

5

Unplug

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8; MARK 1:35-39



GOAL

Children hear the story of Jesus taking time away and discover the benefits of unplugging from activities for times of rest and prayer.

- 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

God of rest, I pray that, in the midst of our busyness, we will make the time to be with you. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Our world is connected 24/7 with entertainment, information, and access to almost anything. The digital world ramped up during the pandemic with remote learning and work. Many people needed to be on screens for hours a day. “Zoom fatigue” became part of our vocabulary. Our bodies, our minds, and our spirits need rest. Unplugging can be a spiritual discipline to disconnect for a time and reconnect with God and others.

THE BIBLE STORY

The spiritual discipline of unplugging provides a vivid illustration of the fact that not all spiritual disciplines are described in the Bible. How could the Bible discuss something that hadn’t yet been invented? In Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, we learn that there is a balance of time in our lives. The Bible also tells us of times that people took time away from the demands of life, time to connect or reconnect with God. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when faced with the demands of crowds and synagogues, teaching and healing, friends and family, Jesus stepped away for moments of quiet, rest, and prayer.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Unplugging may feel like a welcome relief or a punishment to children. Modeling unplugging and helping children choose to unplug as part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle is important to help them learn to self-regulate. As with all spiritual disciplines, the intentionality of the practice is to spend time with God. Understanding that there is a time for screens and a time for spiritual pursuits with God and others is the goal.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “How I Spend My Time” (p. 46): Gather the Spiritual Discipline journals from session 4. Have a few extra notebooks for children who were not present at sessions 1–4.
- “A Time for Everything” (p. 46): Obtain the *Books of the Bible* or *Old Testament Books* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Bible Basics Set).

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Hearing a Story” (p. 48): Obtain *Babbit & Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu or use the YouTube video “Babbit and Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone Read by Judy Gardner” (bit.ly/FMBabbitAndJoan, 8:14).
- “Taking a Mini-Retreat” (p. 49): Set up the following centers:
 - Art center with paper, crayons, markers, and colored pencils
 - Movement center with Resource Page 1 displayed
 - Story center with Bible story picture books and pillows



GETTING STARTED

- Spiritual Discipline journals from session 4 and extra notebooks
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

HOW I SPEND MY TIME



Greet the children as they arrive and give them their Spiritual Discipline journals; have a notebook for anyone who was not at sessions 1–4. Provide coloring supplies. Invite them to write, draw pictures, or cut out and glue pictures from magazines on two pages. Explain that one page should be titled “Screen Time” and have descriptions and/or pictures of the different things they do on screen devices: computers, video games, television, and so forth. The other page should be titled “Time with God” and have descriptions and/or pictures of the different ways they spend time with God. Set aside their Spiritual Discipline journals for “A Time for Everything” (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 and remain the same throughout the 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 unplug, we connect with God and others.

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

- Bibles
- Books of the Bible* or *Old Testament Books* infographic poster (Bible Basics Set)
- Spiritual Discipline journals from “How I Spend My Time” (above)
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING



Display the *Books of the Bible* or *Old Testament Books* infographic poster. Provide Bibles for the children and invite them to turn to Ecclesiastes 3. Tell them that Ecclesiastes, besides being hard to say, is hard to find. Explain that it is a small book of the Bible found in the section called Wisdom Literature. Have the children look at the infographic poster and find Ecclesiastes on the poster. Invite a volunteer to read the names of the other books in this category. Wonder which books sound familiar to the children. Identify Psalms as a large book, pretty much in the center of the Bible. By turning to Psalms, they can find Ecclesiastes after the next book, Proverbs.

Invite volunteers to take turns reading Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, a verse at a time. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✦ What do you think these verses mean?
- ✦ Why do you think someone made a list like this?

- ✦ What other times may there be that are not mentioned in those verses, particularly things that may have not existed in the same way over two thousand years ago? (*Some ideas might be: a time for school, and a time for vacation; a time for play, and a time to refrain from playing; a time to speak up, and a time to be quiet; a time for screens, and a time to unplug.*)
- ✦ How might these verses help us live today?

Tell the children that today’s session is about unplugging, or taking a break, particularly from screen time since it is so hard to escape in our lives today. Wonder together how unplugging might be a spiritual discipline. Remind the children, if necessary, that spiritual disciplines are those things that help us train to be disciples, to practice being a follower of Jesus, and allow us to spend time with God.

Give the children their Spiritual Discipline journals and provide coloring supplies. Invite the children to write the word UNPLUG in large outline letters that they can decorate. Emphasize to the children that screen time is not bad, but that making choices to unplug at times and spend time with God can be a practice that helps us grow as disciples.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

JESUS’ MINI-RETREAT

C

Ask the children what examples there are in the Bible about people unplugging. Some children may suggest some biblical characters who heard God’s call because they weren’t distracted by other things, such as Samuel, Isaiah, or Jeremiah. For most, however, this will be a silly question to pose because there was nothing to plug in during Bible times. Suggest that there were times, especially for Jesus, that he stepped away, taking time off, or pulling the plug on the many people and activities that demanded his time and energy.

Hand out Bibles, and invite a volunteer to read Mark 1:35–39 aloud while the others follow along in their Bibles. Tell the children that, before Jesus took his mini-retreat, he had jumped into his ministry with both feet: he was baptized by John, he went into the desert for forty days where he was tempted to give up on his ministry, he started telling people about God, he called his disciples to follow him, he taught in the synagogue, he healed people, and he was surrounded by crowds who wanted to hear him and be healed by him.

Have the children look at the words and pictures they used to describe “Time with God” in their Spiritual Discipline journals and share them with the group. Wonder together how they might use any of their suggestions as a mini-retreat.

-
- Bibles
 - Spiritual Discipline journals from “A Time for Everything” (p. 46)



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- *Babbit & Joan: A Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu (Flyaway Books, 2020) or internet-connected device

HEARING A STORY

C

Ask the children if they know anyone who has a cell phone and if they think they will have one someday. Wonder together if cell phones get tired from working all the time. Tell the children they will hear a story about a cell phone who needed to be unplugged for a while! Read *Babbit & Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu or show the YouTube video “Babbit and Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone Read by Judy Gardner” (bit.ly/FMBabbitAndJoan, 8:14; stop at 6:53). Reflect on the story with the children using the following questions:

- ✦ Besides feeling alone, how else might Babbit be feeling when he first is separated from Joan?
- ✦ What new things did Babbit, the bird, and the bear notice on their adventure?
- ✦ What screens do you use? What might you do if you took a break from your screens?
- ✦ Did taking a break from her phone make Babbit’s friendship with Joan better or worse? Why do you think that?
- ✦ When is a time you took a break from something? What feelings did you have during and after the break?
- ✦ How might taking a break from your screens this week help you connect with God and people?

CAMPOUT

D C

Tell the children that when people go camping they often “unplug from the world” and go to “get back to nature.” Explain that both phrases could mean that they want to get off their digital devices to spend time with family, friends, and creation (and for Christians, their Creator). Invite the children to use their imaginations and go on a campout together. Suggest that they may use materials in the room to pretend to be items for camping.

Form teams of three or four children, or work together as one group. Have each group set up their camp space with a tent, campfire, and whatever else they can imagine. Suggest they decide where they are camping, what the campsite and the view look like, and what is around them in nature, including landforms and animals. Give the children some time to create and enjoy their campout.

After a period of time, invite the children to sit by their campfires and tell you about their camping experience. Have each group take turns sharing where they are, what is in their campsite, what activities they would do there, and what they see and hear around them. Encourage the children to ask one another questions about their imaginary camping experiences. Wonder where they see and feel God’s presence.

Encourage the children to go on a real campout with their family, if possible, or to take a pretend camping trip in their home or yard with friends and family. Challenge them to unplug from devices and imagine connecting with God in nature.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

TAKING A MINI-RETREAT

A AM QC

Point out the three centers you have set up:

- Art center: write or draw a prayer to God or reflect on what they are thankful for in their lives
- Movement center: follow the body poses on Resource Page 1 and create some of their own movements to praise God
- Story center: look at and read Bible story picture books

Invite the children to take a mini-retreat and choose one center to spend some time. Play instrumental music, if you like.

After the mini-retreat, ask the children how it felt to take a few minutes to choose a way to connect with God. Wonder how they might take a mini-retreat during their day or week.

MAKING A LABYRINTH

Some children may be familiar with a labyrinth, the winding path that twists and turns to a center and back out again. Explain that a labyrinth is not a maze with dead ends or tricks to get someone lost. The purpose of a labyrinth is to spend time with God as you move toward the center and back out again along the same path. Tell the children that there are many patterns for labyrinths—some round, some square, and some other shapes—and that there is not only one way to make a labyrinth. Comment that some labyrinths are made in nature, cut into the grass; made with rocks, twigs, and leaves; or formed from hedges; some are painted on canvas and can be taken to different places; some are made in patterns on the floor; and some can be made from whatever materials are available.

Show the children Resource Page 2, a labyrinth with three turns, or circuits, and how to draw it. Hand out Spiritual Discipline journals and copies of Resource Page 2. Provide coloring supplies. Invite the children to follow the steps and draw a labyrinth in their Spiritual Discipline journals. Suggest that tracing the path (the white space) of the labyrinth with a finger is a good way to unplug and focus on God.

- Art center
- Movement center, including Resource Page 1
- Story center
- Internet-connected device or music player (optional)

- Copies of Resource Page 2
- Spiritual Discipline journals from “Jesus’ Mini-Retreat” (p. 47)
- Pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils



As a supplemental activity, have the children make a labyrinth in the room using material available, such as toys, books, ribbon, and so forth. They can follow the three-circuit pattern or create their own freeform pattern with a path that moves to a central area. Then have the children walk their labyrinth, encouraging them to focus on God and following God’s ways as they walk into the center and back out again.



FOLLOWING JESUS

BLESSING OUR UNPLUGGING

QC

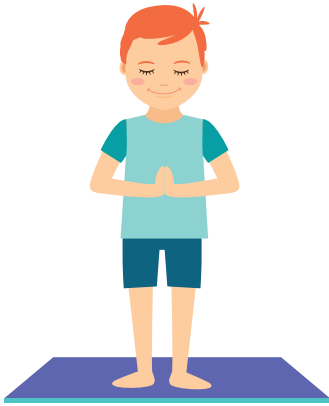
Invite each child to hold their Spiritual Discipline journal in their left hand and place their right hand over it like a roof. Have them repeat after you as you lead them in a blessing:

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

- Spiritual Discipline journals from “Jesus’ Mini-Retreat” (p. 47) or “Making a Labyrinth” (above)



Have the children leave their Spiritual Discipline journals in the room for the next session. Encourage the children to try choosing to unplug from screen time and spend time with God each day.



I am thankful for ...



the sun and moon



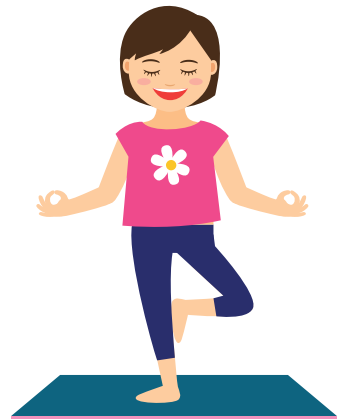
the earth



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!

How to Draw a Three-Circuit Labyrinth

