

6

Try New Spiritual Disciplines

HEBREWS 4:14-16



GOAL

By hearing how keeping company with Jesus allows us to draw near to God, children explore different ways to try new spiritual disciplines.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Creator God, who draws us close in love and compassion, let me lead these children through my words and your Holy Spirit. Amen.

THIS SESSION

New experiences are part of life. Growing up is a series of new experiences as we are able to do more and be exposed to more of what life has to offer. Our interests may change as we grow. Sometimes, we just need a little variety in our daily living. Our spiritual life is no different. There are many diverse ways we can draw near to God. The Holy Spirit guides us into spiritual disciplines that work for us.

THE BIBLE STORY

Hebrews 4:14–16 uses language that is probably unfamiliar to many, especially children, calling Jesus a *high priest*. In ancient Israel, the high priest was the only one who could go into the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Holy of Holies, to communicate with God. This passage professes our faith that Jesus is with God and has prepared the way for us to approach God with confidence. By keeping company with Jesus and being his disciple, we can draw closer to God. The passage doesn't prescribe how to approach God. Our study of Scripture and our imaginations will help us discover what actions will draw us nearer to God.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Just as with foods, our tastes and our exposure to spiritual disciplines may change over time. We may not like broccoli one day and later discover we really enjoy it! Some children love to dance and sing while others dread the very thought. Some like to read or paint. Some like to help others. Not everyone likes everything, but there are spiritual disciplines for everyone. Trying out new ways of connecting with God keeps our relationship with God vibrant.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Painting with New Brushes” (p. 56): Create paintbrushes by attaching items to spring clothespins or craft sticks using tape: leaves, tree bark, flower (real or artificial), rubber bands, aluminum foil, yarn, plastic fork, plastic wrap, craft feathers, empty toilet paper roll, or other items. Prepare paint plates by putting different colors of tempera paint each on their own small paper plate. Gather the Spiritual Discipline journals from session 5. Have a few extra notebooks for children who were not present at sessions 1–5.
 - “Trying New Things” (p. 56): Obtain *Practice Spiritual Disciplines* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- Depending on the options you choose:
- “Prayer Beads” (p. 58): Obtain keyrings, cording, and a variety of beads.



GETTING STARTED

- Spiritual Discipline journals from session 5 and extra notebooks
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils
- Variety of prepared paintbrushes
- Prepared small paper plates with various colors of tempera paint

PAINTING WITH NEW BRUSHES



As the children arrive, give them their Spiritual Discipline journals. Have a notebook for anyone who was not at sessions 1–5. Show the children the paintbrushes and plates of paint you have prepared. Invite the children to paint with each of the brushes in their journals. Since many of the brushes might not clean well with water, suggest that, once a brush is used in a particular color, it should remain in that color for others to use. Have the children title their page with brush strokes: “Trying Something New.”

Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✿ What was it like to paint with these new brushes?
- ✿ What were some brushes you really liked? Which ones did you not like?
- ✿ Do you like trying new things or not? Why?
- ✿ What new things have you tried this year and how did it go?
- ✿ What are some things that you didn’t like before that you like now?
- ✿ What are some things you liked before that you really don’t like so much now?

Tell the children that trying new things might feel different or uncomfortable at first, but we may find we like something we hadn’t tried before. Set journals aside (open to allow paint to dry) for “Trying New Things” (below).

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD



The opening ritual is a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. The motions help children learn their responses, which are printed in the bold text.

Draw near to God

and God (*raise both arms to the sky*)

will draw near to us. (*bring hands toward heart, crossing them over your heart*)

When we try new spiritual disciplines, we find new ways to be with God.

Let us (*extend arms forward, palms facing upward*)

keep company (*bend elbows and bring together hands in prayer*)

with Jesus. (*sign “Jesus” using right middle finger touching the middle of left palm, repeat with left middle finger touching the middle of right palm*)



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Practice Spiritual Disciplines infographic poster
- Spiritual Discipline journals from “Painting with New Brushes” (above)
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils

TRYING NEW THINGS



Wonder together what spiritual disciplines are. Remind the children, if necessary, that spiritual disciplines are those activities that help us train to be disciples, to practice being a follower of Jesus, and that draw us closer to God. Ask the children what spiritual disciplines they have tried. They may be able to name a few if they have been present at any of the previous five sessions: fasting, praying, listening to God, embracing simplicity,

and unplugging. The children may also be able to tell you about specific practices they tried in the sessions, such as using a labyrinth, reading the Bible, praying with their body, reviewing the day in prayer, giving thanks, and taking time out to spend time with God.

Tell the children that today's session is about trying new spiritual disciplines and discovering ways to draw closer to God that may be something they really enjoy doing. Reflect again on the experience of using new paintbrushes in "Painting with New Brushes" (p. 56) and compare it to trying new spiritual disciplines. Ask the children the following questions:

- Which spiritual disciplines do you like?
- Which ones are hard for you?
- Which ones would you do again?

Draw the children's attention to the *Practice Spiritual Disciplines* infographic poster. Have volunteers take turns reading the numbered items and the text in the yellow boxes as you guide the children through the steps the path takes to explore different practices. Invite the children to write or draw pictures in their Spiritual Discipline journals of at least two practices that they would like to try. Set aside journals for "Blessing Our Trying New Spiritual Disciplines" (p. 59).

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

HEARING SCRIPTURE

C

Resource Page 1

Tell the children that today's Bible story is from Hebrews 4:14–16. Explain that the book of Hebrews was written to a group of believers who were Jewish and had become followers of Jesus. Read the story inspired by the text and then the Scripture passage from Hebrews 4:14–16 following the story on Resource Page 1. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- What ways might you approach, or draw near to, God?
- Why do you think one way or another is not the right way or wrong way to draw near to God?
- What does the Scripture passage tell us happens when we approach, or draw near to, God?

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US Choose one or more options.

MANDALAS

A QC

Copies of Resource Page 2
 Markers, crayons, colored pencils

Tell the children that the word *mandala* (man-DOLL-ah) means "circle" in Sanskrit, an ancient language of South Asia. While people who are Hindu or Buddhist use mandalas in their faith practices, Christians have also used the symbol of the circle to represent everlasting life. Wonder together where circles may be seen in Christianity. Some ideas might be the crown of thorns on Jesus' head at his crucifixion, Advent wreaths, the center of a Celtic cross, and a baptism font.

Tell the children that making, drawing, or coloring a mandala, a series of designs or pictures within a circle, can be used as a meditation or prayer tool. Hand out copies of Resource Page 2 and coloring supplies. Invite the children to color the mandala. Invite them to spend quiet time with God.

- Keyrings
- 12" lengths of cording
- Variety of beads

PRAYER BEADS



Tell the children that prayer beads are found in different religions and cultures as a way to pray using the sense of touch. Explain that the beads provide sequencing, repetition, or both. For example, a prayer may be said over and over as one touches each bead, or each bead may help one remember the different parts of a prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer. The beads can be used to pray for different people or needs, to give thanks and praise, or a combination of both.

Invite the children to make prayer bead keyrings. Provide keyrings, cording, and beads. Show them how to fold the cording in half, place the folded end through the keyring, thread the two loose ends through the loop of the folded end, and pull the loose ends through the loop to secure the cording onto the keyring. The children may string beads on each piece of cording as they choose to make their prayer cords, knotting each end. Encourage the children to spend some time using their prayer beads to pray.


YOGA MEDITATION




Tell the children that the word *yoga* means "yoking" in Sanskrit, an ancient language of South Asia. Yoga is understood as the yoking, or bringing together, of physical, mental, and spiritual practices that involve body movement, breathing, and meditation. It has been practiced for thousands of years. Explain that breath prayer and body prayers are related to the practice of yoga as they help focus and center one's mind on God and use the body to communicate words and feelings.

Lead the children in the following breath and body prayer:

- **Being:** Stand or sit with arms down by your side. Turn your attention to your breath. Breathe in and out three times. God's Holy Spirit breathes in you.
- **Bowing:** Put your hands together in prayer and bow your head. God created you. Form the word *I* in your mind and speak it silently.
- **Opening:** Stretch your arms up in the air above your head, opening yourself to receive all God has for you. Form the word *am* in your mind and speak it silently.
- **Filling:** Place your hands crossed over your chest. Give thanks that your heart and being are filled with God's presence and you are here. Form the word *here* in your mind and speak it silently.
- **Being:** Stand or sit with arms down by your side. Turn your attention to your breath. Breathe in and out three times. God's Holy Spirit breathes in you.

 To extend the activity, you may repeat the actions and words in different orders, such as Here I am or Here am I. Always begin and end with Being and breathing.

 People from different cultures, religions, and periods in history have practiced ways to draw closer to the divine. Christians have used and adopted some of these practices, including yoga, to spend time with God.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

WALKING PRAYER



Tell the children that something as simple as walking is a way to pray. Suggest that it can be done almost anywhere, a small space like a bedroom,

indoors or outdoors, alone or with others, at any time of day. Explain that a walking prayer allows us to move our attention away from our many activities and is a natural space for both conversation and silence. Comment that the rhythm of walking can form a rhythm for our prayer as God brings to our mind what we may pray for.

Tell the children that they are going to take a walking prayer in the space you designate. This can be in your room, outdoors in a specified area, in the church sanctuary through the pews, or another place of your choosing. Explain that, as they walk, they may talk silently with God and listen for God in silence. Invite the children to begin their walk by repeating the following two phrases after you. Say them several times and then invite silence.

- Jesus, you walk with me. /
- Jesus, I walk with you. /

DRAWING NEAR WHILE PAINTING

A QC T

Provide painting supplies and invite the children to paint a place where they like to draw near to God or the feelings they have when they draw near to God. Play music while the children are painting using a music player or an internet-connected device.

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- Paper, watercolor paper
 - Tempera paints, watercolor paints, paintbrushes, water cups, paper plates, paper towels
 - Internet-connected device or music player

SERVING OTHERS

S

Tell the children that one way to draw near to God is through service to others. Explain that, as we love and serve our neighbor, we are doing what God calls us to do. Wonder together what might be different ways the children can serve others by themselves, with their families, or with friends. Suggest that drawing near to God does not have to be a silent or solitary activity but that it can be done with laughter, conversation, and other people.

Invite the children to practice the spiritual discipline of service by washing toys from the church nursery. Provide tubs of soapy water, sponges, and towels. Encourage the children to determine how they will do the washing and drying, perhaps by taking turns or setting up an assembly line.

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- Toys from the nursery
 - Tubs of soapy water
 - Sponges
 - Towels



FOLLOWING JESUS

BLESSING OUR TRYING NEW SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

QC

There are countless ways to try new spiritual disciplines. Refer back to the *Practice Spiritual Disciplines* infographic poster to aid the children in choosing some spiritual disciplines to practice.

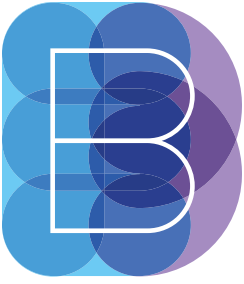
Invite each child to hold their Spiritual Discipline journal in their left hand and place their right hand over it like a roof. Have them repeat after you as you lead them in a blessing:

Lord, we bring our prayers to you /
 as we try new spiritual disciplines in the coming days. /
 Accept our prayers as a token of our love and devotion /
 and our desire to grow closer with you. /
 Amen. /

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- Practice Spiritual Disciplines* infographic poster
 - Spiritual Discipline journals from “Trying New Things” (p. 56)



Send home the Spiritual Discipline journals with the children. Encourage them to use them and add new spiritual disciplines as they try them. Be sure and get the journals to children who are not present today.



BIBLE STORY

INSPIRED BY HEBREWS 4:14–16

On Sunday evenings at dinner, Julie and Jeremy's family always had a discussion of what they did in Sunday school. Julie and Jeremy's parents would tell about what the pastor had taught in their study, and Julie and Jeremy would tell what they learned with their friends and Mr. Sanchez. Sometimes they were all learning about the same Bible story at the same time.

"So, what was your session about?" asked Dad.

"To be honest, I'm not really sure what it was about," replied Julie. "Mr. Sanchez kept talking about high priests and sacrifices, and I didn't understand any of it."

"Me either," chimed in Jeremy. "We don't have priests, let alone high ones. And the only sacrifice I know about is in baseball, and I don't think Mr. Sanchez was talking about baseball."

Mom laughed, "Well, that would be very confusing. And you're probably right that Mr. Sanchez wasn't talking about baseball. Maybe we can help you sort it out."

"Long ago, in Bible times, when the people of God worshiped God, a priest offered sacrifices on their behalf (animals, birds, money, or grain). Moses' brother, Aaron, was a priest. To be a priest, your father had to have been a priest, and all priests were men. Priests had very special jobs to do for the people," explained Dad.

Mom continued, "The high priest was the one person who could go into the holiest of places in the tent that held the Ark of the Covenant, and later in the temple, and communicate with God. Then Jesus came and lived among the people. When Jesus died, he kind of became like the high priest, the one who could go to God. Because followers of Jesus believe he shows us the way to God, people of faith can come to God whenever they want to."

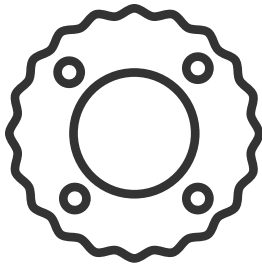
Dad chimed in, "In fact, God wants us to come with everything: our joys, our hopes, our fears, our needs. And we can come any time we want to: morning, noon, and night. And we can come in all kinds of ways. We can sing, we can dance, we can pray, we can paint, we can come and just be quiet with God. God just wants us to draw near to God and be with God."

"That makes so much more sense to me," said Jeremy.

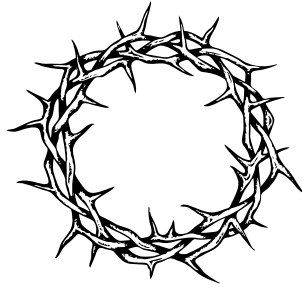
"I like that. I like knowing that God wants me to come and will always welcome me," said Julie.

Let us, then, hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we have a great High Priest who has gone into the very presence of God—Jesus, the Son of God. Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.

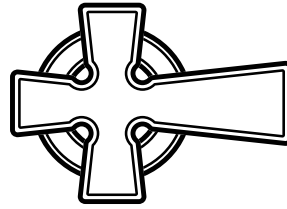
—Hebrews 4:14–16 (GNT)



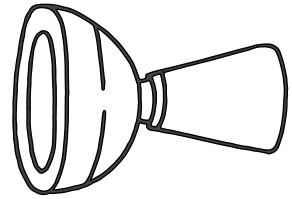
Advent wreath



Crown of thorns



Celtic cross



Baptism font

