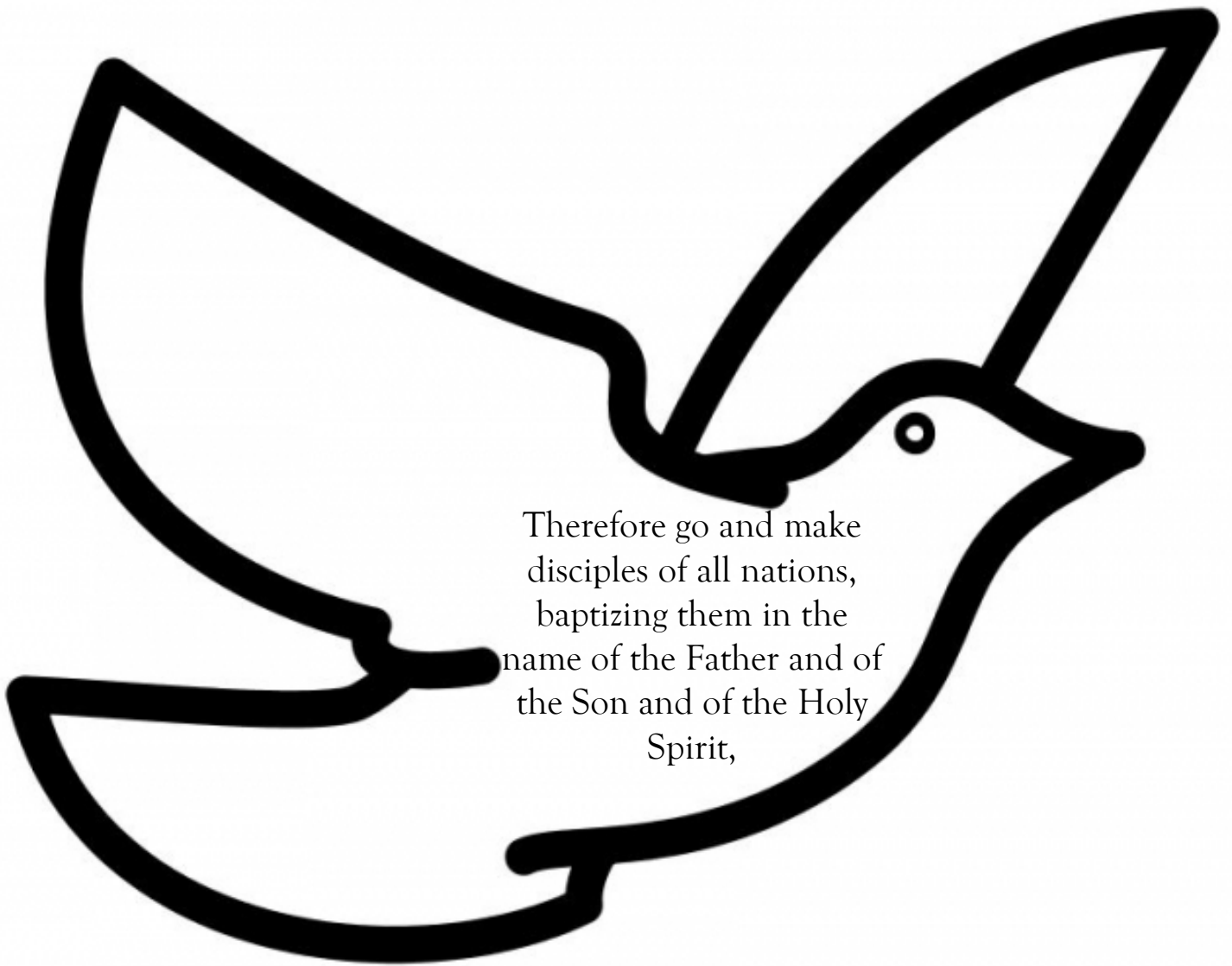
Have the children write down the key verse. Then have them write about something or draw a picture of something they can do this week to show God's love to a friend or someone they know. They can write more than one thing if they would like.



Then the eleven disciples
went to Galilee, to the
mountain where Jesus
had told them to go.
When they saw him, they
worshipped him; but some
doubted.

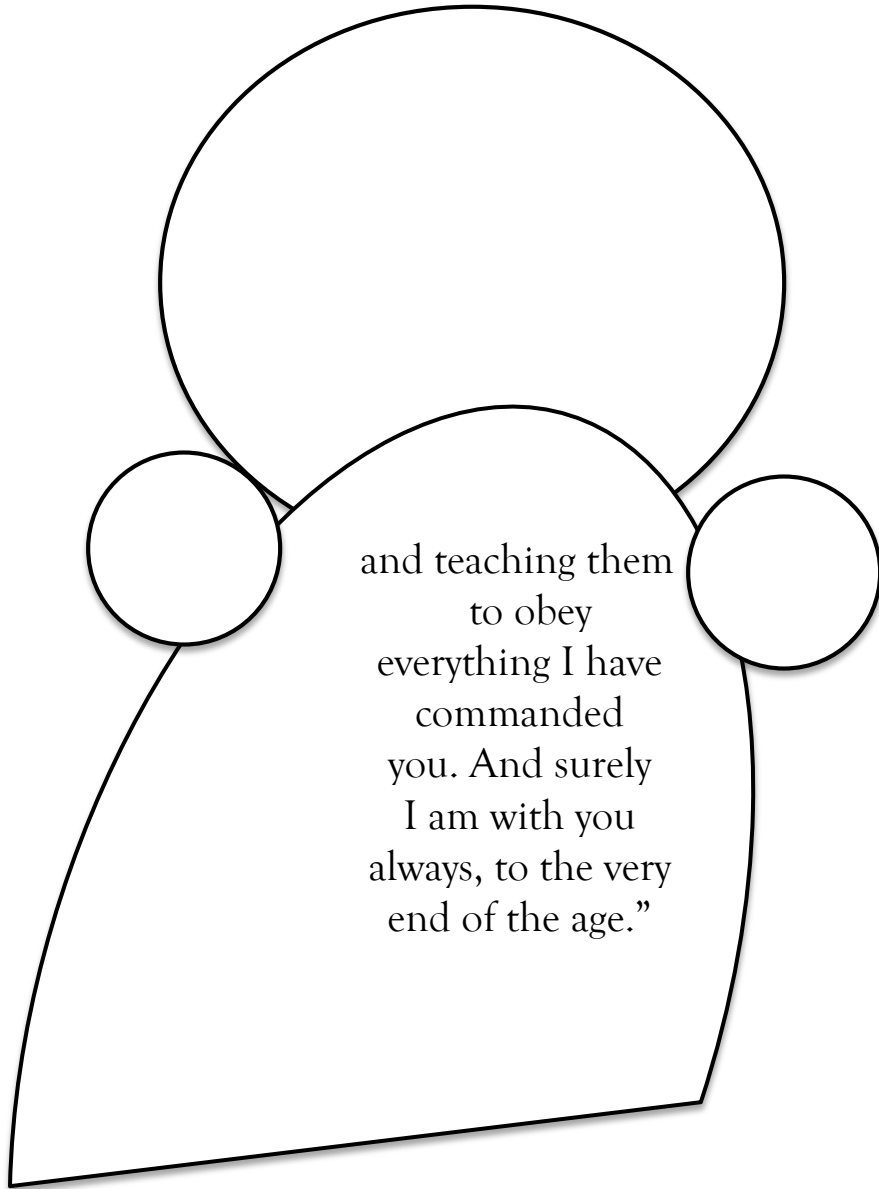
<http://awesome-mountains.blogspot.com/2013/01/mountains-coloring-page.html>





Therefore go and make
disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the
name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy
Spirit,

<http://freecoloringpagesite.com/20-dove-coloring.html/Dove-coloring-10>



and teaching them
to obey
everything I have
commanded
you. And surely
I am with you
always, to the very
end of the age.”

Sending Lesson
Youth
By Evan Rowe

Materials/Preparation: print copies of handout (two pages at end of lesson);

Opening Activity – “Atlas Game”

Supplies Needed: Handout (at the end of this lesson)

In small groups, play the game “Atlas.” The first person says the name of any city, river, ocean, or mountain that can be found in an atlas. Go around the circle and have the next person say another place that starts with the last letter of the place previously named. There is a 10 second limit, and no “place” names should be repeated. For example: Denver, Rhode Island, Denmark, Kenya, etc...

Discussion Questions

- What types of places have you visited?
- How important is travel to you?
- Do you wish you could travel more? Why or why not?

Whether you travel across the world or just down the street, one thing you would learn from traveling is that people have different thoughts about the world and God. Worship sends us back into a world where people differ, disagree, and hopefully discuss their thoughts about matters of great importance.

Scripture Reading:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

Bible Study

The Bible teaches that each and every Christian has been given an incredible and crucial task to follow Jesus and proclaim the gospel of Jesus to others. In fact, if we aren't following Jesus and proclaiming the gospel to others, what are we doing?

Let's look at a scripture passage that will help us understand how our worship of God sends us and how we can faithfully reach out to others with the gospel.

Have someone read Matthew 28:18-20 aloud.

In Matthew's gospel, these are the last words Jesus spoke to his disciples, which means they are probably pretty important. This passage is often called the "Great Commission." A "commission" can be defined as "an authoritative order, charge, or direction. Authority granted for a particular action or function."

After his resurrection and before Jesus ascended to the Father, he wanted his followers to know that "all authority" has been given to him. "Authority" here can mean something like having the means or power to control a person or situation. This reminder that Jesus has been given all authority will be important as his followers encounter people who claim to have "all authority."

Jesus uses his authority to send his followers with specific tasks. First, the disciples are instructed to "go and make disciples." This is a command or commission, which is why it is often called the "Great Commission" instead of the "Great Suggestion." The one with "all authority" commissions his followers to go. It is important to remember that as we depart worship, we depart as a people who are sent by the one possessing "all authority in heaven and on earth."

Relatedly, the followers who are sent are also instructed to make more disciples. This has the idea of training people to follow Jesus. The word "disciple" can mean "follower," so our aim when we depart worship is to live, speak, and act in such a way that others are invited to follow Jesus with us.

Finally, the followers of Jesus are told to baptize and teach the new disciples to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. This means, among other things, that following Jesus is tied with obeying Jesus *and* knowing what Jesus commands. Our worship of God is an important part of obeying Jesus and knowing what he expects of us. In order for disciples (regardless of how long they've been disciples) to follow Jesus more faithfully, they need to be taught.

So, this "Great Commission" is something that all followers of Jesus are challenged to obey each time we leave worship. Wherever and to whatever our worship of God sends us, we need to have it in mind that the one with all authority has told us to go, make disciples, and teach them to obey Jesus. When this happens, we receive a whole new perspective on life. School and work become places where Jesus is obeyed and others are invited to do the same.

Discussion Questions

- How does worship prepare us to obey Jesus' instructions in the "Great Commission"? (Draw attention to the other lessons and the various aspects of worship that teach us who Jesus is, what he expects, and what obedience looks like.)

- How has it been difficult at times to obey the “Great Commission” in your life? (You might draw attention to feelings of anxiety, fear, confusion, forgetfulness, etc.)
- Authority is a big deal in our world. At home, parents have authority. At school, it’s teachers and administrators. In public, authority is displayed by law enforcement officers, judges, and elected officials. In light of the various forms that authority takes in our lives, what are we to make of Jesus’ claim that “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given to him. How might Jesus’ authority compare and contrast with other authoritative figures in our world? What does it mean for us that we have been sent by one with such authority?
- What is at stake if we fail to take the “Great Commission” seriously?

Have someone **read** Acts 1:8 aloud.

In the book of Acts we also read that Jesus told his followers that obeying the “Great Commission” would lead them to be witnesses in places near and far. The word “witness” is related to the word “martyr,” and it means someone who might give a true testimony of what he or she has seen or heard. The disciples were to testify about who Jesus is and what he commands in ever increasing geographical circles until the whole world is filled with those following Jesus and inviting others to do the same.

Discussion Questions

- We’re called to be witnesses, not lawyers. A witness simply tells what he/she knows. What is required of us if we are to be faithful witnesses?
- How does worship prepare us to be faithful witnesses? What aspects of worship point to the so-called “Great Commission” (confession of sin, intercessory prayer, proclamation, etc.)?
- What are the various ways that we can be faithful witnesses to all that we have seen, heard, and know to be true about Jesus? How might face-to-face interactions or interactions on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat be opportunities for you to witness to what you have seen, heard, and know to be true about Jesus?
- Imagine you are writing a benediction for us to use to conclude our meetings. What would it say? How would it encourage others to share the message of Christ?

Closing

Have the youth write a benediction to close the meeting. Ask them to share what it says or its theme. How does it encourage others to share the message of Christ? For the closing prayer, invite someone to read or recite his or her benediction.

Sending Handout

Warm Up with “Atlas” Game

- What types of places have you visited?
- How important is travel to you?
- Do you wish you could travel more? Why or why not?

Scripture (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- How does worship prepare us to obey Jesus’ instructions in the “Great Commission”?
- How has it been difficult at times to obey the “Great Commission” in your life?
- Authority is a big deal in our world. At home, parents have authority. At school, it’s teachers and administrators. In public, authority is displayed by law enforcement officers, judges, and elected officials. In light of the various forms that authority takes in our lives, what are we to make of Jesus’ claim that “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given to him. How might Jesus’ authority compare and contrast with other authoritative figures in our world? What does it mean for us that we have been sent by one with such authority?
- What is at stake if we fail to take the “Great Commission” seriously?

Scripture (Acts 1:8, NIV)

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

- We’re called to be witnesses, not lawyers. A witness simply tells what he/she knows. What is required of us if we are to be faithful witnesses?
- How does worship prepare us to be faithful witnesses? What aspects of worship point to the so-called “Great Commission” (confession of sin, intercessory prayer, proclamation, etc.)?
- What are the various ways that we can be faithful witnesses to all that we have seen, heard, and know to be true about Jesus? How can face-to-face interactions or interactions on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat be opportunities for you to witness to what have seen, heard, and know to be true about Jesus?

Benediction Exercise: Write a Benediction encouraging us to share the message of Christ.

**Sending Lesson
Adult**

By Jason Crosby & Brittany Stillwell Krebs

Definition

Just as we are gathered for worship to be formed as the body of Christ, we are also sent out to be Christ's hands and feet in the world. Worship sends congregants by reminding them that they are blessed and beloved children of God called to continue their work as Christ's disciples in the world.

Opening Prayer

Abiding God,

Who blesses us and sends us out to be your messengers in the world;
Draw near to us as we gather today
And teach us what it means to be your beloved children.

Sustaining Christ,

Who walks with us and send us out to be your hands and feet in the world;
Accompany us as we study today
And form us into your image.

Illuminating Spirit,

Who inspires us and sends us out to reflect your light in the world;
Bless us with your sustaining presence

And send us out to be your instruments of grace and peace in the world.

Receive these prayers

In the name of the
Father,
Son, and
Holy Spirit
One God,
Now and forever.
Amen.

Scripture Readings

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)

²²The Lord said to Moses, ²³“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴“The Lord bless you

and keep you;

²⁵the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

²⁶the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.”

²⁷“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” (ESV)

Numbers 6:22-27 (ESV)

Reflection

It’s a scene we’ve seen often in movies and novels and one that many have or will experience. Parents stand in the driveway hugging their child as he or she departs for the next chapter ahead. They experience a mixture of anxiety and expectancy as they search for just the right words to say before he or she leaves the nest for good. I wonder if Jesus experienced similar emotions as he stood on the mountain in Galilee with his disciples preparing to make his ascent into heaven. I imagine him standing there in the silence searching for just the right thing to say; words to remind them of all those things he taught them and words to assure them of his ever-abiding love and presence.

Theologian Harmon Smith likens the end of our worship to leaving the nest. “Something very similar to ‘leaving the nest’ should, and regularly does, characterize the dismissal and sending forth that typically concludes our liturgies. And pastors who are serious about the church’s mission and their parishioner’s well-being regularly testify to a bifocal sense of expectancy and dread when the congregation is sent out ‘to do the work God has given us to do.’”²⁶

The benediction, offered in a compact, well-spoken bundle, serves as a bridge between the liturgy—the work that has been done throughout the worship hour—and the liturgy after the liturgy—the work that awaits in the world. Its brevity and intentionality provide worshipers with a “to-go box” for the journey ahead; words that ring in their ears reminding them of their mission and of God’s continued presence.

Jesus’ disciples have spent the past three years following Jesus around, learning from his teachings and his example, practicing a new way to live, developing habits patterned after Christ. They have experienced resurrection and now they find themselves with Jesus once more. They may have expected the lessons to continue, they may have been mentally preparing for more practice when suddenly they find themselves standing

²⁶Harmon L. Smith, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Liturgy and the Moral Life*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock (2004).

in front of Jesus, his arms stretched out speaking these words: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV). Before they can quite realize what is going on Jesus is gone and they are left on their own to live out what they have been practicing and learning.

When we gather for worship, we gather to learn from Jesus' teachings and example. We are challenged to practice a new way to live patterned after Christ. We experience the risen Lord and then we, too, are sent out to live what we have been practicing and learning. This charge to go and make disciples of all nations is a daunting task but the disciples were not sent out empty handed and neither are we. Jesus leaves his disciples with a charge and a blessing: "Do the work of making disciples, and never forget that I am with you and will be with you when you get it right, when you try and fail, and when you neglect to try at all."

As our worship hour comes to a close, we need to be reminded both of the task before us and of God's continued presence as we face it. We need to be commissioned week after week to go and live out what we have just practiced with the knowledge that soon we will be gathered again to worship and to work as we are transformed into the body of Christ. We also need to hear a word of blessing; a reminder that we are children of God, chosen and called to be instruments of God's transforming love. As we prepare to return to the wilderness, we hear the promise that the God of Abraham – our God – will keep us and bless us, shine upon us, giving us grace, granting us peace, and sending us out with God's own name upon us to be Christ's hands and feet in the world (Numbers 6:22-27).

Discussion Questions

1. How does the worship hour prepare you to live out your faith in the world? What habits and practices are formed during the worship hour which help you to live into your calling as God's children?
 2. What wilderness or difficulty are you making your way through today?
 3. What do you do to remember God is keeping and blessing, shining upon and giving peace, turning toward and granting peace to you daily?
 4. In the wilderness, sometimes we need to remember God's blessing is upon us when a Bible or devotional guide is not readily available. Is there a benediction, either one spoken or sung, that you have committed to memory?
-

Activity

Allow the group a chance to write their own benediction for class today. Attached is a worksheet for crafting your own benediction. Benedictions often follow a structure that can be helpful in writing this short, "well-spoken" prayer.

Benediction structure:

1. Address God.
2. Describe an attribute or act of God.
3. Put forth a petition (that God accompany us as we depart).
4. Give the purpose of the petition/charge for the week ahead (we need God's presence to help us complete the charge).
5. Conclude (usually in Christ's name or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

May the *(address God)*, who *(describe an attribute or act of God)*, *(put forth a petition)*; that *(purpose/charge)*. In the name of *(conclude)*. Amen.

Give participants time to write their own benedictions and then allow any who may want to share a chance to offer a prayer of benediction as you prepare to leave this time together.

Benediction

Suggestion: If you have volunteers to share their benedictions use those as you close your time together. You can also use the benediction below to send the group from this place to be blessed and called children of God.

"May the God who gathers us as the Church, send us from this place with the knowledge that we are God's blessed and beloved children; that we might live uninhibited as messengers of Christ's unfailing love. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen."

Benediction Worksheet

Template

1. Address God.
2. Describe an attribute or act of God.
3. Put forth a petition (that God accompany us as we depart).
4. Give the purpose of the petition/charge for the week ahead (we need God's presence to help us complete the charge).
5. Conclude (usually in Christ's name or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

May the *(address God)*,
 who (describe an attribute or act of God), (put forth a petition);
 that (purpose/charge).

In the name of *(conclude)*.

Amen.

Considerations for Working With Congregants Who Have Intellectual Disabilities

By Katie Anderson

Every congregation will likely have persons with disabilities among their population; approximately 1%- 2% of members will have some type of “special needs”, according to current statistical measures (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd). With that consideration in mind, below are recommendations, considerations, and overarching adaptations that may be of help when working with individuals who carry diagnoses of intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). No specific recommendation or adaptation will be effective for every person with these diagnoses. Not every person who can benefit from these adaptations will have a diagnosis. The important thing to remember when engaging people in ministry and spiritual education is that they are people. God’s children deserve respect, care, and the opportunity to develop personal foundations of faith; they are members of the Body of Christ.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

1 Corinthians 12:18-25 (NRSV)

There are instances in which an individual cannot and should not be expected to adapt to regular worship situations. Persons with significant sensory defenses and anxiety should not be forced to participate in an environment of excessive noise, motion, and transition in order to accommodate a sense of inclusion. However, atmospheres for their inclusion can be made in other plains of Church life. Some churches have established a “sensory sanctuary” near their main worship center. This room is warm, neutral, quiet, and inviting; it is a place where peace may be found for persons with diagnoses such as Autism. It should be noted that this space also serves as a place for prayer and meditation for every member of the congregation throughout the week.

Considerations for Working with Pre-School Age Children with IDD

In working with very young children with IDD, there is not a great deal of difference in their level maturity and function. The most prominent feature will be relative to

any visible difference or observable developmental delay. Can the children walk and play like everybody else? If they can't, how can you alter a play center to meet their needs to allow them to participate to their full potential?

In working with preschool children with IDD, it is important to open a consistent and trusting line of communication with the parents/caregivers. If and when difficulties or changes arise, they will become your ally in forming solutions. It is likely that they will be very grateful to have a leader who is empathetic to their situation, someone who shares the desire for their child's wellbeing. Remember these parents likely spend much of their energy trying to support their children and encourage their connection to the world around them. They could use your help in the effort. Additionally, this is the prime time to emphasize God's love for ALL people in ALL circumstances for the entirety of the group. Embedding this theology in the foundation of young children will help to integrate people who are "different" throughout your congregation in the generations to come.

Considerations for Working with Elementary Children with IDD

Elementary aged children have begun to notice difference and similarity. Consequently, there will likely be some social distance growing between children with IDD and those of the general population. It would be best to try to close this gap as much as is possible. When children try to talk about how another child might be different from them (e.g. they look different, they walk different, they talk funny, etc.) do not discourage the conversation. Instead of silencing the questions, answer them with grace and inclusion in mind. How are we all different from one another? Does different mean bad?

"I like vanilla ice cream, she likes chocolate. Are either of them bad or good? I think they are just different. God teaches a lot of important stuff by helping us understand that different is okay."

It would be helpful to acknowledge that being a helper to all of our friends is what God wants us to do. If one of the children cannot hold their crayon correctly, see if another can help them get a bigger crayon or a grip to help hold the same crayon. In the same way, acknowledge that the children with IDD can also serve as assistants to the teacher and their friends. Emphasize their gifts of prayer, caring, singing, etc. An essential element of providing support is the awareness that help can also become a social hindrance. Please work diligently to make certain that no child feels weaker or less than so that they can continue to function within the group as a whole.

In the setting with elementary school children, students will likely be more focused on trying to conform to be 'like everyone else'. This can bring about a generalized

anxiety in social situations. Teachers might counteract this by offering individualized welcome and reassurance. In these instances, words are not necessary to greet with warmth and kindness; a clearly aimed smile or hug will suffice. This generalized anxiety will also create a heightened defensiveness surrounding stimuli. An additional way to neutralize anxiety is to eliminate extra stimulus that isn't necessary. This is true for children, adolescents, adults, and even the elderly! What pictures are on your wall? How much noise is bouncing around the room you are in? How bright are the lights in your class? Are they overhead fluorescent lights? These lights blink 50 times per second and people with photosensitivity, whether or not they have autism, can recognize those flashes. Can you calm the atmosphere by using lamps around the room instead? Can you put filters over the fluorescent lights to help soften their flashes? It is surprising what a difference this simple modification can make in the ability of a child to focus and interact in a meaningful way. You may look into creating an 'escape' space, or safe center, within the classroom. A simply constructed fort can create a sense of safety and escape for all of the children in a group, at one time or another. This method of calming is not only helpful for children with diagnosed intellectual disabilities, but also for children without diagnoses that are easily over-stimulated.

Be aware of self-talk and self-perception that you may observe during the progression into the stage of development that Piaget labeled Concrete Operational Stage, somewhere around age six or seven. During this phase of development children become aware of their difference. Through this phase they develop the "self" concept they will carry all of their life. Please do your best to ensure that they feel as loved and blessed as every other child around their Sunday School class table. As with preschoolers, elementary school children will also have proponents in their parents and educators. Take time to speak with parents and consult area teachers on issues surrounding struggles you face. This age group can frequently become trying for teachers. If you are a leader or staff person in this area of ministry, it is *highly recommended* that churches have teams teach elementary age children, particularly if there is a presence of behavioral struggles or intellectual disabilities. Team teaching in this area allows for more flexibility and additional assistance without altering the flow of the entire class. It also provides a means of relief when one child needs to 'take a break' from the regular flow of things.

Considerations for Working with Youth and Adolescents with IDD

The social isolation of living with an intellectual disability becomes much more pronounced during the adolescent years. It is during this period of development that social differences, physical differences, and cognitive limitations become more distinct. These factors begin to define a young person's sense of self. It is important

to reinforce the equality of everyone within the context of the group. The framework of scripture will likely be the most effective tool in emphasizing the unity of the Body of Christ.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)

As adolescents progress, hormones begin to play a prominent role in physical and romantic interests. Whether or not an individual has the cognitive capacity to establish appropriate romantic relationships, their physical development will pull them to attempt these relationships. It is important to bear this in mind when observing the group and interactions with children and adults alike. As with every adolescent, discussing sex and appropriate touch is imperative. Whether or not this education comes from Sunday School or from home is a decision made through your Church leadership. If this has not been discussed, it is a talking point for the congregation as a whole. Every teaching member needs to hold fast to sustaining a safe, comfortable environment for each learner within a congregation. This need could be fulfilled by clearly communicating boundaries surrounding appropriate social interactions, appropriate dress and touch, and deciding which topics of conversation are best for public discussion and which are better discussed in smaller settings. Enforcing the established boundaries consistently is essential during interactions involving adolescents with IDD, and repetition of the boundaries may be necessary.

One of the pronounced differences in the teaching of adolescents with IDD is their capacity to grasp abstract concepts. This is the point in human development when abstraction comes into play for the general population, themes and generalized ideas become a part of conversation many may take for granted, particularly in conversation surrounding faith. Many people with IDD will never be able to grasp abstract concepts. To accommodate for this difference, it is sometimes helpful to find tangible illustrations or analogies similar to those used by Jesus himself in teaching faith. It is also helpful to repeat key concepts for retention and focus. Despite this deficit, it is necessary to maintain a respectful and mature tone in communicating with every adolescent. Adolescence is the bridge between childhood and adulthood, and because it is such a sensitive time in emotional development, use care when speaking to any young adult. The respect you display helps to build the respect they hold for themselves.

Considerations for Working with Adults with IDD

The inclusion of adults with IDD is imperative to uphold their faith constructs as well as their sense of self. Frequently churches have placed adults in classrooms with children because their developmental level and learning styles are similar. However, with this practice you find adults hanging around and playing with kids on the playground. Does that seem like a healthy peer group or outcome for either side of those relationships? The preferred practice is to provide an adult atmosphere for adults with IDD, perhaps with one or more companions or support persons in the group. Even persons with severe or profound impairment will gain something from interactions with their peers.

An important note regarding communication with and about individuals with IDD is to use “person first language.” Frequently the disability will lead the conversation and people will be left behind.

*“Our special needs class should be further away because of the noise they make during class.”
“Handicapped people don’t really need to be participating in worship leadership, it’s just too hard to accommodate.”*

These statements may be partially accurate, but there is not a single individual mentioned in the consideration of church or worship planning within their context. Considering specific identities should always be a prominent point during worship planning or in working through logistics. Individuals with disabilities are no different from any other member in that matter. They desire to be seen as they are and known; it is the human condition that binds us all together. When planning or working through logistical considerations, please take these individuals, their distinct identity, into consideration.

*How will Suzie feel being in a place so far from her Mom and Dad?
How will George feel when he doesn’t get to sing in the choir beside his dad?*

Though it is sometimes uncomfortable and requires compromise, there is generally a way to uplift ‘individuals’ while still attending to best practice for the whole.

In regard to Suzie’s concern, perhaps a ‘special needs’ class is not the best option for your congregation. Perhaps it would be better to integrate members throughout the general population and utilize companions to assist when there was difficulty understanding the curriculum. Perhaps lower functioning individuals with IDD could serve as assistants to some of the younger classes, offering support to the teacher and encouragement to the children in the program. Suzie loves to help people; she loves arts and crafts. She would be an

excellent assistant to the first grade Sunday School teachers, helping mostly during craft time. Could you ask her if she would like to serve as a teaching assistant?

George may be a terrible, and I mean TERRIBLE, singer, but he could probably be an asset in helping set up stands and chairs for choir practice. He could likely help take roll at the beginning of rehearsals and make certain that all of the music is placed out for musicians. In this accommodation, he would still get to be a part and offer what he could to strengthen the music ministry. And you, as a leader, would get to empower him to use his gifts in the life of the Body. He knows people and he likes to say hello when taking roll. He knows how to help the choir get ready because he has watched music ministers do it for years while he waited for his Dad to finish choir practice. This is the Body of Christ at its best, when the members offer their gifts to the support of one another.

In the conversation regarding person first language, it is also imperative to address antiquated terminology. Terms like “handicapped”, “idiot”, “feeble-minded”, and “retarded” are disparaging and hurtful to people with intellectual disabilities. Please refrain from using these terms and politely encourage the same change among the members of your congregation.

There may be congregations that have a higher concentration of individuals with IDD. In these instances it may be good to organize a class that is specifically designed for adults with IDD. The most healthful planning of this type of group would have them meeting at a time outside of regular Sunday School or discipleship meetings so that there is a diverse and heterogeneous peer group for every member of your congregation. It would be no different than organizing a Bible Study group geared toward supporting young mothers. Preferred resources for curriculum and Bible study for these groups may be found through the following organizations:

| | |
|--|--|
| Friendship Ministries | www.friendship.org |
| Christian Churches Disability Ministry | www.ccdmonline.org |
| Special Touch Ministries | www.specialtouch.org |
| Willow Creek Association | www.willowcreek.com |

Implementing this type of program takes deliberate preparation and planning. While the class itself becomes a prominent focus in design and church programming, please do not forget the necessity to support the families of persons with IDD as well. These parents and siblings are caught in a unique place. They adore and support a beautiful human being, while simultaneously mourning the life they had dreamed for the child or brother/ sister. There are certainly things they would love their family member to achieve or have that are no longer realistic for their level of function. It is

a tense and demanding situation in life. A support system for these persons would not be a bad consideration either, as a group or as individuals.

Conclusion

It is unrealistic to pretend there is no difference between people of the general population and people with intellectual deficits. However, it is not biblical to believe that any type of difference among God's children makes them any more or less valuable in the Body of Christ. God has no favorites, which seemed to be one of the very prominent themes among the gospel that Jesus brought to humanity. The difficulty in addressing the gifts of persons with intellectual disability is in looking beyond their difference and revealing our own vulnerabilities at the same time. As you adapt to the needs of a very small and special population, consider the changes you must make.

1. People with IDD frequently require succinct communication. Be clear, use fewer words. Ask yourself why you felt it necessary to use so many complicated words in the first place. What motivates that choice for you?
2. People with IDD frequently have strength in the area of trust and loyal relationships. Ask yourself why church leaders and ministers spend so much time talking about why God is trustworthy. What hinders the trust of so many?
3. People with IDD frequently require additional support to feel 'integrated' into the general population. Ask yourself why it is necessary to offer instructions to extend gracious welcome within the context of your congregation.
4. People with IDD frequently have an amazing capacity to resign to concepts of powerlessness and submission. Ask yourself what part of you craves answers in the face of theodicy.
5. People with IDD have a great appreciation of the Mystery of our triune God. Ask yourself why believers struggle so strongly to understand what cannot be absolutely understood. What humility could be learned from adults who have an easier time in accepting their own limitations?

Appendix A



Kentucky State Gathering
CBF General Assembly

June 26, 2014

4:15-5:15 pm



Gathering

Chiming of the Hour

Hymn

“As Grain On Scattered Hillsides”

Welcome & Introductions

Bob Fox

Response: **We welcome you as you join us in worship and in service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Call to Worship

Leader: We gather on a day like any other day.

All: **We gather on a day unlike any other day.**

Leader: Come, brothers and sisters in Christ, touch and feel and taste and smell the sacred in this day.

All: **For this is the day which our Creator God has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**



Confessing

“Let’s Talk about Sin, Baby,
Let’s Talk about You and Me”

John Inscore Essick

Sin as Rupture of Relationship

Confession as Restoration of Relationship

Confession of Sin

Sin is a reality in our midst,

We confess, O Lord.

Sin that no one knows and sin that everyone knows,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

Sin that burdens us and sin that bothers us not,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

Sin that gives too little and sin that takes too much,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

Sin that holds our tongues and sin that unleashes them,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

Sin that perpetuates injustice and sin that ignores it,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

Sin that separates us and sin that draws us together,

We confess, O Lord. *(silent confession)*

But where our sin increases, O Lord, ***your grace abounds all the more.***

Chant

***Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin.
Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that doth make all things whole again.***



Interceding

“The Drama of Intercession”

John Inscore Essick

Prayers of the People

Lord, hear our prayer.

Passing the Peace



Proclamation

Scripture Reading—Ephesians 4:1-16

"Re-membering the Body"

Brittany Stillwell Krebs

Celebration of Holy Communion

Chant

*To you all hearts are open, to you all desires known,
To you there are no secrets Almighty God, we come to you.*



Sending

Recognition of KBF Scholar

Sara Clarke Turpin

Commissioning Scarlett Jasper, CBF Missionary

Laura Barclay

"When You Gather Together"

Bob Fox

Benediction

Bob Fox

Appendix B

“Listening Conversation Questions”

Gathering

- Who gathers us?
- For what purpose are we gathered?
- How does the traditional way church people call one another "Brother" and "Sister" inform our relationships to one another in worship?
 - Who makes us related?
- What about the term "congregation"?
- How do you know when “worship” begins?
- Is there anyone we need to be intentional about including?

Interceding

- What is prayer for?
- Who is prayer for?
- Who listens to us as we pray?
- Is prayer intended to make us feel good? Is it to actually talk to someone?
- How does prayer reveal and challenge our assumptions about ourselves, our world, and God?
- Who do we pray for? Why do we ask others to pray for us? What do we do for others in worship?
- What is the role of Christ as Mediator? Or the Holy Spirit as Advocate? Other theological names/terms for God's action that suggest God's response to our prayers?

Confessing (Sin)

- How are we honest about ourselves before God in worship?
- Why is it important to be honest as we worship?
- Who does the confessing? One? One on behalf of all? All?
- How does confession help us tell true stories about the ruptures in our relationships?
- How does the Holy Spirit work to help us confess?
- How do we know we are being honest when we confess?

- What is the relationship between telling/hearing the truth about me and telling/hearing the truth about others, the world, or God?
- Where are all the places we confess? Hymns? Scripture readings? Prayers? Silent time?
- Pardoned by whom?

Proclamation

- What is proclamation?
- What makes proclamation different from ordinary communication?
- Who is speaking to the congregation? Who is the congregation listening to?
- What is the “Word”? Where is it? Is it in the scriptures? What role does it play?
- Is the table proclamation?
- Is baptism proclamation?
- When taking the Lord's Supper, what is the most stressed theme?
 - Is it from Matthew, "for the forgiveness of sins"? From Paul, to "proclaim the Lord's death 'til he comes"? From Luke, "do this in remembrance"? Is it Markan, "covenant" and "kingdom"?)
 - Is it an ancient catholic emphasis on "thanksgiving"?
- Do the several themes in the Lord's Supper spill out into the rest of worship in your context? Or other worship events? Into the way we live?

Sending

- Who sends us?
- Is God only present with us in worship?
- Does worship end when we are sent?
- Is sending a result/consequence of worship or a part of worship? Part of an encounter with the divine?
- Are there ways we can point to “God with us” or “God ahead of us” *as* we worship?
- Are we sent alone? Is God "with us always"? Is God ahead of us?
- Is there anything transformational about worship? Do we leave as different people? If so, who or what is making the difference?