

6

Try New Spiritual Disciplines

MATTHEW 19:13-15; HEBREWS 4:15-16



GOAL

By hearing how Jesus welcomed children to come to him, children seek different ways they can build their relationship with Jesus.

- 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

Lord, creator of the heavens and earth, help me create wide paths for your children to access you. Open my heart that I may humbly receive from them new ways to connect to you. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The invitation to experiment as a form of spiritual discipline reminds us that there is no one right way to draw near to God. People are wired differently and gravitate toward different spiritual practices. Likewise, individuals change over time. While they are still young, this session lays the foundation for children to remain open to how one journeys with Jesus.

THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus wants everyone to draw near to God. When the grown-ups who followed Jesus thought he should not be disturbed by little children, Jesus rebuked them. “Let the little children come to me,” Jesus told his disciples, then further revealing “for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14). In the same vein, Hebrews 4:16 depicts an empathetic Jesus as our high priest and, using kingdom language, exhorts people to confidently draw near to God’s throne of grace.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Rather than introducing a spiritual practice for them to grow into, this session gives young children language around a practice they could easily grow out of as they age. Young children are blissfully unencumbered by “how things are supposed to be.” Ever watch children climb a slide the *wrong* way? Immediately after going down the slide, they don’t bother using the ladder but turn around and joyfully trek up the slide. That same spirit is at the heart of the spiritual practice of experimenting.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Five-Senses Centers” (p. 62): Set up five sensory centers using items suggested in the supplies list. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.


Depending on the options you choose:

- “Worship Service Five-Senses Scavenger Hunt” (p. 64): Obtain a worship bulletin and objects from worship such as a candle, bell, Bible, cross, chalice, and hymnbook. Obtain bread and grape juice. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.
- “Seeking God” (p. 64): Obtain *Where Are You Hiding, God?* by Elisabeth Zarl’s (Flyaway Books, 2017) or use the YouTube video “Bedtime Story: Where Are You Hiding, God?” (bit.ly/FMHidingGod, 4:49).



GETTING STARTED

- Items for sensory centers
- Touch: moldable sand or play dough; cookie cutters; materials representing different textures, such as bubble wrap, sandpaper, pinecones, feathers, cotton balls
- See: binoculars, hand mirror, kaleidoscope, magnifying glass, sunglasses
- Hear: toy musical instruments, rattles or shakers, jingle bells
- Smell: various spice containers, scratch-and-sniff stickers
- Taste: pretzels, mandarin orange pieces or apple slices, chocolate chips, lemon wedges

 Here and in “Obstacle Course” (below), consider how you present and speak about the five senses since not everyone has access to all sensory experiences. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

FIVE-SENSES CENTERS

AM F X

Sensory centers encourage the exploration of our five senses, which we use to receive data and interact with our environment. Spiritual practices, likewise, are multisensory and involve seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. Many of us turn to the same one or two senses whenever we seek to draw near to God. Engaging different senses is part of experimenting as a spiritual practice.

Invite children to interact with the five-senses centers. Before transitioning to the opening ritual, lead a group discussion. Invite the children to share what they know about the five senses and which centers and items they enjoyed. Keep the senses centers set up for “Obstacle Course” (see below).

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

AM

The opening ritual in this unit includes a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. There are motions to help children learn their responses. The children’s response is printed in the bold text and remains the same throughout this unit.

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” with hands using right middle finger to touch the middle of left palm and repeat with left middle finger to touch the middle of right palm*)



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Sensory centers from “Five-Senses Centers” (above)
- Obstacle course items, such as cardboard boxes, pillows, chairs, balls

 Ask open-ended questions that encourage the children’s contributions. Be slow to shut down any of their ideas no matter how far-fetched. The goal is to have children intentionally create ways to engage their senses.

OBSTACLE COURSE

C AM G

This activity introduces the spiritual practice of experimenting by extending the children’s interactions with the five-senses centers.

Explain to the children that God created the world and created humans with senses to explore and experience it. Invite the group to create an obstacle course that utilizes all their senses. Have the children use materials from the “Fives-Senses Centers” (above) along with additional objects in the meeting space. Brainstorm ideas of what the obstacle course could look like. Allow the children to take the lead in creating the obstacle course. Cheer on the children as they take turns moving through the obstacle course.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

THRONE ROOM PLAYDATE

C D

Tell the children that Jesus wants to spend time with us just like he did long ago with the children that he met. Read the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 1.

Ask the children to imagine that a special invitation just arrived. Acting as a herald, form your hands in front of your mouth like a horn and make a royal trumpet sound. Unroll the paper scroll and using your best heralding voice say,

“Hear ye! Hear ye! A most royal welcome is extended to the children at (*name of church*). Jesus requests your presence at God’s throne room for a royal playdate. All children are invited to bring their ideas of what to do at this playdate. Jesus looks forward to spending time with you!”

After the pronouncement, wonder together:

- What will the throne room look like?
- What will we wear?
- How might we greet Jesus: a royal bow or curtsy, a fist bump, a verbal greeting?
- How do you want to spend your time during the playdate with Jesus?

Summarize their ideas about what they’d like to do with Jesus on sticky notes and place them on a wall. Have the children help you group similar ideas together and agree on a schedule, wondering what things they will do first, next, and so forth. Invite the children to act out their playdate with Jesus, having them take turns playing the role of Jesus.

JESUS CHANT

AM

Teach the “Jesus Chant” (below) to the children. Insert one child’s name into the chant. Have the group clap each time the child’s name is said, and have everyone pat their thighs in a drum roll when they say “Yaaaaaay.” Repeat the chant until everyone in the group has been identified.

2-4-6-8! Who does Jesus appreciate?
(*Name*), (*Name*), Yaaaaaay . . . (*Name*)!



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Embedded within the global church is a vast library of spiritual practices that make use of our five senses. The first activity invites children to see how their local church engages the different senses. The following activity tells the story of a child encountering God through the senses.

Choose one or both options.

- Resource Page 1
- Rolled-up paper scroll
- Sticky notes
- Marker

- Worship bulletin
- Objects from worship such as a candle, bell, Bible, cross, chalice, and hymnbook
- Bread, grape juice, bowl of water
- Napkins and cups
- Newsprint and marker



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

- Where Are You Hiding, God?* by Elisabeth Zartl (Flyaway Books, 2017) or internet-connected device

- Internet-connected device

WORSHIP SERVICE FIVE-SENSES SCAVENGER HUNT



Tell the children that they are going on a worship service scavenger hunt looking for the five senses. Walk through a worship service with the children using a worship bulletin as a guide. Talk about each part of worship, asking, and explaining to, the children what happens in that part and helping them identify the different senses found there. For example, in the Prelude, we usually hear music, and we may see and smell candles being lit. As you talk together about each part of worship, show objects related to that part. If the worship bulletin you are using does not have baptism or communion, be sure to include a conversation about the sacraments and the elements used—water, bread, and juice.

Write down the children’s observations about how the five senses are engaged during a worship service. Note with them that, many times, multiple senses are engaged at the same time during the worship service. Review with the children their observations. Encourage the children to use the following motions as you say each observation:

- Seeing—Form hands like binoculars and bring them up to your eyes.
- Hearing—Cup one hand to your ear.
- Tasting—Point to your mouth.
- Smelling—Point to nose while taking a deep breath.
- Touching—Touch fingers together.

SEEKING GOD



Read *Where Are You Hiding, God?* by Elisabeth Zartl or show the YouTube video “Bedtime Story: Where Are You Hiding, God?” (bit.ly/FMHidingGod, 4:49). Wonder together:

- Where are some places the child looked for God?
- What senses did the child use to find God?
- How can you use your senses to find God?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

SIYAHAMBA



Ask children who has worshiped God in more than one spoken language. Explain that people all over the world follow Jesus and worship God in different ways and in different languages than English (the predominant one in the United States). Tell the children they will hear a song called “*Siyahamba*,” which originated in South Africa. Explain that *siyahamba* is a Zulu word that means “we are walking or marching” and the song repeats the phrase “We are marching in the light of God.” The song can be sung in English too; however, invite the children to worship God with this song even if they don’t understand what is being sung. Suggest that praising God can be done in any language!

Invite the children to dance freestyle or follow the singers’ dance moves as they listen to the song sung in multiple languages. Show the YouTube video “Siyahamba” (bit.ly/FMSiyahamba, 6:36).

Discuss what it was like to worship God this way. Ask the children if they could worship even if they did not know the words. Wonder why or why not.

NATURE BODY PRAYERS



Tell the children that we can worship God with our bodies. We can move and praise God. Comment that, even if our whole bodies don't move, we can use the parts that do. Show the children Resource Page 2. Invite the children to try each pose. Have them try some of the poses moving only their arms and hands or only one arm. Brainstorm what things in nature each pose reminds them of, such as a particular animal, plant, part of the land or sea, or something related to the weather. Write down the children's responses on a piece of newsprint.

Use the suggested prayer prompts at the bottom of Resource Page 2 to lead the group in prayer. Send home a copy of Resource Page 3 for the children to color and use at home.

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- Resource Page 2
 - Newsprint and marker
 - Copies of Resource Page 3



FOLLOWING JESUS

COME AND SEE



Introduce the song you have sung to close each session of this unit. It is sung to the tune of "London Bridge Is Falling Down." Teach the chorus by singing one line at a time. Then have the children sing the chorus with you. Teach the verse of the song in the same way. Invite the children to sing the chorus and the verse using rhythm instruments, if you choose.

Chorus:

Jesus says to come and see, come and see, come and see.

Jesus wants to be with me.

I love Jesus!

Verse:

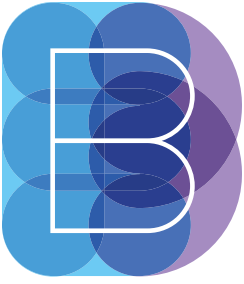
Feel the sun, and draw or sing, shout "Hooray!" sculpt with clay.

There are many ways to play
with God today.

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- Rhythm instruments (optional)



The chorus of the song is repeated in each session of this unit. The verse changes to reflect the spiritual practice highlighted in that session.



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON MATTHEW 19:13–15; HEBREWS 4:15–16

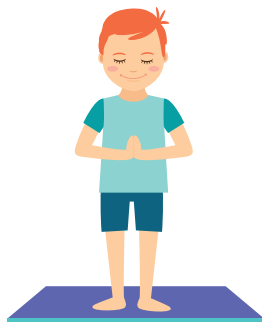
As Jesus became more popular, more and more people wanted to see him. Parents and grandparents started bringing their children to see Jesus. They hoped Jesus would lay his hands on their children and say a prayer. But the disciples thought Jesus was too busy and had more urgent things to do than bless little children. As the parents and grandparents approached with their children, the disciples held out their hands to stop them. Then using stern, and—what they thought—were important sounding, voices the disciples said things such as, “Whoa, where do you think you’re going?” “You’re not going to interrupt Jesus, are you?” “Don’t you see he’s in the middle of an important debate with the religious leaders?”

Jesus saw what the disciples were trying to do and said to them, “Let the little children come to me.” Jesus motioned the children to approach him as he continued to talk to the disciples, “Put down your hands, do not block them.” Then looking at the children in their eyes, Jesus said to everyone who could hear him, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children.” Then Jesus laid his hands on and prayed for each child. Some children came right up to Jesus, running and giggling. Some children were quiet and thoughtfully gazed up at Jesus. Some cried but found comfort when their big brother or sister held their hand. Jesus blessed them all.

This same Jesus who cleared the way for children to come to him removes the barriers for everyone to come to God. Jesus is our high priest who understands why we sometimes make mistakes because he experienced the same struggles we do. Even when he struggled, Jesus always chose to do the right thing. Now Jesus has entered heaven, taken down the “Do Not Enter” signs to God’s throne room, and rolled out the welcome mat. Since Jesus has cleared the way, let us confidently approach God’s throne of grace.

Nature Body Prayers

What animals or things in nature come to mind as you do these poses?



A



B



C



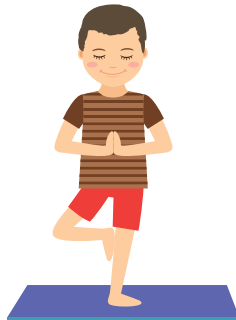
D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L

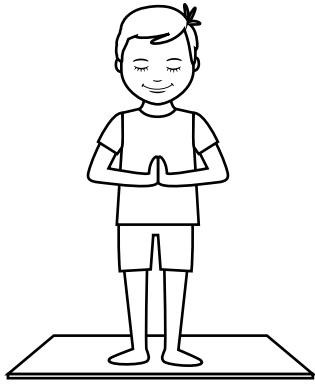
Prayer Prompt 1

Creation praises God! [Pose L]
[Nature name] praises you! [Pose]
And I praise you! [Pose A]

Prayer Prompt 2

Thank you, God, for loving your creation! [Pose L]
You care for [nature name]! [Pose]
And you care for me! [Pose A]

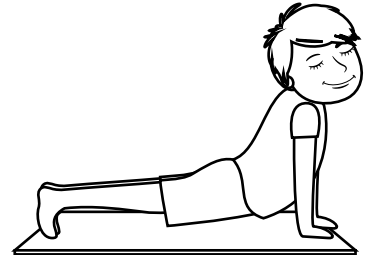
What other prayer can you come up with using these poses?



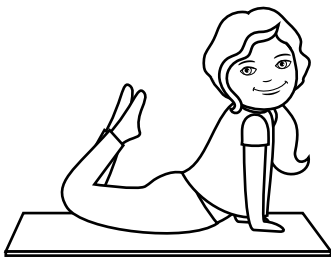
I am thankful for ...



the sun and moon



the earth



my pet



birds we see



my friends



my family



food we eat



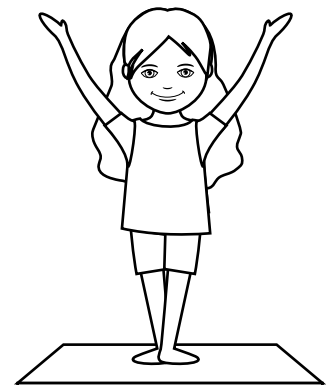
silly times



a place to rest



a time to play



Thank you, God,
for everything!

