

# How to Live

## Leader's Guide



### Ideas for Growing in Christian Practices with Teens

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WITH LANI WRIGHT AND SUSAN BRIEHL

**WAY TO LIVE LEADER'S GUIDE: IDEAS FOR GROWING IN CHRISTIAN PRACTICES WITH TEENS**

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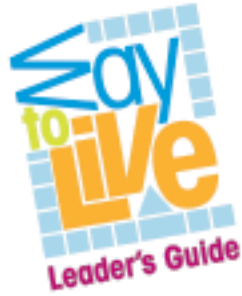
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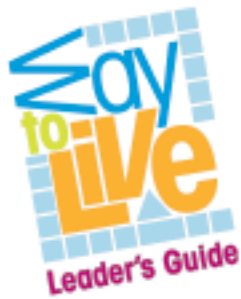
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### Contents

1	Introduction
7	■ Guidelines for <i>Lectio Divina</i>
9	■ Pray the Psalms
10	■ What Are Practices?
12	Life
17	The Story
22	Bodies
28	Stuff
34	Food
40	Creation
46	Creativity
52	Work
58	Play
64	Time
69	Truth
75	Choices
82	Friends
88	Welcome
94	Forgiveness
100	Justice
106	Grieving
114	Music
120	Prayer
126	Practice

This Leader's Guide is formatted for printing.  
When using it online, you can also click through  
highlighted text to go directly to links.



# Introduction

Welcome to the Leader's Guide for *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*. This Guide provides chapter-by-chapter suggestions for involving teens in thinking about and taking part in the eighteen Christian practices discussed in *Way to Live*.

Before turning to these suggestions, we want to explain some of the process and thinking behind *Way to Live*. Why is it so important for teens—and for adults—to understand and participate in Christian practices?

The authors of *Way to Live* believe that we live in a period of social change when many of the basic patterns of daily life and human relationship are up for grabs. Some of the changes underway are positive; but even so, figuring out how to live is rarely easy. Today we must make many choices about how we shall live, and we make these choices in the midst of many competing messages and pressures. These choices and pressures are especially prominent in the lives of teenagers. Those who want more than to be swept along by external forces need to be deliberate about what their way to live will be.

And teens do want more—so much more—than to be swept along by external pressures. They yearn not just to get by but to live lives that are good for themselves, for others, and for all creation. They want not just to survive but to be *alive*. They long to know the presence of God.

*Way to Live* urges teens to understand themselves as part of a community of people who don't just go with the flow. This community gathers around Jesus, whose whole way of living and being embodied the loving, challenging life of God. Through his presence and example, a way to live comes into focus. The community with Jesus at its heart experiences his presence in many ways—in the faces of people in need, in bread shared, in music sung, in prayer, and even in the suffering we sometimes have to endure, just as he did. Sharing life with Jesus, we are caught up into the loving, challenging life of God. Christians call this “life in the Holy Spirit.” It is *abundant* life—Life with a capital L—*Life* full of the kind of freedom and love and courage Jesus lived himself and gave to his community.

Rather than exploring this way of life (or “Way of Life”) in one big chunk, this book and Guide explore it one practice at a time. Each practice **addresses a basic area of human need**. Each practice is **something we learn from and do together with other people**. Each practice **appears in the**

**Bible**, and each has also taken shape **in Christian communities through the ages and around the world today**. Participating in these practices is a way of **responding through action to God's love for us**. (See pages 10–11 below for a full definition of what we mean by a Christian practice.) We grow stronger in Christian living as we practice these practices. The weaving together of all these practices within a community would be that community's way of life.

We hope that teens will be called to a way of abundant life through their encounter with *Way to Live*—and, more important, through their encounter with you and other adults with whom they are gathered into a community with Jesus at its heart.

## Getting into each practice ■ ■ ■ ■

This Guide provides many suggestions for exploring each practice. It is up to leaders to select those activities that will most interest and challenge their specific group. As a starting point for leaders' planning, each chapter opens with a summary of the **main idea** (what the practice is and why it matters) and then offers a sample outline for a 60- to 90-minute program for youth.

The sample outline selects activities from the various sections of the chapter:

- **Focus.** Exploring our current experience of this area of our lives.
- **Join the Story.** Encountering the Bible and learning from Christians who have gone before us.
- **Challenge.** Stretching ourselves to live more faithfully.
- **Worship.** Offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God's help.
- **Link.** Related websites, videos, music, books, and other resources.

As you adapt the sample program outlines to meet the needs of your group, we urge you always to include activities from at least three sections of any given chapter. Be aware that it is fine to change the order in which you move through these sections. For example, a Bible study group could begin with **Join the Story** before moving to other sections.

Here are some other issues for leaders to keep in mind as they invite young people to explore Christian practices:

- **Become aware of how we already engage in this practice.** Where is the practice in the lives of teens today? Sometimes exploring this question requires us to turn a critical eye on the ways in which the practice is distorted (such as the tendency to pile up too many material possessions; see the *Way to Live* chapter on Stuff). Sometimes it means noticing the positive ways in which teens give attention to God or care for themselves and one another (such as the story at the end of the *Way to Live* chapter on Friends).
- **Acknowledge the presence of God in the practice** and understand how involvement in this practice draws us into God's intentions for us and for the world. Each chapter in this Guide includes Bible study suggestions, a Bible text for *lectio divina* (see pages 7–8 below for an explanation of *lectio divina*), a prayer based on a psalm chosen to illumine the particular practice, suggestions for worship, and often other options as well.
- **Look for wisdom from Christians who have gone before us**, both historical figures and older people within teens' own local communities.

- **Notice the “moves” that make up the practice**, which are usually very down-to-earth suggestions that teens can pursue in the middle of everyday life.
- **Find companions with whom to grow into this way of life.** All of us need a community of support as we seek to practice the practices of faith.
- **Identify links to these practices** in films, books, music, and other areas of culture. These are not obscure activities that happen only in church!
- **Challenge yourself to stretch into more faithful ways of living the practices.** We tell teens: *Your* challenge and privilege are to live the abundant life of Christian practices where *you* are . . . in *your* family, *your* neighborhood, *your* school, *your* world.

### Possible wrong turns ■■■

We have found that many people—teens and adults—sometimes have inaccurate assumptions about Christian practices. Therefore we want to be clear about what Christian practices are NOT:

- **Practices are NOT add-ons to life.** Teens don't have to do these in addition to homework and household chores! Instead, a practice is a *life-giving way* of doing something that is already part of everybody's life in one way or another.
- **Practices are NOT ways of showing God, ourselves, or other people how good we are.** God already loves us, and we do not make ourselves or others more lovable by scrambling anxiously to be right all the time. Instead, we believe that God is trying to care *for teens* through these practices, calling them to live a more free and truthful life. Within this way to live, teens get to share God's love with others too.
- **Practices are NOT rules or formulas to master.** Though practices involve skill, they often require creativity to figure out how to use these skills well in a given situation.
- **Practices are NOT an invitation to be “spiritual but not religious.”** Christian practices are rooted in religious communities, even though no particular community has exclusive claim on these practices.
- **Practices do NOT require the use of any code language and do not have some hidden agenda.** Christian practices can be described, interpreted, and lived in a variety of faithful ways.

## Other guidelines ■■■■

This Guide provides many suggestions for your group, as well as one structured 60- to 90-minute program on each practice. However, each group is unique, and your role as leader is to know your group well so you can select the most suitable activities for exploration and worship and introduce them in ways that connect with your members. The same activity might be declared “awesome” by one group and “totally boring” by another, so be sure to take your group’s strengths and interests into account in your planning. Because worship styles and theological emphases vary greatly among Christian congregations, choose worship materials carefully.

**Worship.** *How you worship is your option; but we strongly urge you always to include some form of worship, prayer, and/or Bible study when you explore a practice.* This Guide provides texts for Bible study, *lectio divina*, prayer, and worship suggestions in every chapter. Keep these ideas in mind as you prepare worship for your group:

- The Story and Prayer are the first and last practices featured in *Way to Live*, the two “bookend” practices that undergird all the others. We therefore encourage leaders to read *both* book chapters prior to your group’s exploring *any* of the practices. This will prepare you with different approaches for reading the Bible as scripture and for leading prayer with your group.
- *Lectio divina* is an ancient spiritual practice that developed to enrich experience of God’s living Word. *Lectio divina*, or “divine reading,” is a way of meditating on scripture that is practiced in many ways by individuals and groups. See pages 7–8 below for guidelines in leading both group and personal *lectio*.
- Pray the Psalms: The Psalms are the prayerbook of the Bible. For thousands of years Jews—and later Christians—have prayed these songs. Using these ancient words, we cry out to God when we find ourselves in dangerous situations or grieving a loss; and we thank and praise God for creating, saving, and continually caring for us. Even though the words are old, they never grow old-fashioned because they speak so truthfully about being human and being in relationship with God. The Psalms show us a way to live faithfully with God and one another. See page 9 below for a simple way to lead your group in praying the psalms. Each chapter of this Guide includes a specific suggestion of a psalm to use.

**Order.** The order in which you study the practices is an important choice you make as leader. You need not move through the chapters beginning at the front of the book—or for that matter at the back, in the middle, or alphabetically. Some leaders may post the chapter titles and let a group discuss the topics to which it feels drawn. Or a leader might determine that his or her group is especially strong at one practice—such as Music or Play—and start there. Are your teens upset about issues surrounding Welcome, Justice, or Forgiveness? Perhaps they have a reason to wonder about Grieving. Begin with a practice you think will engage them at a deep level, and move on from there.

**Pace.** The pace of your exploration will affect its quality. In many Sunday school or youth group programs, it might seem sensible to cover one practice per week. However, we urge you to resist doing this. Instead, let the group tarry. Make a commitment to *practice* something during the week and have the teens report back on it the following week. Take time to explore one practice in a few different ways—for example, through a film, a service activity, worship, and the teens’ own exploration of <http://www.waytolive.org>, which includes many other ways of experiencing this perspective.

**Reading the book.** Consider postponing the teens' reading of *Way to Live* chapters until after the first discussion of each practice. Encourage them to take the curiosity stirred by the group exploration into their reading—rather than make the reading seem like homework that has to be done in preparation for the group exploration.

**Challenge.** Encourage teens to stretch beyond their present way of living a practice. Every practice has a radical aspect that stretches everyone who embraces its challenge. As a group, locate the *edge*, the place where this practice presses against the sin in our personal lives, within our peer groups, and within our larger society. Lean into this uncomfortable space rather than avoid it. Help the group “get” the vision of radical faith that is here, without necessarily pushing them to adopt that version of the practice. Do urge them to take one step into more faithful practice, however, even if it is a small and seemingly not radical one. When teens do this, be sure to check back later to ask if they continued in this step and how it has been for them.

Several challenges for each practice are also included on <http://www.waytolive.org>.

**Ways to study practices together.** Here are some structured approaches to using *Way to Live* in your youth ministry program:

- Link adult mentors to teens with a focus on a practice of importance to both, equipping them with a “toolbox” that includes discussion questions, activity suggestions, and a request to share what they have learned about the practice with others in a few months.
- Use *Way to Live* as the focus for a year-long Bible study; you could do this part on Sunday mornings, link with service opportunities, and hold discussions or other explorations at youth group meetings. In the Bible study, try the different methods described in the chapter on The Story.
- Draw upon the book and Leader's Guide to prepare for and debrief from a mission trip. Practices become a way of describing our way of life on the trip, at home, and in the area being served.
- Study *Way to Live* in preparation for confirmation. Or consider making this exploration a follow-up to confirmation, as teens embark on Christian living in a new way.
- Interweave your group's active involvement in a practice with times of contemplative prayer, using the prayer methods in the chapter on Prayer. Focus a weekend retreat on two practices, one of which is prayer.

**Your group's way of life.** Be aware that every youth group can fall into patterns that become its own characteristic way of life. With other adult leaders, reflect on how the group itself is doing in terms of the various Christian practices. Also ask the youth to reflect with you on this at an appropriate time. Once you and the group know the names of the eighteen practices, you can also look for teachable moments that emerge during the natural life of the group. For example, link newcomers' arrival to your discussions on Welcome, poverty in your community to discussions on Justice, a student's exhaustion to your group's exploration of Time, and so on.

**Have fun along the way.** Eat dessert! Play Capture the Flag! (See the final chapter, Practice, in *Way to Live*.) Practice is not expected to make perfect. Leaven the serious explorations with times of rest and play. Make sure the teens—and *you*—sense the love as well as the challenge of God as they explore these practices.



## A final note on sharing *Way to Live* with teens ■■■■

*Way to Live*, this Guide, and <http://www.waytolive.org> are not “program pieces” but invitations into a process in which teens and adults grow into a way of life attuned to God’s presence.

The concern to discover a way to live that is vital, worthwhile, and even *holy* is not restricted to teens alone. Many adults are on a similar quest. Some of the authors of *Way to Live* wrote a book for adults that advocates twelve Christian practices in *Practicing Our Faith* (edited by Dorothy C. Bass and published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., 1997). You will discover many more resources on Christian practices, primarily meant for adults, at <http://www.practicingourfaith.org>.

As you serve as a companion and guide to teens, you also need a community of adults with whom to share abundant life in Christ and with whom to practice the life of Christian faith. Ideally both you and the teens with whom you work belong to a congregation whose worship and discipleship frame your exploration of *Way to Live*. Even within a vital congregation, however, it is important to identify specific other adults who care about living faithfully and who care about young people. Ask them to accompany you and the teens in exploring Christian practices.

Teens need a significant number of caring, challenging adults in their lives as they explore how to live. The team of authors that wrote *Way to Live* includes equal numbers of adults and teens. We loved this balance! Consider inviting adults in the congregation to study *Practicing Our Faith* at the same time the teens explore *Way to Live*. Then make sure the two groups talk with each other and practice the practices together.

# Guidelines for *Lectio Divina* ■ ■ ■

## Group *lectio divina* ■ ■ ■ ■

### Preparation

Consider forming groups of no more than eight. For each group, ask three persons to prepare to read the *lectio* text—one for each of the three times the text is read. Include readers of both genders. Find a chime or bell that can be used to signal the end of silent meditation periods. Get a candle and matches. If you wish, choose a song for the group to sing together before beginning. You may find a song that the group likes to sing every time they begin *lectio divina*.

### Opening

When the group has gathered, describe the process for this time of meditation on scripture. Explain that the same passage of scripture will be read three times.

A time of silence will follow each reading. The bell will end the silence and introduce a time to share. Explain that you will instruct them on what they are to listen for before each reading of the passage. Explain now that during the first reading they will hear the passage twice. They should listen for a word that stands out for them, that seems to “shine” or “shimmer.”

When everyone is seated comfortably, **say**, “We make our beginning in the name of Christ, in the light of the Living Word.” Light the candle, explaining that this is to remind us of Christ’s presence in our midst. Help the group members to become quiet and fully aware of God’s presence by taking a few moments to relax and to say a silent prayer welcoming God into this time.

### First reading

The first reader reads the passage aloud two times, pausing for a moment after the first reading. The hearers listen for the word God speaks to them from this passage while it is being read. When the text has been read twice, allow two to three minutes of silence, then ring the bell. Ask persons to share just the word or phrase God has given to them with no other explanation or comment. You may choose to go around the circle and have each person share, or ask persons to share when or if they feel comfortable.

After this sharing, instruct participants to listen to the next reading and to ponder how the passage seems to touch their lives. **Ask** them to listen for the answer to this question: “How is my life touched by this passage?”

### Second reading

The second reader reads the passage one time. Following the reading, wait a few minutes, then ring the bell. Then ask persons to share in one sentence how they are touched by what they’ve heard.

After this sharing, instruct group members to listen to the passage one more time, asking themselves, “Is there an invitation here? Do I sense that this passage is inviting me to do or be something?”

### Third reading

The third reader reads the passage one last time. Following the reading, allow a few minutes of meditation time as each person tries to hear what Christ wants him or her to be or to do today in response to the reading. The answer might be a contemplative one, a better way of being in God's presence; or it might be an action to be carried out. After you ring the bell, ask persons to share what they have heard from God.

### Closing

Conclude with "Go Now in Peace" or a song or blessing that affirms the ever-present love of Christ.

## Personal *lectio divina* ■ ■ ■ ■

### Opening

Begin with a few minutes of silence. Take time to be fully present to God. Invite God to speak to you through this text.

### Three readings:

1. Read the passage slowly.
2. Reread it a second time, aloud if possible. Circle or underline the words or phrases that seem to "jump" out at you, or that "shine" or "shimmer." Repeat those words or phrases and linger over them until you feel ready to move on. Why do you feel drawn to these words or phrases? What do you think God is saying to you?
3. Meditatively "chew" on the words that have stood out for you. Ponder what you underlined and listen for the message God is sending you through the words or phrases that catch your attention. Ask yourself, "How will God's message affect me today?"
4. Re-read the passage a third time. In prayerful response to your reading, try one of the following activities:
  - Sculpt a response with clay.
  - Draw with oil pastels, charcoal, or pens.
  - Write in a journal, using prose or poetry.
  - Sing a song or create a response through music using an instrument of your choice.

A good source for *lectio divina* for personal or group use is the following website:

<http://www.methodx.net/thelife/prayermethods/lectio.asp>

For a detailed description of how to use *lectio divina* in groups, see *Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups* by Norvene Vest (Upper Room Books, 1996). Some of the material here was adapted from this resource.

## Pray the Psalms ■ ■ ■

Try this simple way to pray a psalm each time you gather to talk about *Way to Live*. Specific psalms are given in each Guide chapter under “Worship.”

- Dim the lights.
- Light one large candle in the midst of the gathering, and/or give each person a small taper or votive candle to hold.
- Let silence settle on the group. Wait until restlessness ebbs or ends.
- One person reads the opening sentence provided in this Guide (in each chapter) for the psalm. (This brief sentence states one of the themes of the psalm, links the psalm to a particular practice, and gives everyone a common focus.)
- A brief silence follows.
- One person reads the psalm clearly and slowly (pausing after each stanza), or two people read the psalm responsively (sentence by sentence or stanza by stanza).
- At the end of the reading, everyone sits in silence, letting the images and poetry sink heart-deep.
- One person prays the closing prayer provided in the Guide or prays a brief prepared or spontaneous prayer that connects the words of the psalm with the real lives of the people in the group. Or those who want to do so are invited to pray a one-sentence prayer that is inspired by the psalm or that connects the psalm to their lives.
- After a brief silence, extinguish the large candle, bringing closure to the time of prayer. (If space and time allow, some could quietly leave while others stay to pray.)

The first time your group prays the psalms, consider using the prepared closing prayer from the Guide. The next time ask someone in advance to add her own or his own prayer. Move toward inviting others to add their brief spontaneous prayers. In time the group members will begin making these ancient psalms their own.

# What Are Practices? ■ ■ ■

## What do we mean by “Christian practices”? ■ ■ ■ ■

The authors of *Way to Live* worked with a specific understanding of what a “Christian practice” is, and we want to share that understanding with leaders who will be guiding groups of young people in reflecting on the book. We do not necessarily expect you to teach this definition of Christian practices to young people directly. However, we do want you to understand—and to help young people understand—that Christian practices are not simply healthy attitudes, life skills, or ways of being nice (although these could be part of a given practice). Christian practices go beyond this. They involve us in the activities of God and link us to other practitioners in the past, the present, and the future. Christian practices invite us into Christ’s radical way of being in the world. They frequently involve resisting how things are ordinarily done in our culture.

*A Christian practice is a set of activities Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in the light of and in response to God’s active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.*

### Each Christian practice:

- **involves us in God’s activities in the world and reflects God’s grace and love.**

Teresa of Avila put it this way: “Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now.” (See pages 2 and 11 of *Way to Live*.)

- **is done together—not alone but with others.**

The folks with whom we practice include people we know personally, brothers and sisters around the world, and many people who have come before us or who will come after us. Even when someone is participating in a practice alone, he or she is embraced by this community, which has Jesus at its heart.

- **is learned with and from other people.**

We have been invited into Christian practices by Jesus. Almost always, however, other people have helped us to hear Jesus’ invitation and to learn the moves that make it possible to respond. Someone—family, church, mentor, friend—has shared Christ’s love with us by making a specific practice a living reality: for example by welcoming us, by teaching us to make music, or by offering us forgiveness. As we take up our own parts in these practices, we will in turn invite others to join in too.

- **comes to us from the past and will be shaped by us for the future.**

Our challenge and privilege are to join in each practice *where we are*. Often it is not completely clear how to do this, however. So we reflect, drawing on the wisdom of the past (including scripture and history) and being creative as we put the practice into play in our own situation, mindful that what we do will have an influence on generations to come.

- **addresses fundamental human needs.**

Each practice addresses one or more needs that are basic to who we are as human beings created in God's image and offered new life in Christ. When thinking about a practice, it is often helpful to reflect on what really basic part of our humanness is at stake in this practice. This can help us to resist the dubious notions of what we *need* that are promoted by advertisers and to recognize the true character of human fulfillment.

- **is thought-full; it relies on beliefs and develops in us certain kinds of wisdom.**

Christian practices are active and embodied, but that does not mean that they don't involve our minds! They do. The biblical Story clothes each practice with images and words. In addition, each practice relies on specific Christian beliefs; for example, the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope (Grieving) and allows us to repair torn relationships (Forgiveness). However, belief doesn't always come before practice: being members of communities where the Christian practices are really lived can help us to understand and embrace the central beliefs of Christian faith more fully.

- **is done within the church, in the public realm, in daily work, and at home.**

A Christian practice is not something we do only at church. Each practice takes shape also in the area of social justice, at home, at school, at work, and as a dimension of personal spirituality. Christian practices overlap with the practices of other religious groups at many points, though not in every way.

- **shapes the people who participate in the practice, as individuals and as communities.**

When we live Christian practices, we express who we most truly are: beloved children of God. When we live Christian practices, we also learn to see everyone else as a beloved child of God. In the midst of any given practice, we also acquire specific skills and character traits.

- **comes to a focus in worship.**

Every Christian worship service involves some practicing of the practices, and a full service that includes Holy Communion gives a taste of all the *Way to Live* practices. When we worship, we gather up our whole way to live and offer it to God. At the same time, we are prepared to go out once again into a way to live that is deeply shaped by our worshipful encounter with God.

- **is a strand in a whole way of life.**

Taken all together, Christian practices add up to a way to live. They are woven together: if one is missing, all are distorted in some way. On the other hand, because they are woven together, any one practice can become a gateway into faithful living. Fortunately, almost everyone has at least a little start on some of the practices, even if he or she does not use these words or think of these practices as related to Christian faith.

## Offering welcome... managing our stuff... forgiving... making music... praying

When we live the practices of Christian faith, we join together with Jesus, one another, and a great cloud of witnesses in a way to live that brings *abundant life*—Life with a capital L—for creation, for other people, and for ourselves.



# Life

## Main Idea

**Get in touch with your longing** for a way to live that is deeply, truly good—a way to live full of the kind of freedom, love, and courage Jesus lived and offers to us today.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity # 3 (15 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity # 1 (20 minutes)

Do Worship activity # 1 (30 minutes)

Close with Worship activity # 2 (5 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Images of “the good life”

Bring in a stack of current magazines, including several produced for teens. Ask each participant to select a magazine and find a picture that conveys “the good life.” Ask participants to each make a list of what they see, naming the specific details in the picture that make this “the good life.” Then, for each detail, ask them to write down the activities required to live this kind of “good life” (such as lots of high-pressure work, cosmetic surgery, and so on). As a group, share these pictures and what participants have written about them.

**Ask:** Do we agree that these activities are “good”? for the people shown? for other people? Have participants circle the activities they believe actually contribute to the good of the people shown and to the good of other people and the earth.

Then have them add to their lists by **asking:** What other activities not shown in these pictures are important parts of a good life? What would your friends add? What would your family add? What would you expect a Christian adult you admire to add?

## 2. Mountaintop experiences

**Ask** the group: Have you ever had a *mountaintop experience*—a time when you experienced God's presence with special clarity and felt that life was real and good and full of possibilities? Ask the group members to sit in silence as you gently guide them back into this experience.

Leader **says** (speaking slowly and expanding on details; ellipses indicate a time to pause): *In your imagination, return to the place where you had this experience. . . . Remember how it looked, smelled, sounded, felt. . . . Was it warm or cold, sunny or dark? Were you alone or with others, indoors or in nature? . . . Go there and get into it. Now remember specific things you did that made this an important time and place for you. Did you hike, pray, talk to others, eat? . . .* (Allow time for reflection.)

When participants have finished reflecting, ask them to list the important things they remember from the experience. Now ask them to read Martha's account of her first youth group mission trip (*Way to Live*, pages 1–4) and list things she and the group did that contributed to her "mountaintop experience." Then have participants compare the lists and notice similarities.

**Discuss:** What do you see that might help explain why you (and Martha) were especially open to God at these times? Do you find, as Martha did, that this focus experience gets "fuzzy" when you return to everyday living? Why do you think this happens?

## 3. Asking questions about LIFE

Explain that a question is a little "quest"—a journey (sometimes long and hard) in search of something valuable. Different questions take us on different journeys, down different paths of discovery. Write the word *LIFE* on newsprint and invite participants to raise some questions about the meaning of *LIFE*, pretending that they are biologists (what questions would biologists ask about *LIFE*?). Now add the word *MY* before *LIFE*.

**Ask:** What questions do you have about *your* life—as it is now and as it might be in the future? Tell participants to notice that these differ from scientific questions; they are personal questions of meaning and direction. They should further note that we all live with some uncertainty about what will happen and without all the answers we would like to have. The group need not try to answer these questions people ask about *MY LIFE*. Just list them on newsprint, and save this sheet to revisit in a few weeks or months.

**Ask:** Who in your life encourages you to ask questions about life in general, and your life in particular? Can we ask some of these questions together as we discuss *Way to Live* in coming weeks?

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Jesus' invitation

Tell participants that Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Ask them to define *abundant*, using a dictionary; then ask what it might mean to say that life itself could be abundant. **Ask:** What do you suppose Jesus meant by inviting his followers to live *abundant lives*? Read these scripture passages for clues: John 3:1-21, Matthew 4:6-21, Matthew



6:19-21, Luke 17:11-19, Luke 19:1-10, John 9:1-41, Luke 8:4-18, Luke 8:40-56. (Each participant or each small group could look at one passage, then bring impressions back to the larger group.)

**Discuss:** Putting all these scriptures together, what can you see about what “abundant life” meant for Jesus? What might it mean for us today? (Ask participants to be specific—think about what “abundant life” would look like in our families, our high schools, our churches, our world.) Work together to come up with a description.

### 3. Share stories of compassion

Invite participants to recall a time when they felt *compassion* toward another creature (person or animal). **Ask:** How old were you? What moved you to compassion? How did this feel? What did this experience inspire you to do?

Share the following account of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement—a network of houses across the United States that offers food, shelter, and care to homeless people.

When Dorothy Day was a young child, at a time when many people couldn't find work, her father brought donuts home every Saturday morning. As she sat in her apartment in New York City eating donuts, she could see ragged, hungry people walking the streets below. One day she suggested to her father that since he always brought a dozen donuts even though there were only three people in the family, perhaps she and her parents could eat just one each and share the other nine with the people on the streets. Her father told her that this wasn't a good idea, but every Saturday morning for several weeks she brought it up again. Then one Saturday her father grew stern: “There's nothing we can do,” he said. “Don't ever bring this up again.” Dorothy refused to accept her father's analysis of things. She kept her compassion alive, spending time among poor people and finally opening the first Catholic Worker house of hospitality in 1933. Ever since that day, people influenced by Dorothy have been welcoming the homeless poor, offering a listening ear, a bowl of soup, and a bed to sleep in at night.

Dorothy *noticed* others. Encourage participants to think of whom they *noticed* with compassion during the past week—or whom they might have noticed had they been paying closer attention. Dorothy was not discouraged when told there was nothing she could do. **Ask:** Have you ever heard such words of *dis-courage-ment*? Who *en-courage-s* you to be compassionate?

## Challenge

View <http://www.waytolive.org>.

Ask participants to spend thirty minutes to an hour exploring this website. Do this in small groups, if possible, to maximize interaction. Then **discuss** one or both of these questions:

- With which *character* do you most closely identify, and why? (Michael, Sarah, Anna, Chloe, Nick, Jim, or Kate)
- Which *practice* would you like to know more about? What questions do you have about this practice?

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *God is the shepherd who guides us and cares for us with goodness and mercy.*

**Read:** Psalm 23

**Closing Prayer:** Shepherding God,  
You lead us on the right path  
And walk with us through the valleys.  
Your goodness is our constant companion.  
Be with us now as we begin this journey together.  
Let our days and our deeds overflow with your Life.  
Amen.



### 1. Walk and pray

If you have access to a labyrinth, walk it silently as a group. For centuries, some Christians have prayed while walking on a labyrinth, a circular but winding path that leads into the center and out again. An Episcopal church in your community or a nearby camp or retreat center might be able to tell you the location of a labyrinth in your vicinity. If you do not have access to a labyrinth, find another place where everyone can walk in silence—near one another, but with each person going at his or her own pace. For example, you might walk up, down, and around the aisles of your sanctuary, or outdoors around a building or through a park. As you walk, ask God to make you aware of God's presence as you walk from this place into other places in the coming days. (Plan to repeat this exercise at the conclusion of your study of *Way to Live*.) Close by singing as a group the African-American spiritual "Guide My Feet."

You can learn more about this form of prayer at  
<http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/index.shtml>.

### 2. Saint Teresa Benediction

Have the group stand in a circle and pair up, with partners facing one another. Instruct participants to touch each other gently as prompted. (Option: Participants may stand in a circle and touch their own bodies as prompted. Also, the leader may invite prayers of petition following each line.)

**Say:** This is based on the writing of Teresa of Avila, a Spanish mystic who lived about 500 years ago.

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours.*  
(Touch eyes.)

*Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world.*  
(Touch feet.)

*Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good.*  
(Touch hands.)

*Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now.*

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Life at your next gathering. If you do, ask each person to bring one magazine for Focus activity #1. Ask each person also to think of a story they're willing to tell for Join the Story activity #3, or assign different people to one of the Link explorations about the lives of spiritual heroes and to report their findings next week.

## Link

1. Check out the latest ideas for living an abundant life at <http://www.waytolive.org>.
2. Learn more about Augustine of Hippo at <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/sainta02.htm>.
3. Learn more about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement she founded at <http://www.catholicworker.org>.
4. Learn more about Saint Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Order at <http://www.sbfranciscans.org>.



# The Story

## Main Idea

**Become part of God's Story:** The Bible tells the Story of God's love for us and for the whole creation. When we read and study, hear and tell this Story, we meet Jesus. He invites us to join the Story and to share God's love. The more we "get into" this Story, the more it gets into us and shapes the way we live.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #2 (10 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #5 (15 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (30 minutes)

Choose a Challenge activity to commit to as a group (10 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #1 (20 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Family stories

In small groups have each participant share a story that his or her family tells over and over again. Is it funny, touching, embarrassing? How has the story changed or been embellished over time? What does this story say about the participant and his or her family? If you have a physical object that reminds you of this story, bring it and share as you tell the story.

### 2. Getting lost

**Ask:** What book have you read that carried you to another place, time, or reality—a book you "got lost" in? Why was it so gripping? How did you feel when you finished the book?

### 3. Fractured fairy tales

**Ask:** Do you remember a time when you felt your childhood had ended? a time when you realized that the world is more broken *and* more beautiful than you had known? or a time when God seemed different than you had imagined? What caused this change? Was it an exciting time? Was it sad, scary, or confusing? Invite those who want to share to do so.

#### 4. Truth or fiction

**Ask** group members: Name a fictional book, play, poem, or movie that opened your eyes to see the “real” world in a deeper, truer way. What did it help you see?

#### 5. Story time

Create a story as a group. One person sets the scene, another describes the characters, another starts the action rolling. After three sentences, another person picks up the story line, then another and another, until everyone has contributed at least once. Have the person who began the story bring it to a conclusion.

### Join the Story

#### 1. *Lectio text*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

#### 2. Lost and found

Have the group read the parable of the prodigal son aloud (Luke 15:11-32), with one person serving as narrator and others taking the parts of the father, the younger son, the older son, and the servant or slave. Then form four groups according to the character in the story with whom they most identify. The “servants” would be those who feel as if they are on the edges of the story, watching from the outside. In the small groups encourage participants to share why they identify with this character. **Ask:** What would you most like each of the other characters in the story to understand about how you feel? Reconvene as a large group. A representative of each small group shares what they discovered about their “place” in the story.

#### 3. Seed and soil

Have the group read the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9), acting it out as if they were doing a spontaneous second-grade play (everyone has a part and no one is in control!). **Ask** participants to reflect imaginatively on this parable: What do you think the seed is? (There are no right answers here.) Who is sowing? What might the stones, thorns, birds, and pathway be? Where are *you* in the story? After a lively discussion, encourage the group to listen as Jesus opens the parable for his less imaginative disciples. Read Matthew 13:18-23 aloud.

#### 4. Dear Tim

Lead the group in leading and exploring Paul's personal words to his friend and student, Timothy (2 Timothy 1:1-14) using the Västerås method as described in “Cracking the Book” (*Way to Live*, pages 25–26). **Ask:** How might these words be speaking to you?

## 5. Scavenger Hunt

Divide the group into teams. Have participants search the Bible until they find (1) a love poem, (2) a letter, (3) a sermon, (4) a lament or sad song, (5) a genealogy, (6) a prayer, (7) a parable, (8) a proverb, (9) a prophet's warning, (10) a healing story, (11) a list of laws, (12) a call narrative (God calling someone to serve).

## 6. Twisting the story

Form five groups. Each group looks up one of these passages: Genesis 1:26; Ephesians 6:5-8; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; Acts 5:27-32. Have each group discuss how this text can be (and has been) used to justify harming creation and degrading human beings. Reconvene as a large group. Each group reads its passage aloud and reports its findings. After a time of discussion and reflection, close by reading aloud Galatians 3:23-29, which was part of an ancient baptismal liturgy.

## Challenge

### 1. Visit a local synagogue.

Arrange for the group to visit a synagogue and talk with the rabbi or another well-informed member of the congregation. Ask if he or she will show the group a Torah scroll and describe how it was made and how it is used in public worship. Ask him or her to read aloud from it and then translate the reading from Hebrew into English. Also ask about the role of scripture in Jewish homes. Then return to your own place of worship. How is Scripture physically present here? What role does the Bible play in your own home?

### 2. Commit to reading.

Encourage participants to read one of the four Gospels with a friend. They should read a chapter a week, and agree to an ongoing conversation about their reading either face-to-face, over the telephone, or via e-mail.

### 3. *Palabra de Dios*

Identify participants who are taking a foreign language. Encourage them to check out a Bible in the language they are learning and try reading the Christmas story (Luke 2) or another familiar part of scripture. Suggest that they keep their English Bible handy as a reference.

### 4. Interview others.

Encourage participants to interview members of their congregation, asking them what their favorite Bible story is and why. Publish interviews in the parish newsletter or on the parish website.

### 5. Write it on your heart.

Urge participants to memorize a Bible verse or a psalm each month this year.

## 6. Sign up.

Suggest that participants volunteer to be a lector or reader during Sunday worship.

## 7. Ready, Set, Sunday

Suggest that participants find out which biblical texts will be read in their church the following Sunday. Have them choose one and join the Story by using one of the methods described in “Cracking the Book” (*Way to Live*, pages 25–29) as a way to prepare to enter the Story more deeply during worship.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *Tell the story of God's goodness so future generations will grow up to trust in God.*

**Read:** Psalm 78:1-8

**Closing Prayer:** Faithful God,

Let us never forget your goodness,  
your deeds of mercy, your wonderful works.  
Write your Story on our hearts.  
Let our words and our lives tell our friends  
and future generations of your love,  
revealed to us in Jesus.  
Amen.

## 1. New verses

Psalm 136 thanks God for the gifts of creation, freedom, and ongoing care. Ask participants to look at the psalm together and note the pattern. The first half of each verse declares a wonder God has done—“spread out the earth on the waters,” “divided the Red Sea in two.” The second half voices the response to that wonder: “[God’s] steadfast love endures forever.” Now ask each person to write a new verse, naming a way God has been present and active in his or her life.

Have the group read verses 1-16. One person reads the first half of each verse and the whole group says the response. Then each person reads his or her own verse, followed by group response. Close as you began by reading verses 23-26.

## 2. Thank-you notes

Read Psalm 78:1-4 aloud. Ask participants to write a thank-you note to someone who told them the stories of faith or shared the wonders of God with them. Have paper, pencils, and envelopes available for everyone. Close with one person reading Philemon 1:1-3, part of Paul’s letter to his “dear friend and coworker” Philemon, their “sister” Apphia, and all those who gather to worship in their house, encouraging them to continue to share their faith through words and deeds of love and mercy.

### 3. Sing the Story

Encourage participants to look through their church's hymnal or songbook for songs that tell the Story of God's love for us and for the whole universe. Then have the group join the Story by singing several of them.

### 4. The Story according to Emily

Call attention to the narrative along the bottom of pages 13–22 in *Way to Live*. Divide the story into sections. One person reads the first section aloud, everyone responds by singing a simple chorus of praise or thanksgiving such as “Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises” or “Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet” or “Bless the Lord, O My Soul.” Then another person reads the next section, followed by the sung response, and so forth until the whole story has been told.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about The Story at your next gathering. If you do, you might start next time with Focus Activity #1. Choose a video or another activity for next time.**

### Link

1. Suggest participants read *Manna and Mercy: A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe* by Daniel Erlander, a wonderful, whimsical hand-illustrated telling of the story of God found in the pages of the Bible. Order from Augsburg Fortress (1-800-426-0115; catalog # 6-0000-2074-0) or from the author at Box 1059, Freeland, WA 98249.
2. The video *Feast of Life* is a musical based on meal stories from the Gospel of Luke written by Marty Haugen and performed by a church youth group (a good link to the Food chapter too). If you order the DVD, you also get interviews with composer/writer Marty Haugen, director Marilee Mahler, and some of the teenage performers. Want a real challenge? Get your group to perform this musical in your home church! (See <http://www.giamusic.com>.)
3. **Resource books** for reading and studying the Bible: *A Beginner's Guide to Studying the Bible*, Rolf E. Aaseng; *A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible*, Craig R. Koester; and *A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Bible*, Diane L. Jacobson and Robert Kysar, all published in 1991 by Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis.
4. Encourage the group to view a movie that tells the story of Jesus or host a “film fest” for your congregation or other local youth groups. Suggested films: *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Parable* (Jesus is a circus clown), *Jesus among the People* and *Jesus the Final Days* (order from Franciscan Communications @ 1-800-488-0488). **Discussion starters:** How are the disciples portrayed? How is Jesus presented? How does the era in which the movie was made shape the telling of the story?





# Bodies

## Main Idea

**Honor the human body:** The body—our own or that of someone else—is a strong yet vulnerable gift from God. Life with Jesus is not just a spiritual thing but involves our whole being, including our body. We seek a way to live that honors every-*body* as made in God’s image and therefore “holy and awesome.”

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #3 (30 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (10 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #1 (30 minutes)




Close with Worship activity #4 (10 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Continuum

Instruct the group members, after hearing the following statements read aloud, to go to one end of the room if they agree, the other if they disagree, or somewhere in the middle if they’re not sure. Allow for brief discussion after each statement:

-  My body is my own business. I do with it what I want.
-  Media images of bodies match up with what my church teaches about bodies.
-  Church is the best place for learning about sex.

### 2. Body likes and dislikes

Distribute an index card and red and blue pens or markers to each participant. On one side of the card, ask participants to write in red ink two things they *dislike* about their bodies. On the other side, ask them to write in blue ink two things they *like* about their bodies. Let them know that what they write will be shared later, in an anonymous way, with the whole group. Collect all cards and

save for Worship activity #1. (Optional discussion questions: Name a time when you felt “at home” with your body. What made this possible? Name another time when you felt “out of kilter” and disconnected from your body. What were some reasons for that?)

### 3. The Perfect Body

Form two groups along gender lines. On a long piece of newsprint, trace the outline of a person in the group. Take ten minutes (stop immediately when time is called) to concoct the “perfect” body wearing “perfect” clothes. Males draw the “perfect man”; females draw the “perfect woman.” (Option: Instead of drawing, make collage images using magazine ads.) Discuss what features show up in each group’s picture. **Ask:** Where did we get these ideas about what a “perfect” body is? Who tells us which body features are ideal? How do we feel when we compare our own bodies to these images?

### 4. Honoring the body

Ask the group to define the word *honor* (to respect, reverence, recognize as worthy). **Ask:** During a typical day at school, what happens that shows honor to your body? What dishonors your body and your physical needs and abilities? (Use these ideas to respond to such things as dress code, physical education and health requirements, bathroom breaks, athletics, early start time, long hours of sitting still, and so on.) (Option: If some participants have a job, ask them to do the same thing about their workplace.) Then help them identify ways in which their church is a place where bodies are honored—and dishonored. (Consider everything from baptism to handicapped accessibility.) **Ask:** What one change could you imagine for your school, workplace, or church that would help the people there to recognize God’s holy image in themselves and one another?

### 5. “Mirror, Mirror”

Get the group into pairs. Have partners stand and face each other, a foot apart. Instruct the person with the longer hair in each pair to begin and start slowly moving around. The other partner is to follow his or her motions exactly. The object is for the pair to be so in tune with each other’s movements that an outsider could not tell who is leading and who is following. After a minute call for the pair to switch roles.

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio text*

Psalm 139:13-18 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Seeing God’s image

Pass around a hand mirror. Ask participants to say one sentence about what they see in the mirror. Then have them reflect in pairs: How did you feel as you viewed yourself in the presence of other people? Why? Now read Genesis 1:27 aloud. **Ask:** How many of us, when we gaze into a mirror, see God’s image? Most of us see instead things about our bodies we’d like to change. How would you answer Matt’s question (*Way to Live*, page 35): “If we are made in God’s image, does that

mean we should treat our bodies the way we would treat God?" Pass around the hand mirror again. This time, as each person looks in the mirror and says his or her name, have the group respond by saying "made in God's image."

### 3. Jesus' care for bodies

In small groups read one of the passages listed below. **Discuss** these questions: What *specifically* does Jesus do in these stories to show care and compassion for bodies? Act out the ways in which he uses his own body to care for the bodies of others. Then ask participants whether they have seen adults and teens in their community do similar things for one another.

- Mark 6:30-44 (takes weary disciples away to rest, feeds five thousand hungry people)
- Luke 8:26-33 (heals the Gerasene demoniac)
- Luke 8:43-48 (heals the woman with flow of blood)
- John 9:1-7 (heals a man born blind)

## Challenge ■■■■

### 1. Bod mod panel

Arrange a panel discussion on *cosmetic body modifications*, addressing such topics as beauty, tattoos, and body piercing. Identify ways that Christian faith informs our choices about such issues and procedures.

### 2. Interview a doctor.

Invite a physician to talk with your group about the wonder of the human body. Ask the speaker to emphasize the beauty and intricacy of the body rather than the "don'ts." (Option: Invite a medical illustrator to talk about drawing the human body.)

### 3. The body vulnerable

Encourage participants to visit someone with chronic health problems, for whom "feeling at home with one's body" is a real challenge. Ask them to imagine how that person experiences the body's *limits and vulnerability*. If the person is comfortable sharing his or her experience, the visitor should listen with care and respect. Discuss with participants how their church does or does not make space for this vulnerability and honor this person's body.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *We are fearfully and wonderfully made.*

**Read:** Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

**Closing Prayer:** Blessed God,  
you created us in your image;  
making each of us an unrepeatable miracle.  
Help us see how valuable and vulnerable every body is.  
Teach us to care for, honor, and cherish our bodies  
even as you cherish and care for us,  
through Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

### 1. Litany with focus cards

Randomly distribute the index cards from Focus activity #2 (above). Lead the group in a prayer of thanksgiving and invite participants to read the side of the cards where people wrote what they are grateful for about their bodies, saying "For (*what is written in blue ink*)," with the group responding "We thank you, God." Then ask the group to pray for those things about our bodies we dislike or feel ashamed of. Invite participants to say "We pray for those who struggle with (*what is written in red ink*)," with the group responding "Hear our prayer, O Lord." Close with the whole group praying aloud the Lord's Prayer together.

### 2. Hand-washing ritual

Place a pitcher of water, basin, and towel on a small table in the center of the room. Invite participants to come forward as pairs and wash each other's hands, using a blessing appropriate to your church tradition. Here are some examples you may suggest:

"In the name of God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

"In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."  
(Remind the group that this is the blessing used in baptism.)

"Bless these hands to your service, O God."

### 3. Movement Prayer

Preselect a psalm to use for this activity, and have several words from the psalm circled or highlighted. Action verbs tend to work well. During the session, have participants stand in a circle facing outward with their eyes closed. Tell them that you will read a series of words. As you read each word, they are to move their bodies in a way that represents that word for them. Next, tell the group to keep their eyes closed, but turn in and face the inside of the circle. Tell them that you will read the same list of words, but this time it will be in the context of a psalm. Explain that you will stop and emphasize each word to which they are to move, and that they should freeze in each pose until

going to the next one. Read the whole psalm one more time, but have the group move with their eyes open. (After doing this activity, the group may choose to adjust it and use it as a liturgical movement for a psalm reading in their church worship service.)

#### 4. Prayer

Stand in a circle. Read aloud Exodus 3:1-5. Ask everyone to “remove their sandals”—to take off their shoes—because they are standing on holy ground in the presence of God and one another, all made in God’s image. Then pray aloud:

*God, who knit us together in a mother’s womb,  
help us honor what you have made.*

*Let us touch this masterpiece gently,  
with reverence,  
with delight,  
blessing what you have blessed.*

(Worshippers may touch named body parts as they are blessed.)

*The face  
For the housing of our thoughts,  
For the muscles of our emotion.*

*The arms,  
For embracing what is sacred,  
For grasping, then releasing, your gifts.*

*The belly  
For taking in nourishment,  
And, in some, for the nurture of new life.*

*The thighs  
For carrying another’s burden,  
For pushing off from the ground.*

*The feet  
For walking your paths of peace,  
For standing on holy ground.*

*God, who formed these inward and outward parts,  
Fill us with wonder at such knowledge,  
knowledge that we are wonderfully made. Amen.*

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Bodies at your next gathering. If you do, check out the film in Link activity #5 sometime during the week, or choose other activities from this chapter.**

## Link

1. Adult leaders and advanced teens could read *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*, by Stephanie Paulsell (Jossey-Bass, 2002). Each chapter raises issues and offers biblical passages related to this chapter of *Way to Live*. A study guide geared to adults is also available. See <http://www.practicingourfaith.org/pdf/media-18127.pdf>.
2. For an online bookseller such as <http://www.amazon.com>, write a group review of *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships*, by Ruth Bell et al. (Random House, 1998).
3. New Moon Publishing (<http://www.newmoon.org>) produces media for girls entering puberty and for adults who want to support girls in developing healthy respect for their bodies. Check out their resources for possible use in your group.
4. Suggest the group view documentaries by the author and activist Jean Kilbourne (<http://www.jeankilbourne.com>) about how advertising impacts bodies:
  - *Killing Us Softly III: Advertising's Image of Women*
  - *Slim Hopes: Advertising and the Obsession with Thinness*
  - *Pack of Lies: The Advertising of Tobacco*
5. Suggest the group view the film *Pretty in Pink* (1986). Discuss how Andie Walsh (Molly Ringwald) feels about her body. **Ask:** What is her philosophy about beauty? Why are clothes so important to her? If a film like this were made about a girl in your high school today, what would need to be different?



# Stuff

## Main Idea

**Put stuff in its place:** We should deal with *stuff* (material possessions) in ways that deepen our relationships with God, other people, and the whole created world. Christian practices can help us figure out the difference between good stuff and bad stuff and help us let go of stuff we don't need.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #1 (30 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (30 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #3 (15 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #1 (modify it with a list of just 3 items) (15 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Examine the stuff you own.

Ask participants to write down five things they own. Then ask them to exchange lists with someone else in the group. Have them ask each other, taking turns, these questions about each thing on their lists: Is this good stuff? (See pages 56–57, *Way to Live*.) Is this bad stuff? (See Mark and Alexx's ideas on page 58, second paragraph, *Way to Live*.) Why is it good or bad stuff? Next, invite participants to walk around outdoors (in a green space) for ten minutes and list at least five things in nature they can enjoy for free. Then ask each pair of partners to compare this list to their previous list.

### 2. Reflect on your desire for more stuff.

Ask participants to list five things they wished they could have bought during the past month. For each item, they should try to figure out what it was that made them *want* it. Advertisements? Someone else's having it? Some other reason? (Option: Have the group watch thirty minutes of TV together as a group and compile a common list of "Buy this!" items. Remind them to notice both the items pitched in the ads and those pitched through product placement in the show.) Then

**ask** participants to choose things from their lists and do some research: Where and how is this item made? If you do buy it, who will be affected? How? Who's affected if you don't buy it? How?

### 3. Stuff then and now

Ask the group to compare life two hundred years ago with life today (in North America). For example:

Activities	1802	2002
Transportation	horse	car
Cooking	wood-burning stove	microwave
Communicating	letter	cell phone
Entertaining	cards and games	television

Then have the group compare advantages and disadvantages for each category. Sample comparisons:

- Horse: Took a long time to travel any distance. More exposed and vulnerable to nature. Smelled the land, experienced changes in weather, and had to watch out for insects and dangerous animals. Fuel was renewable and “exhaust” biodegradable.
- Car: Covers distances faster. Rarely feel on your skin the sun, rain, heat, and cold. Insects, animals, and occasionally people may be wiped out if hit. Fuel nonrenewable resource; exhaust pollutes environment.

After the group has drawn these comparisons, **ask**: What's different about how the kind of stuff we have shapes our lives today compared with 200 years ago? What has been lost as humans have acquired faster, easier-to-use stuff? What has been gained?

## Join the Story ■ ■ ■ ■

### 1. *Lectio* text

Matthew 6:19-21 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. “Abundance of possessions”

Read aloud Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21). Form small groups and have each group prepare a skit based on this parable. (Ideas: Groups could impersonate different TV and movie characters playing the rich fool, or give each group three odd props that must be used in the skit.) Have the small groups stage each version for the whole group. Then **ask** participants to discuss these questions:

- Where do I see *myself* in this parable?
- Where do I see *my country* in this parable?
- What motivates people to accumulate “an abundance of possessions”?



- Jesus says he came to bring *life abundant* (see John 10:10). What is the difference between *life abundant* and the kind of *abundance* the rich fool wanted to hoard in his huge barns? Find examples of both kinds of abundance in your own community.

### 3. Learn from people who choose to live more simply.

Encourage participants to interview someone who has made a voluntary, faith-based commitment to lead a simple life. If possible, they might interview someone who belongs to a religious order or an intentional residential community. Questions they might ask include the following: What *rules* does this order or community have about stuff? How is this way of life a *challenge* for you? What have you had to *sacrifice* in order to live this way? How is this way of life a *blessing*? Does simple living seem to give you a sense of freedom and joy? If the Bible has guided you in your relationship to stuff, how?

## Challenge ■■■■

### 1. Identify your own household's rules regarding stuff.

Have participants list at least three rules their family lives by when it comes to purchasing, owning, or relating to stuff. (For example, what is hands-off and what is shared; how decisions about purchases are made; whether new stuff or old stuff is valued; whether brand names are considered crucial; and so forth.) Then **ask**: Do you have any ideas about where these rules came from? How does Christian faith inform them? What one point from Mark's and Alexx's chapter would you like to discuss with your family, perhaps leading to a change in one of these rules about stuff?

### 2. Plan alternative activities for holidays.

- **Halloween**: Take your group trick-or-treating for canned goods instead of candy. Donate items to a food pantry. Publicize to your congregation that the youth group will be trick-or-treating at church members' homes for canned goods instead of candy.
- **Thanksgiving**: Suggest ways participants can plan family recreation or entertainment that does not involve television or video technology. Encourage them to join the national movement to make the day after Thanksgiving "Buy Nothing Day."  
See <http://www.adbusters.org/metas/eco/bnd>.
- **Christmas**: Suggest participants send Christmas cards/messages to at least five friends or relatives who normally give them gifts. Have them request that instead of a gift this year, friends and relatives make a donation to a charity or service agency the participant's youth group has decided to support. The name and mailing address of the organization should be included. Participants might be surprised to see how much money their group can raise in this way.
- **Super Bowl Sunday**: Suggest participants sponsor a "Souper Bowl" event.  
See <http://www.souperbowl.org> for details.

### 3. Resist being a walking billboard.

Have participants stand in a circle and ask them to look at the products they're advertising on their clothes. Then form gender groups, and send them into separate rooms to make a written list of the labels on *all* the clothes in the room. (Provide privacy screens so that boys and girls can check labels hidden under clothes.) Before returning to the whole group, participants should remove visible labels (when possible) and arrange clothing so logos aren't visible (turn inside out). With the whole group standing again in a circle, ask them to comment on differences between the guys' and the girls' label lists and to identify strategies to resist being a walking billboard.

### 4. Commit to a "stuff fast."

Encourage participants to commit with at least two other friends to a one-week *stuff fast*. For one full week, they don't buy anything! They'll stay away from stores, catalogues, and online shopping. Whenever they find themselves wishing for new stuff, they should write it down. If they "stray" or "stumble," they are to fine themselves \$5 and donate the money to a local charity. At the end of the week, encourage them to talk about their experience: **Ask:** Were you tempted to break your fast? How did you resist doing so? Did knowing that others were also fasting make a difference? Did "fasting" make you more aware of your neighbor's need and God's goodness? (See *Way to Live*, pages 72–74.)

### 5. Do "the assignment" that Alexx and Mark undertook when writing this chapter.

See *Way to Live*, pages 47–50.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening sentence:** *Do not trust wealth or power; God alone is our hope, our home, and our security.*

**Read:** Psalm 62:1-12

**Closing Prayer:** O God, our rock and our refuge,  
you give us every good gift.  
Your love never lets us down.  
Teach us to trust you more than power or possessions.  
Free us from greed and fear so that, with all your people,  
we might live securely in the wealth of your love,  
poured out upon us in Jesus.  
Amen.

### 1. Let go of the stuff that blocks relationships.

Remind the group that Mark and Alexx challenge us to make a list of the stuff we could give away in order to lead a more simple and God-focused life (*Way to Live*, page 63). After participants have thoroughly discussed this practice and made this list, set aside some time to pray and act as a group. Suggest that participants get into a comfortable position and breathe deeply five times. Ask them

to look at the first item on their lists and to think about that item for two minutes. **Ask:** How does this item help you and other people to become fully alive, the people God created you to be? How does this item take away from your relationships with God, other people, and other living beings? Have them ask the same questions for the other items on their list. Finally, encourage them to ask God's guidance as they decide which one of these items they are ready to relinquish.

**Prayer:**

As we look for what to do,  
may the strong hand of God rest upon our shoulder  
guiding, admonishing, encouraging,  
and may the wisdom of all eyes be our sight.  
God, convert appetite for stuff  
to hunger for justice.  
May our ears gather up the voice of the Spirit.  
Amen.

**2. Set a date for a worship service.**

Each person will bring a possession to be given away. At the service have the group sit in a circle and sing "Tis a Gift to Be Simple" (in many hymnals). Read Luke 12:13-21 aloud. Some participants may wish to explain why they have chosen what they brought. Then each person may place his or her item as an offering in the center of the circle, arranged around a cross. When the group sees what is there, they can discuss what to do with all this stuff. As a closing ritual, invite group members to come forward and pack the stuff in boxes to be given away, while singing "Tis a Gift to Be Simple."

**3. Blessings Received/Blessing Given**

Read Genesis 17:1-7 (The Call of Abram and Sarai). Explain that God provides physical and spiritual possessions so that we might share them and be a blessing to others. Have each participant write down on a piece of paper 10 possessions they feel blessed to have. (Examples might be a car, a cell phone, a musical instrument). After they have each made a list, have them think of a way they could use each item to be a blessing to others. (A car could be used to give a classmate without a car a ride to school. A cell phone could be used to help someone who is stranded. A guitar could be used to sing songs for children or at a nursing home.) Circle one thing that you commit to using in a new way this week.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Stuff at your next gathering. If you do, ask each person to do Link activity #1 during the coming week.**

## Link

### 1. Create **stuff portraits**:

- Prepare beforehand by taking a photo of each participant. Glue each photo in the center of a large piece of paper or poster board.
- If possible, review the book *Material World: A Global Family Portrait*, photographs by Peter Menzel, text by Charles C. Mann (Random House, 1995). Photographers spent one week living with a “statistically average” family in thirty different countries, learning about their work, their attitudes toward their possessions, and their hopes for the future. Then a “big picture” shot of the family was taken outside the dwelling, surrounded by everything they own.
- Give participants crayons or markers and their personal photo posters. Ask them to sketch their own version of a “big picture” shot. Attach all posters to the wall and browse them as a group.

**Discuss:** What personal insights do your stuff portraits give you? What insights do they give you about the kind of stuff we own and value as a group? Imagine what a family from (select example from book) would say if they saw your stuff portraits. What would you say in response to them?

2. Tell participants they can see the results of **John Freyer’s “stuff experiment”** at the website <http://www.allmylifeforsale.com>. In October 2000, Freyer invited friends to help him sort through his things and decide which items best represented his life in Iowa City. He then sold all his stuff on eBay and went around the country visiting it.
3. Suggest participants take the “stuff quiz” at [http://www.northwestwatch.org/pubs/stuff\\_quiz.html](http://www.northwestwatch.org/pubs/stuff_quiz.html) based on the book *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* by John C. Ryan, Alan Thein Durning, and Don Baker (Northwest Environment Watch, 1997).
4. Encourage participants to network with other North Americans who are seeking ways to live simply and with integrity:
  - The Affluenza Project (<http://www.affluenza.com>)
  - The Center for a New American Dream (<http://www.newdream.org>)
  - The Simple Living Network (<http://www.simpleliving.net>)
5. Encourage participants to consult the annual publication *Shopping for a Better World* before making their next big purchase.
6. Compare the Madonna song “**Material Girl**” with the Sweet Honey and the Rock song “**Are My Hands Clean?**”



# Food

## Main Idea

**Eat at God's table:** Food is more than body fuel. It is a gift from God that connects us to the earth and to the needs of others. At the table we share food and our lives. We thank God, meet Jesus, and become companions for life.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

- Open with Focus activity #2 (15 minutes)
- Do Join the Story activity #4 (15 minutes)
- Do Worship activity #2 (30 minutes)
- Close with Join the Story activity #1 (15 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. A special meal

Ask participants to form small groups, and ask each person to remember one meal that stands out as really special. What was the occasion? Who was there? What did folks talk about? What made this meal so special? Was it the food—or was it something else? What?

### 2. Feast and fast

Contrast these words: *feast/binge* and *fast/diet*. Have them give examples of each, using stories from their lives, movies, books, television, and the Bible. Ask them what feelings and issues about eating come to mind for each of these words.

### 3. "Eat It"

Have the group listen to a recording of Al Yankovich's song "Eat It." Ask what attitude this song expresses toward food. (Option: Compare it with the attitude toward food conveyed in the song "All Good Gifts" from the *Godspell* soundtrack.)

#### 4. Food fight

Show the food fight scene from the movie *Hook*. **Discuss:** Have you ever been in a food fight? What did you like about it? What didn't you like?

#### 5. Silent meal

For a group that eats together regularly, offer this alternative experience: Serve dinner buffet style. Before anyone gets food, tell all assembled that they must serve themselves and eat in complete silence and without eye contact. After everyone has eaten, gather the group for discussion. **Ask:** How did you feel about eating alone? in silence? What did you notice about eating this way? Have you ever preferred to eat alone rather than with others? Why might someone choose this way?

### Join the Story

#### 1. *Lectio text*

John 6:1-14 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

#### 2. "What is it?"

Read or tell the story of manna (Exodus 16). **Ask** the group: Why did God provide manna for the wilderness wanderers? How did they react to this provision of daily bread? Have you ever had an experience that reminds you of receiving manna?

#### 3. Food in the Gospels

Form small groups and assign each group one of the four Gospels. (Make sure everyone has a Bible.) Ask each group to scan through its assigned Gospel and list by chapter and verse every story they find about Jesus and food. Then have each group share what it discovered with the whole group. **Ask:** Which Gospel has the most food stories? How significant does food seem to be to Jesus' ministry? What do you notice about the meals Jesus shared with others?

#### 4. The Last Supper

**Ask** the group: Why did Jesus choose to share a meal on the last night of his life (Luke 22:14-23)? Mention that meals were particularly important times of fellowship in the Middle East and in the early Christian communities. Many of Jesus' most important times with friends and family took place at meals; and that night's meal—the Last Supper—became the earliest ritual of the church, now called Holy Communion, Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy, or the Lord's Supper. Ask participants to look in their church's worship book or other material and read the prayers spoken by the congregation when partaking of Communion. One of these is probably the Lord's Prayer. **Ask:** What does it say about food?

## 5. Meal at Emmaus

In the Gospels of Luke and John, the stories about what Jesus did after he rose from the dead also include meals. Read aloud the story of the Emmaus Road encounter (Luke 24:13-35). **Discuss:** Although no one knows the exact location of the village of Emmaus, we know that it was within a day's walk of Jerusalem and that some of Jesus' followers lived there. Many people through the centuries have found it odd that these disciples did not recognize Jesus as they walked and talked with him for hours. Does this seem odd to you? Notice what is happening when they finally do recognize him and what they then say about that long walk. How are we also changed by eating with Jesus?

## Challenge

### 1. Saying thank you

Suggest participants conduct a survey and compile a list of mealtime rituals (table graces, songs, candlelighting) observed in your community. Publish these ideas in a local newspaper and on your congregation's website. Encourage participants to use the ideas themselves.

### 2. The "Emily test"

Suggest participants find out where their food comes from by tracing its origins as Emily does (*Way to Live*, page 69). They can start by taking a food they eat regularly and tracing it through all the stages of production back to its ultimate source. This is like drawing a family tree. **Ask:** Were the people who worked to grow, harvest, package, transport, and sell this food paid and treated fairly and given time off and safe working conditions? Was the land respected, replenished, and rested? Does your food pass the "Emily test"?

### 3. Plan for *com-pan-ion-ship*.

Ask participants how many times a day they share a meal with other people at a table. Encourage them to make a point of doing this at least twice a day during the coming week. Ask them to consider the difference this makes in their life and in the lives of their companions.

### 4. Get your whole family to the table together at least three times per week.

Ask participants what they would have to do to make this happen. Offer to cook? Change the eating schedule?

### 5. Set an extra place.

Encourage participants to set an extra place at the table for a few weeks. As they eat, invite them to remind themselves of those who don't have a welcome table at which to sit, or even food to put on a table.

## 6. Fundraising feast

Gather a group of teens and adults to organize a culinary fundraiser for a local food pantry or soup kitchen. Invite friends from different congregations to contribute their specialty dishes and sell tickets to this event. Host the meal in a banquet facility and provide musical entertainment.

## 7. Fundraising fast

Suggest participants try a simple fast with their family or friends, perhaps one day a week during Lent. They should decide on a simple meal: a baked potato, a bowl of soup, or a plate of pasta. The money they save can be given to a food bank or a homeless shelter. In addition, they can spend the time they save not cooking or doing dishes working at such a place. Remind participants to pray for awareness of the needs of their neighbors and wakefulness to the goodness of God.

## 8. Write letters supporting humane food policies.

Supply paper, envelopes, pens, and the addresses of your governmental representatives. See Link for web addresses.

## 9. Bake bread.

Suggest the group prepare and bake Communion bread for your church's worship service. Discuss how the different ingredients in the bread are like the different members of your faith community: some, like flour, provide the basic "stuff" of your common life; some, like oil and water, bind your community together; some, like salt, add flavor; others, like yeast, leaven the loaf.

## 10. Take cooking lessons.

With the group, plan a gourmet menu for a congregational meal. Schedule "rehearsals" for the event and arrange for a chef or experienced cook to offer the group cooking lessons. Preserve or freeze the leftovers, and have teens take them to those who can't attend the feast.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening sentence:** *God provides us with the food we need and nourishes the whole creation.*

**Read:** Psalm 104:10-18, 27-30

**Closing Prayer:** We thank you, O God,  
for the food you provide and for our companions.  
We long for the day when no one is hungry  
and everyone is welcomed to the table.  
Teach us to break bread with grateful hearts  
and to practice the generosity you share with us  
at your Feast of Life.  
Amen.



### 1. Progressive dinner

Arrange transportation for your group to have different courses of a meal in several different homes (for example, for four homes: appetizers, soup/salad, main course, dessert). Have the group say or sing blessings for the cooks and food at each house.

### 2. Read a children's book.

Read to the group *The Greatest Table: A Banquet to Fight Against Hunger*, by Michael J. Rosen (Harcourt Inc., 1994). As each panel unfolds, pose the following questions about the table: What food is on it? Where is it? What is being shared around it? What is being nourished beyond it? Who is host and who is guest? Where do you imagine yourself at this table? Conclude by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

### 3. Agape meal

For Maundy Thursday, plan an "agape meal," a simple meal of soup and bread or dried fruit and cheese prior to evening worship and the celebration of the Last Supper. (Option: Display art images of Jesus' "Last Supper" to provide different perspectives on the event. Meditate quietly on each image for several minutes before beginning the agape meal.)

### 4. Praying before each meal

Commit with a friend or group of friends to stop and say some kind of blessing before each and every meal this week. (In the lunch room, eating dinner with friends at McDonald's after practice, even eating a bagel in the car on the way to school. Please don't close your eyes for this prayer if you are driving!) Follow up with the group the next week on how this commitment affected them during the week.

### 5. Harvest offering

As a youth group, offer a summer mission program with the gardeners of your congregation. Each week when members come to worship, ask them to bring a bag of their vegetable garden harvest. Drop it off at the door to the sanctuary upon entering worship. Even have the ushers bring a few bags down the aisle when they present the monetary offerings. Then arrange with the youth a schedule to take the produce to the local food pantry ministry.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Food at your next gathering. If you do, ask each person to collect material for Challenge activity #1 during the week or assign two people to plan Worship activity #3 in time for Maundy Thursday.**

## Link

1. Join or start a local **Bread for the World** chapter (See <http://www.bread.org>).
2. Suggest the group watch the film *Babette's Feast*. **Ask:** How is grace made available through the preparation, presentation, and partaking of this extravagant meal? How does this meal differ from the meals Babette served in her Paris restaurant?
3. Suggest the group view and discuss *The Lunch Date*, a 12-minute story-on-film by Adam Davidson that won an Oscar as Best Short Film in 1991. (Order video from The Lantz Office, 212-586-0200.)
4. Encourage participants to read Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001) and learn what makes french fries taste so good.
5. See **20/20 Vision** (<http://www.2020vision.org>) for connections between how food is grown, processed, and packaged and the well-being of the environment.
6. Check out the **Catholic Migrant Farmworker Network** (<http://www.cmfnc.org>) for connections between the food we eat and the laborers who provide it.



# Creation

## Main Idea

**Cherish the creation:** We are part of the intricate web of Creation. We care for things God has made, and we also notice how God cares for us through these very things. A faithful way to live includes delighting in the wonders of the natural world. It also includes many large and small acts that honor and protect the air, water, and other natural elements we and all creatures need.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity #2 (2 minutes each person)

Do Focus activity #5 (30 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #1 (15 minutes)

Do Worship activity #4 (10 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Close to nature

Take your group outdoors, take some time to walk around in silence, and then find a comfortable place to sit. Then have participants tell one another about a time when each person felt especially close to nature. **Ask:** Where were you? What were you doing? Remember the specific experience: What did you see, hear, smell, touch? In what ways did this experience draw you closer to other people? to God?

### 2. Loving what we care for

Invite participants to tell about a pet or plant they have (or had) responsibility for, being specific about what they do to care for this creature. **Ask:** How would your life be easier if you didn't have this responsibility? Would you gladly give it up? Why or why not? If the creature is no longer with you, how did you feel about losing it? One man said, "I sometimes found taking care of my dog a burden, but by caring for him I gradually came to love him." Does this make sense to you? What is the relationship between "caring for" and "loving"? What might happen if we cared for the earth this way?

### 3. Web of life

Ask participants to stand in a large circle with one person standing in the middle. This person represents the sun and receives a ball of yarn, which he or she will “send” into the “environment” (the circle) as “energy.” Each person who receives the ball of yarn will toss it on to someone else, holding on to one end of the string with each person responding to the previous person in the same way that various parts of nature respond to one another. To begin, the “sun” tosses its “sunlight” (the ball of yarn) to someone and asks, “What gets its food from sunlight?” That person answers “plants” and tosses the “energy” to someone else, asking, “What eats plants?” The group continues in this pattern as long as they can. (Maybe this game should be called “creative biology”!) As they continue to toss the yarn around the “circle of life,” it will become a web across the circle showing the interconnectedness of all creation.

### 4. Old Turtle

Ask participants to get comfortable on couches or the floor and read aloud the children’s book *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee (School & Library Binding, 2001). **Ask:** What wisdom does the old turtle share with others? Discuss what it would mean for each of you to take this wisdom seriously in your own life.

### 5. Twenty questions

This exercise will help heighten participants’ awareness and deepen their appreciation of their own unique place on earth. Have them form small groups and try to answer these twenty questions, which come from John and Lara Oliver of Saint Ignatius Orthodox Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Then bring everyone together to share answers. If no one knows an answer, suggest they figure out who in your community would, and go ask!

- Describe and name five different trees that grow in your area.
- Imagine the path of your household water from precipitation to the faucet.
- Describe the soil around your home.
- How long is the growing season where you live?
- What spring wildflower is the first to bloom where you live?
- Where did the food in your last meal come from?
- Name five birds you commonly see in your area.
- Name five edible plants that grow in your area.
- From where you are reading this, point north.
- Where does your garbage go?
- If you have a car, how much gasoline does it use in an average week?
- What is the largest wild region in your area?

- How many days until the moon is full?
- What is the history of land-use by humans in your area in the past century?
- How many people live next door to you? What are their names?
- What energy resources—both developed and potential—are in your area?
- What primary geological event or process shaped the land where you live?
- Identify the source of each sound you can hear outside your home tonight.
- There is no waste in nature. What happens to natural debris in your area?
- Name five qualities you enjoy about the natural world around your home.

## Join the Story ■ ■ ■ ■

### 1. *Lectio* Text

Psalm 104:1-13 or Romans 8:18-22 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Perform the creation story.

Invite three persons with acting talent to “perform” Genesis 1:1–2:3. While one person narrates, the other two improvise the creative activities of each day. Be sure they take their time. Note: It’s fun to combine solemn narration with lighthearted, even comic interpretive gestures. (Option: For a more sobering performance, narrate portions of Job 38:1–42:6 to a slide presentation or interpretive dance. Or read aloud the poem by James Weldon Johnson “The Creation,” the final portion of which is printed along the bottoms of the pages in the *Way to Live* Creativity chapter.)

### 3. Caring for what we name

Read aloud Genesis 2:15-20. **Ask:** What does this say about why God created animals and birds (verse 18)? Note that when Adam named each of the creatures, he began a relationship that led to his caring for them. How does naming a pet or child initiate a relationship of accountability and care? How does learning the given name of a person, plant, or animal help us to feel differently about it? Invite participants to share their experiences.

### 4. Environmental debate

Form two teams to debate the following proposition. Proposition: According to Genesis 1:26-2:3, God commanded humankind to fill the earth and subdue it and to have dominion over all creatures. By using the earth and its resources we are simply fulfilling God’s plan, regardless of consequences to the environment. Besides, Jesus said this present world will come to an end (Mark 13:24-37), so trying to preserve the environment for future generations would be a sign we don’t really trust God’s word. Assign one team to support it; another to challenge it. Give each team a set amount of time to present its case, then time for rebuttals and closing arguments.

## Challenge

### 1. Care about what's extinct.

Tell the story of poet Christopher Cokinos, author of *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers: A Personal Chronicle of Vanished Birds* (Warner Books, 2001). Cokinos was profoundly moved when he first admired the brilliant plumage of a stuffed Carolina parakeet—all that's left of a species that once roosted by the hundreds in trees across North America but has now been extinct for more than eighty years. Cokinos's book describes the life and demise of the Carolina parakeet and five other species. Have participants, working in teams, prepare group reports on other extinct species. Individuals may want to write a prayer or poem expressing sadness that they have been lost. Then suggest participants learn about one species that still exists but is endangered today and write a prayer or poem expressing their sense of its value to them and to God.

### 2. Prepare a report on how well your congregation cares for the earth.

Urge participants to explain to the adults responsible for buildings and grounds why they believe that this responsibility is a faith issue, and ask the adults to work with them on this report. Then have participants track recycling, use of paper (including bulletins), heating, lighting, carpool habits, composting. As a resource, they can refer to *Fifty Simple Things Your Business Can Do to Save the Earth* (Earthworks Press, 1991). They will end up with an environmental stewardship audit to share with the whole congregation. Challenge them to figure out together what is the first thing they could change to improve the church's care for the earth.

### 3. Use "living waters" for baptism.

Plan to use water from a local source (stream, river, lake) for a baptism. Remind participants to test the water beforehand for purity, and if it is polluted, to investigate why.

### 4. Be 60 Minutes.

Instruct the group to choose one company and investigate how it treats the earth. Encourage them to meet with company representatives to report their findings.

### 5. Winterize homes in your community.

This is a great service project that keeps people warm and reduces global warming.

### 6. Take a nature hike.

Learn to identify local flora and fauna. (Option: Plan an overnight camping trip. Help participants identify the wildlife sounds they hear at night and in the morning.)

### 7. Walk, ride a bike, or rollerblade whenever you can.

Challenge participants: Don't be wimps—learn to walk, ride a bike, or rollerblade in the rain with proper rain gear.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *Let the whole universe praise the Creator.*

**Read:** Psalm 148

**Closing Prayer:** We praise you, O God;  
With glittering stars and moonlit sky, we praise you;  
With running deer and swimming whale, we praise you;  
With ocean deep and dark rain clouds,  
fruit trees, cedars and sparrows, we praise you.  
As part of creation's choir, we praise you.  
In caring for creation, we praise you.  
Amen.

### 1. Read a poem.

Read aloud the poem "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1877). (Text is available at <http://www.sonnets.org/hopkins.htm#100>.) Encourage participants to pray for ways God sustains creation in the face of human exploitation.

### 2. Read responsively Saint Francis's "Canticle to Brother Sun."

Text is available on the web.

### 3. "All Creatures of our God and King"

Lead the group in singing this hymn. It works wonderfully when sung back and forth between two groups. Try singing it across a river or creek, or from two facing hillsides.

### 4. Two more hymns

Lead the group in singing "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale" by Jaroslav Vajda or "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" by James K. Manley.

### 5. Listen to music.

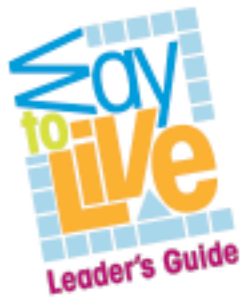
Have the group listen to music that celebrates the wonder of creation: Paul Winter's "Sunsinger" or "Dolphin Morning"; Rufino Zaragoza's "Sacred Creation."

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Creation at your next gathering. If you do, assign three people to do Challenge activity #2 and then report to the group next week. Ask the rest to choose one of the websites from Link activity #2, Link activity #4, or Link activity #5 sometime during the week, so they can make additional suggestions to the three doing the audit, or choose some of the other activities for next time.

## Link

1. Have the group watch the scene in *Star Trek 5: The Final Frontier* in which dolphins help save the Enterprise.
2. Encourage participants to learn about the work of Oberlin professor **David Orr** and the **Lewis Center for Environmental Studies**, a model for sustainable architecture and a holistic laboratory for students and the community. (Look for David Orr and the Lewis Center on the Oberlin College website at <http://www.oberlin.edu>.)
3. Suggest participants read *A Whale for the Killing* by Farley Mowat (Bantam Books Canada, reissue 1987) or watch and discuss the 1981 movie based on this novel.
4. Suggest participants explore Saint Francis stories from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* available via Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org>).
5. Suggest participants review publications by the **Earthworks Group**, and compare the websites of other environmental groups.  
    **Earthworks Group** publications can be found at the following website:  
    [http://www.protest.net/activists\\_handbook/involved.html](http://www.protest.net/activists_handbook/involved.html).
6. Check out the work of the **Honor the Earth Campaign** (<http://www.honorearth.com>) and ask how you might contribute to this “campaign.”





# **Creativity**

## **Main Idea**

**Create something new:** God’s Spirit is still moving in the world, even in and through us. When we express the Spirit’s creative movement in our own unique way, we bring something brand new to the world. Sometimes creativity arises from pain, sometimes from joy; but it is always more than “art” done by “creative” people.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity # 2 (10 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity # 4 (20 minutes)

Combine Challenge activity #1 and Worship activity #1 (40 minutes)

Close with Challenge activity #7 (20 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## **Focus**

### 1. Go to an art museum for a scavenger hunt.

Each person is to find:

- A picture that has lines that lead the eyes from one place to somewhere else.
- A spooky picture.
- A picture in which black and white are close together.
- A picture that “sounds.”
- A very quiet picture.
- A picture that “fools” in some way—that does not look like what it is.
- A picture with great distance.
- A picture with very little distance.

Ask participants to compare notes and discuss how artists create these effects.

## 2. Explore an object from nature.

Instruct participants to find a leaf, branch, flower, bug or other small natural object. They should look at it, touch it, wonder about it, and write down some things they notice.

- I see \_\_\_\_\_ .
- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ .
- I smell \_\_\_\_\_ .
- I thank God because \_\_\_\_\_ .
- I wonder about \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio text*

Psalm 8 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. The artist as birthgiver

**Ask:** In what ways was Mary, the mother of Jesus, like an artist? Have participants read Luke 1:39-55 and reflect on these comments by Madeleine L'Engle (*Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith & Art*, page 18):

To paint a picture or to write a story or to compose a song is an incarnational activity. The artist is a servant who is willing to be a birthgiver. In a very real sense the artist (male or female) should be like Mary who, when the angel told her that she was to bear the Messiah, was obedient to the command. . . .

I believe that each work of art, whether it is a work of great genius, or something very small, comes to the artist and says, "Here I am. Enflesh me. Give birth to me."

### 3. Consider the lilies.

Read to the group Matthew 6:28 and then ask them to compare it to this paraphrase by Eugene Peterson (from *The Message*):

All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

Note for the group that Jesus seems to suggest that contemplating the beauty of nature can help us worry less about how we ourselves are dressed. **Ask:** How might anxiety about our clothing diminish our creativity?

#### 4. Golden calves

Imagination is not always life-giving and liberating. Recall for the group the story of the Israelites fashioning a golden calf during their wilderness wanderings (see Exodus 32:1-10). **Ask:** What prompted the people to make such an object? Why did God get so angry with them for displaying their artistic talent? How did their “creativity” differ from God-given creativity as described in this chapter? What does the commandment against making idols or graven images have to do with our creative spirits? Can you think of current objects that might be described as “golden calves?”

#### 5. Potter and clay

Read aloud Jeremiah 18:1-4, a parable about a dissatisfied potter who smashes and recreates. Ask participants to identify an occasion when they felt like that potter, when they made something that was ugly or displeasing to them as creator. **Ask:** How did you react? (Option: Provide lumps of modeling clay for participants to mold and shape during the discussion.)

#### 6. Offensive art

Before participants read the Creativity chapter in *Way to Live*, invite them to form small groups, and give each group a copy of Psalm 137 and a dark marker. Instruct small-group members to decide as a whole which verses are “offensive” and to mark through those sentences, leaving only acceptable verses. Have them share their edited versions with other groups, comparing what groups decided to censor. **Ask:** What are the dangers of editing out those parts of scripture we find offensive? Do you ever see artwork or hear music that you find offensive? Have you ever created something that offended others or been asked to change something to avoid offending others? Have you ever censored what you noticed in order to avoid offending someone?

### Challenge

#### 1. *Objets trouvés* (“found objects”)

Take a trip to a recycling center or dump. **Ask:** What can you create with the objects you find in the trash?

#### 2. Bad poetry contest

Have a contest to see who can write the worst poem on a particular topic. Read the poems aloud, and appoint a panel of judges or vote as a group to decide “the winner.” Discuss what makes a poem *bad*, and in the process identify what makes a *good* poem.

#### 3. Write a good poem.

Instruct the group to think about something in their lives that draws on deep (sad or joyful) feelings. Ask them to write down a few words that they associate with those feelings, and turn those words into a rough poem or story. Suggest that they use haiku (a three-line, 17-syllable poem, 5-7-5) or cinquain (five-line stanza) form. Collect these writings to post on your group website. (Option:

Assign a Bible passage as the poem's subject. For example, Richard Crashaw was a seventeenth-century poet. While a university student, he entered a Latin poetry competition. The students entered the room and received a topic and three hours to compose a poem. The subject that day was John 2:1-11, the wedding at Cana. At the end of three hours, Crashaw handed in his paper with only one line written on it: *Nympha pudica Deum vidit et erubuit*. Translated, his poem reads, "The shame-faced water saw its Lord and blushed." Crashaw won the prize.)

**4. Host an art exhibit.**

Help the group decide on a theme for an art exhibit in your church building and invite contributions of paintings, sculpture, photography, as well as interpretive notes for each work of art.

**5. As a group make and send a pretty (or funny or sympathy) card to someone.**

**6. Change your point of view.**

Ask group members to write a short story about something that happened to them. Then ask them to rewrite the story from the perspective of one of the other "characters" (can be an animal, plant, or inanimate object). **Ask:** What do you learn by telling the story from another point of view? How does this exercise tap your creativity?

**7. Dig in the dirt.**

Plant some blue wildflowers or yellow black-eyed Susans.

**Worship** ■■■■

**Pray a psalm.**

**Opening sentence:** *The heavens are God's creative handiwork; God clothes us in beauty and creativity.*

**Read:** Psalm 8

**Closing prayer:** Holy God,  
we stand in awe when we see your handiwork,  
the stars of night and the creatures of earth.  
Inspire the artist, dancer, and poet in each of us,  
that we might become creative stewards of your world,  
reflecting your beauty and giving your honor,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

**1. Create a worship center and liturgy.**

Encourage participants to use found objects, clay sculptures, poems, songs, and anything else they made earlier in this session.

**2. Proclaim Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.**

Suggest participants use video, a slide show, or a Powerpoint presentation set to music. (Option: Use the Byrds' song "Turn, Turn, Turn.")

**3. Plan a contemplative worship service.**

One of the most creative people in history lived a thousand years ago in a Benedictine monastery on the Rhine River (Germany). Hildegard of Bingen experienced ecstatic visions of God that she shared with others in plays, poems, paintings, and songs. She used the curative powers of natural objects for healing and wrote treatises about natural history and the medicinal uses of plants, animals, trees, and stones. She wrote music and texts to her songs, describing this music as the means of recapturing the original joy and beauty of paradise. Modern recordings of her music are available today, as are her artistic images.

**4. Choreograph liturgical movement.**

Suggest participants develop movements to interpret Lee Ann Womack's "I Hope You Dance" and present in worship.

**5. Find or write prayers for artists and artisans.**

Suggest using the prayers in worship.

**6. Write a new psalm.**

Distribute copies of a psalm. Have each participant circle one word or phrase in each line of the psalm. Then copy the words on the back of the page. Write a new psalm using one of the words in each line.

**7. A new kind of prayer time**

Ask the participants to think of some creative activity they like to do (dance, write, sing, play an instrument, doodle, or sketch.) Give an assignment to do this activity they love sometime during the coming week, but begin and end the creative time with prayer. Follow up at the next meeting and ask how their creative prayer time was.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Creativity at your next gathering. If you do, arrange to do Focus activity #1, Challenge activity #4, Worship activity #7, or Link activity #3.**

Link ■■■■

1. Encourage participants to learn about poets and writing poetry from the **Academy of American Poets** (<http://www.poets.org>). Read this quote from an article entitled “How to Read a Poem” by Edward Hirsch from this website:

Read these poems to yourself in the middle of the night. Turn on a single lamp and read them while you're alone in an otherwise dark room or while someone else sleeps next to you. Read them when you're wide awake in the early morning, fully alert. Say them over to yourself in a place where silence reigns and the din of the culture—the constant buzzing noise that surrounds us—has momentarily stopped. These poems have come from a great distance to find you.

2. Encourage participants to learn about famous painters at the **WebMuseum Paris**: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth>.
3. Help participants examine “Gadgets for God” at <http://ship-of-fools.com/Gadgets/index.html> and discuss what distinguishes art from kitsch.
4. Encourage participants to learn about the **Bellwether Prize** for fiction in support of a literature for social change at <http://www.bellwetherprize.org>.
5. Learn about the use of creativity in worship through two books by T.E.A.M. (Theological Expressions in Arts Ministry):
  - *All That We Are: An Arts and Worship Workbook*
  - *Making Worship Real: A Resource for Youth and their Leaders*



# Work

## Main Idea

**Discover your work:** Work that touches our deep gladness and feeds the deep hungers of the world can be a blessing for us and for others. Doing good work gets us involved in a process of creativity and care that started with God’s work in making the world and continues in God’s keeping today. But not all work is fair, and sometimes our “job” and our “work” are different.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity # 5, option 1 (10 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity # 3 (20 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #3 (20 minutes)

Do Worship activity # 3 (20 minutes)

Close with Focus activity #6 (5 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. When I was 5. . . .

**Ask:** Remember what your five-year-old self wanted to be when you grew up? Invite participants to share what they wanted to be or do and what influenced their ideals of work at age five. Ask those who would still choose the same goal how their sense of this occupation has grown over the years. Ask those who would now make other choices how and why they changed their minds.

### 2. What comes to mind when you hear the word *job*?

Ask that participants form small groups, and give each group one marker and a large piece of newsprint with the word *job* written in the middle. Ask them to jot down all the words and images that come to mind when they hear the word *job*. Tell participants to take turns writing, in silence, until all have had a chance to put down as many words and images as they wish. Then discuss the viewpoints on jobs that you see on the paper. Allow several minutes for small group work and then have participants discuss as a large group. **Ask:** How many word associations are negative and

how many are positive? What stories or experiences have shaped your positive and negative views of work?

### 3. What's my line?

Write on index cards the names of public or historical figures well-known to your group (Moses, Joan of Arc, Ludwig van Beethoven, Martin Luther King Jr., George W. Bush, Venus Williams, and so on). Tape one index card to each person's back. Challenge participants to discover their identity by circulating in the group and asking "yes" or "no" questions about their work.

### 4. Why work?

**Discuss:** Some people live in order to work. Other people work in order to live. Ask participants to think of famous people or people they know who are examples of one or the other approach. **Ask:** What is the difference? Which appeals to you more? Do any of the people in your discussion seem to have a clear and intense sense of having found the right work?

### 5. What is work?

**Option 1:** Designate one side of the room as "Work" and another side "Not Work." Ask participants to follow their gut instinct and categorize the list of activities below by walking to the "Work" side or the "Not Work" side of the room when the name of each one is read. Allow time for movement after reading each of these:

- Painting the house
- Playing soccer
- Sorting lumber
- Visiting older people who are ill
- Picking up trash
- Counting migrating salmon
- Decorating for a party
- Making posters for a community concert
- Writing thank-you letters
- Writing a story for the school newspaper
- Doing the laundry
- Walking the dog
- Wrapping Christmas presents
- Hiking in the desert
- Reading to a child
- Giving medical advice in a free clinic
- Going on a date
- Baking cookies
- Building a bookshelf
- Praying



**Option 2:** Write each of these 20 activities on a separate piece of paper. Then post five activities in each corner of the room, taping pages one on top of the other. (For example, for the first round, the top pages in the four corners might be Playing soccer, Baking cookies, Going on a date, Hiking in the desert.) For each round, instruct participants to consider the four options, choose the activity they find most appealing (or least burdensome), and go to that corner to meet kindred spirits. Take off top pages in each corner to play the next round.

## 6. The José Hobday quotation

Discuss the Native American approach to work as discussed on page 114 of *Way to Live*:

My father said, “Try many things. When you find what you love, do that. Then figure out how to make a living with it.” What wisdom!...When people ask me, “Where do you work?” I answer, “Everywhere.” They say, “I mean, what is your job?” I say, “I have no job; my work is my life—teaching, healing, loving, decorating, playing, struggling, helping.” . . . The Native way is more freeing, more celebratory. You get all the “work” done—meeting the needs of housing, feeding, clothing, transporting, etc. But you do it in harmony, in union with all Creation and the life cycles.

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Matthew 25:14-30 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. God's work

Ask participants to look up each of these Old Testament passages and to describe the work God does:

- Genesis 1 (creates the world by speaking words)
- Genesis 2:7-10 (forms humankind as a potter molds clay; cultivates a garden)
- Psalm 104:24-30 (feeds the animals)
- Isaiah 66:13 (comforts as a mother does a child)
- Job 38:25-27 (makes the rain fall)
- Psalm 139:1, 13-16 (knits me together in my mother's womb)

**Ask:** How are God's work and human work similar? How do they differ? How would you describe the work Jesus did during his earthly ministry?

### 3. Gifts and work

Read aloud 1 Corinthians 12, in which Paul describes how the Spirit gives a variety of spiritual gifts to the church and compares the church to the human body that requires a variety of members in order to function properly. Make two headings: “Gifts” and “Work.” Under “Gifts” ask participants to list the different gifts they are aware of in your faith community. Under “Work” have them list

the various tasks that need performing in order for this “body” (community) to remain healthy. Then ask them to compare the two lists. **Ask:** How could our church make space for gifts not currently being employed? How could our church recruit and equip people for work that needs doing?

#### 4. Parable of the cathedral builders

Read this story aloud and then **ask:** How might even our menial work glorify God? What other stories or experiences convey this message? Why is it important to have a larger view of our work?

During the Middle Ages, a monk visited a city where a great cathedral was being built. Various artisans and craftsmen were about their work, and as the monk toured the facility, he inquired about the nature of their labor. “What is your work in this place?” the monk asked the first man. “I’m a stonemason,” he replied. “I’m carving each stone in this pile to the same exact proportions.” “What is your work in this place?” the monk asked another man. “I’m a glassmaker,” the second man replied. “I’m designing stained glass for these windows.” As he was leaving, the monk met a stooped, elderly woman sweeping the floor with a broom. “Good woman, what is your work in this place?” the monk asked. The little old woman straightened up, spread her arms wide and beamed a broad smile. “Why, sir!” she exclaimed, “I’m building this magnificent cathedral to the glory of God!”

### Challenge ■■■■

#### 1. Taking stock

Ask participants to describe a current activity that they really care about that makes them feel particularly alive. **Ask:** Who are the other people with whom you sometimes share this activity? For teens: How might more *adults* be invited to join with you in this activity? For adults: How might more *teens* be invited to join with you in this activity?

#### 2. Busywork

**Ask:** As you think about your daily routine, what things stand out in your mind as things you’d rather not do? Identify your current strategies for avoiding these (example, procrastination). What *constructive* approaches might help you get these things done?

#### 3. Work that de-energizes versus work that nourishes

Form two groups. Ask one group to draw up “the job description from hell” and ask the other group to draw up a “dream job description.” Ask the whole group to compare these two descriptions and identify persons or populations who hold each type of job. **Ask:** What “prepares” people for one type of job or the other? For which type of job do you find yourself positioned? Name jobs in your community that you would *not* want to be hired for. **Say:** Good work feeds us spiritually as well as physically, while at the same time making the world a little more just, a little more peaceful, and a little more hospitable for others. **Ask:** Do you notice anyone in your community who has a job that is *not* good work?

#### 4. Creating Jeopardy cards

Form two teams. Instruct each team to create a set of *Jeopardy* cards for its own team members—two or three cards per member. On the index cards, the teams should write short statements identifying gifts of persons in their group on one side (example, “This person speaks fluent Spanish.”) and on the other side write “Who is \_\_\_\_\_?” (filling in the name of that person). Play a few rounds of the game, with one team using its cards to challenge the other team.

#### 5. Debatable work

Form two teams and debate the following proposition: *Since high school is state-required work for teens, they should receive some pay for attending. Holding other jobs during the school year is against their best interest and should be prohibited.*

#### 6. Job-hunting skills

Encourage participants to find someone in your community who knows about how to find employment—examples, an employment counselor, personnel director, and so on. Suggest they ask that person to help in planning a one- to three-hour workshop for teens on the essentials of looking for a job.

### Worship

Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *We pray to see God at work in the world and ask God to bless the work of our hands.*

**Read:** Psalm 90:1-2,13-17

**Closing Prayer:** Gracious God,  
Open our eyes to your work unfolding among us.  
Open our ears to hear your voice calling us.  
Open our arms to the needy ones around us.  
Gladden our hearts with the joy of serving others  
and the delight of pleasing you.  
Bless the work we do.  
Amen.

#### 1. Lead the group in singing “In Our Lives, Lord, Be Glorified Today.”

Other stanzas begin with “In our words,” “In our work,” and “In our world.” Encourage participants to learn to sign while singing this simple song.

#### 2. Lead the group in singing “God Whose Giving Knows No Ending.”

This hymn has a good connection to Jesus’ parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

### 3. Dishwashing prayer

Encourage participants to stand in front of a sink of dirty dishes with sleeves rolled up and hands in warm water, feeling the pleasant warmth of the water. Have them take their time with each dish, become fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of their hands. Dirty dishes are a sign that someone has been fed. Encourage participants to give thanks for those who grew the food, for those who prepared the meal, and for those who ate. Invite them to give thanks for other food that is now nourishing someone in another part of the world and pray for those who do not have enough food at this very moment. **Say:** Visualize all these people in your mind as you pray, seeing them as you think Jesus would see them. Let yourself experience your longing for their well-being. Enjoy this moment in God's presence.

### 4. Spiritual Work

Explain that throughout generations, African-American spirituals have been used for a variety of functions, including making grueling work more bearable and more of a spiritual and communal experience. For example, a spiritual song would be used by field hands or road or rail crews to keep a steady beat that they all could work to, as well as provide fellowship and a worshipful setting. Take the group on a service project that is either heavy or monotonous labor (raking a senior citizen's yard, hauling heavy loads, or sorting food at a food bank). While you work, sing faith songs you all know. They could be spirituals, hymns, praise songs, even Christmas carols!

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Work at your next gathering. If you do, arrange for a job-seeker's workshop as outlined in Challenge #6, or have participants explore Link #2 as if they were preparing for a job hunt themselves.**

### Link

1. Watch the 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Discuss what Ferris and his friends learn about life and work while skipping school. Ask teens how they would like to spend a day off from school.
2. Visit <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com>, a supplement to *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* by Richard Nelson Bolles (updated annually by Ten Speed Press).



# Play

## Main Idea

**Have fun:** Play is part of God's good creation and is important to a balanced, happy life. Play is the reset button God gives us to get a fresh take on a situation and to renew our lives. We can even approach work with a playful spirit.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

- Open with Focus activity # 1 (15 minutes)
- Do Worship activity # 2 (10 minutes)
- Do Challenge activity #3 (50 minutes)
- Close with Join the Story activity # 2 (15 minutes)

**Note:** This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Invent a game

Form small groups and try the activity suggested on page 127 of the Play chapter in *Way to Live*. Each group should invent a simple game for two to four players that uses only a tennis ball. Then each small group plays their game in the large group. See if spectators can guess the rules just by observing. **Ask:** Was your game competitive (winners and losers) or cooperative (playing together to reach a common goal)? Was it fun?

### 2. Remembering playtime

Place a pile of simple toys in the center of the room. As participants enter, invite them to take a toy and be seated. Invite them to play with the toys and while playing to share memories of favorite childhood toys.

### 3. Playing with animals

Ask group members to describe ways in which family pets and other animals invite us to play. (If someone has a litter of puppies or kittens, let the group play with them and notice the playful behavior of both the animals and the teens.) **Ask:** What lessons about playing can we learn from animals?

### 4. The playfulness of nature

Let participants take ten minutes to wander outside with a small notebook and notice the playfulness of nature: for example, gurgling streams, dancing light, singing birds, fluttering leaves, twinkling stars. Then have them compare their lists and cross out any items that at least one other person has. Participants collect one point for each unique item they noticed.

### 5. Improvisation games

Teach participants to play *the pillow game* by standing in a circle and passing around a small pillow. When each person receives the pillow, he or she must do an action using the pillow as a prop (for example, balance it on the head, pretend it is a football and “run” with it, “read” it like a book, and so on). The challenge is for each person to do something different with/to the pillow.

OR

Teach participants to play *the alphabet game*, in which two or three players must sustain a quick-paced dialogue beginning each exchange with the next letter in the alphabet (going from A to Z). Replace a player who stumbles or hesitates.

(For a reference list of improvisation games, see <http://www.learnimprov.com> or <http://www.humanpingpongball.com>.)

### 6. Mixing work and play

Give each participant a piece of scrap paper. Ask them to wad the paper and throw it into a waste basket. Have them take turns and then discuss the various ways people do this activity (impossible hook shots, dropping it directly in, and so on). **Ask:** Is the way you did this playful activity anything like the way you do your work, including your school work? Is work always serious and play always lighthearted? (Recall for the group the Disney cartoon “The Three Little Pigs,” in which one brother scoffs at the other two: “I build my house of stones, I build my house of bricks. I have no chance to sing and dance, for work and play don’t mix.”) Encourage participants to share ideas for having more fun while working.

[**Note:** The questions Don asks on page 138 of *Way to Live*, in the section “Playing for life,” can guide follow-up discussion of any of these focus activities.]

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio text*

Proverbs 17:22 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. *Godspell*

Have the group listen to songs from the Broadway musical *Godspell* (“Day by Day,” “Bless the Lord,” “All for the Best,” “Light of the World,” “We Beseech Thee”) or view film clips from the 1973 adaptation. **Ask:** How do you feel about the “clownish” takes on these stories based on the Gospel according to Matthew?

### 3. En-JOY-ing our life with God

**Ask:** Does God really approve of play? How do we know? To answer, have small groups look up the following Bible passages, discuss them, and then explain to the larger group what each passage suggests about play:

- 2 Samuel 6:5 (David and Israel dancing and playing music)
- Isaiah 55:1-2, 12 (delight in God’s grace, “you shall go out in joy”)
- John 15:10-11 (“that your joy may be complete”)
- Luke 15 (three parables showing joy in finding what was lost)
- Mark 10:14-15 (on being childlike)

## Challenge

### 1. Play “Capture the Flag.”

That’s right: just play it, for as long as the group wants to, with no agenda. But then have them sit together for a snack and get an informal discussion of the game going. Lots of times you’ll find that there is as much energy and fun talking about the game—dissecting the moves, the “cheating,” the competition, and so on—as in the game itself. DON’T rush to some kind of moral judgment about what was “learned” from this play. But DO subtly help the group notice how the other practices in *Way to Live* get woven into how they have played the game—bodies, truth, choices, friends, forgiveness, welcome (including everyone). Help the group to discuss the “shadow side” of this game too. For example, were boys and girls equally involved? Was the competition ever mean? DO notice, as leader, who was left out, and find ways to switch team membership the next time.

### 2. Learn to juggle.

Ask for a volunteer to demonstrate juggling. Have the person begin by juggling two tennis balls or small beanbags that don’t roll when dropped. Then add a third. Try adding a fourth ball or bag or juggling in a different pattern. Then discuss together what we can learn from the physical act of juggling about how to “juggle” many responsibilities. See <http://www.juggling.org>.

### 3. Teens interviewing adults

Arrange ahead of time for teens to interview members of an older adult class or group, asking them, "What did you do for fun when you were a teenager? Where did you play? What did you play?" Instruct participants to conduct simultaneous face-to-face interviews in small clusters, with one or two teen interviewers per two or three adults. They should allow five to ten minutes for these interviews and take careful notes, capturing the stories and phrases just as they were expressed. Then ask participants to share findings with the whole group of teens and adults. **Ask:** What surprised you in hearing the older folks' stories? Do you notice similarities and differences between your experience and theirs? As youth and adults discuss these questions together, encourage them to listen carefully to one another. Then, try playing a game together.

### 4. Panel discussion

Plan a panel discussion or debate on one of the following topics related to play:

- guns and war toys, especially those designed for young children
- the "shadow side" of high school sports and/or professional sports (see *Way to Live* page 137)
- the pros and cons of video gaming as a form of play

### 5. Make a piñata

Help participants build their own gargoyle-shaped piñata out of papier-mâché. Use a balloon for the basic, empty structure that will be the belly of the gargoyle, or make a gargoyle-shaped frame from rolled newspapers. Using scissors, cut old newspapers into long thin strips. Get some decoupage glue. Cover one side of the strips with glue and lay them onto the balloon or frame. Let each layer dry before adding another layer, gradually building up legs, ears, wings, and so on. Under the top layers, loop a wire around the gargoyle's "waist," with a loop sticking up in back that can later be used to tie on a rope. Also leave an opening into the belly so you can later fill the dried piñata with many small pieces of candy. Several days later, decorate the finished piñata with paint, streamers, buttons, and so on, and fill the belly with candy, taping over the hole to keep the candy inside. Suggest your group use your piñata for your worship (see Worship activity #1). Of course, you could also purchase a ready-made piñata!



## Worship ■■■■

### Pray the scripture.

**Opening Sentence:** *A child fearlessly playing among the wild beasts is a sign of God's promised, peaceable kingdom.*

**Read:** Isaiah 11:6-9

**Closing Prayer:** O God,  
you created the ostrich just for fun  
and taught the hyena to laugh.  
You sent a Child to lead us into your new creation  
where sorrow turns to dancing and power gives way to play.  
Free us from our fears, we pray, and take away our pride  
as we follow the Joyful Jester in the way of abundant life.  
Amen.

### 1. Worship with a piñata

Incorporate a piñata ritual in your group's worship. If possible, suspend the piñata from a tree or high beam, using it where it can be swung by a rope and where blindfolded players can move about and swing the stick without hurting anyone. Describe the background of the piñata (see page 129 in *Way to Live*), and have the group pray together for strength in confronting the powers of evil in this world. Then let participants take turns trying to break it open!

### 2. *The Juggler of Notre Dame*

Tell or read this classic story that dates back to twelfth-century France. Ask participants to ponder what playful gift each of them would give to the Christ child. Then close with prayer, inviting members to dedicate their gifts: "Dear Jesus, I give you. . . ."

Story summary: A once-famous juggler ekes out a bare existence performing in streets for coins. Brokenhearted over the death of his wife and his best friend, the juggler drifts aimlessly until he is invited to stay in a monastic community where he is treated kindly. As Christmas approaches, all are making special gifts for the Christ child. The juggler despairs over having nothing to offer until he discovers he can give his gift.

*The Juggler of Notre Dame* film is available from Paulist Productions (800-523-0226). A fine children's book version is *The Clown of God: An Old Story*, by Tomie de Paola (Voyager Books, 1989).

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Play at your next gathering. If you do, plan a space for Challenge activity #1, or invite specific people to do Challenge activity #4, or assign each person to learn and teach a game from Link activity #2 for next time.**

## Link

1. *Play Therapy* by Michael Joseph (Abbey Press, 1991) is a whimsical little book that celebrates the wisdom and healing power of childlike play.
2. Can't quite remember how that one game used to go? Try *Hopscotch, Hangman, Hot Potato, and Ha, Ha, Ha* by Jack Maguire (Simon and Schuster, 1992), a rulebook of more than 250 children's games. Each section lists games in alphabetical order to make finding your favorites easier. One of the best features of the book is the description for each game. Where to play, number of players, equipment needed, object of the game, and directions for play are clearly stated in easy-to-understand language. The author sorts the games three ways: by location, player age, and number of players.  
Also use <http://www.gameskidsplay.net> as an online resource or see <http://dmoz.org/Games> for an online directory of games.
3. Project Adventure (<http://www.pa.org>) provides resources in adventure play and education.
4. *Patch Adams* (1998) is a film based on the story of Hunter "Patch" Adams, the founder of the Gesundheit Clinic. Adams combined both humor and compassion in relating to his patients.
5. *Rudy* (1993) is a film based on the story of Rudy Ruettiger, a working-class boy intent on realizing his dream of playing football at Notre Dame despite his uninspiring academic record and unimposing athletic ability.
6. *Searching for Bobby Fischer* (1993) is a film based on the story of Josh Waitzkin, a 7-year-old New Yorker who has a genius for chess. Josh's dad enters him in competition, losing sight of what this does to the boy's psyche and enjoyment of the game.
7. The film *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) portrays what happens when the playful spirit of Luke Jackson encounters a Southern prison-farm chain gang. It also illustrates "third way" responses (see page 129 in *Way to Live*).



# Time

## Main Idea

**Take a NAP:** In a society that is constantly telling us to *do* so many things, it can be hard to find time for the rest we need. God wants to give us the gift of a Non-Active Period—a time to be with God, a time for renewal, a time to let down our guard and just *be*.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity # 3 (10 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity # 2 (10 minutes)

Do Worship activity # 2 (10 minutes)

Close with Challenge activity #1 (1 hour)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. *Tempus fugit*: Time flies

Help the group brainstorm a list of time-related expressions: “time flies,” “killing time,” “time is money,” and so on. Have them write these down and discuss the feeling about time that is communicated by each one.

### 2. Map a day.

Tell the group that their prayers for “more hours in a day” have just been answered: they now have a *thirty-hour day*. Provide paper and ask participants to map out their day and be specific about how they will use the extra six hours. Form small groups for discussion. Then **say**: “Oops. There’s been a mistake. Instead of a longer day, you’ve been given a twenty-hour day.” Now ask each person to map this shorter day. What will get left out?

### 3. Graph your day.

Give participants graph paper and ask them to choose one day from the last week. Ask them to sit for a while and remember that day's schedule in detail, making notes about what they remember. Then ask them to write the hours between waking up and bedtime along the bottom line of a graph and plot the day's ups and downs (high points and low points, times that seemed good and times that didn't). Form small groups to share graphs. **Discuss:** Where are the times of greatest peace? greatest pressure? What would you like to change about this day? What can you actually change for this same day next week? (Option: Have participants keep track of a day while it is happening, making notes each hour.)

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Psalm 90 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Bible time

**Ask the group:** When does your day begin? (Most of us feel it begins in the morning.) Read aloud Genesis 1:1-5 and note for the group how time itself is created by God. In verse 5 God gives proper names to "Day" and "Night." Then the day *begins* at sundown: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day." The first part of each day passes in darkness; we rest, getting ready for the gift of light and activity. **Discuss:** Would beginning each day at sundown change your attitude about the start and end of your day? How?

### 3. Keeping Sabbath

**Ask the group:** What images does the word *Sabbath* evoke for you? Do you know people who strictly observe the Sabbath as a day of rest? Read aloud Deuteronomy 5:12-15. **Ask:** What is radical about this commandment to keep the Sabbath day? Here are some radical ideas for marking the specialness of the Sabbath:

- Don't buy stuff (making and selling it requires the work of other people; see the chapter on Stuff in *Way to Live*).
- Don't make to-do lists or do other things that get you thinking about work.
- Don't work! (See the chapter on Work in *Way to Live* for help in figuring out what that means!)
- DO enjoy being part of creation. Go outside! Don't pollute! Practice caring for creation.

Help the group notice how Sabbath clears time for other practices that are part of a way to live.

### 4. Church time

On a large piece of newsprint, draw a circle of the Christian year. Head it "How the Church Tells Time." Begin with Advent and Christmas, and ask participants to fill in the circle as best they can, brainstorming as a group. When they get stuck, use the information in your pastor's ministry

manual. Have a group member color the circle with the appropriate liturgical colors. **Ask:** What is the significance of the colors? They can also make tissue overlays of other ways our culture tells time, such as seasons of nature, school seasons, work seasons (busy and slack), sports seasons.

## Challenge

### 1. Take a group nap.

Ask participants to bring sleeping bags to church on Sunday morning. Following worship, they can enjoy "Sunday dinner" together and then stretch out and take an hour-long group nap. Talk about the experience and have the group discuss the value of nap-taking.

### 2. Be e. e. cummings.

Distribute copies of cummings' poem "i thank You God for most this amazing day," which is available on the web. Read the poem aloud, and then ask participants to write their own poems of gratitude for the day. Post the poems on a bulletin board or website.

### 3. Interview Sabbath keepers in the business world.

Suggest participants interview employees of businesses (such as Chick-fil-A) that close for Sabbath rest and report findings to the group.

### 4. Learn about *Shabbat*.

Invite persons of Jewish faith to share with your group how their family and congregation observe *Shabbat*.

### 5. Share songs about time.

Ask the group to bring songs about the passing of seasons and time. Adults may recall Joni Mitchell's "The Circle Game," Jim Croce's "Time in a Bottle," Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle" and "All My Life's a Circle." All may have heard these: "Time after Time" by Cyndi Lauper, "Fly Like an Eagle" by Steve Miller, "Time Is on My Side" by the Rolling Stones. **Ask:** What are some current teen songs about time? How do these songs make you feel? In what ways are they alike and different? What sense of time do they convey?

### 6. Rest your eyes.

Show the group how to make eye pillows filled with flax and lavender. Buy flax seed and dried lavender blossoms in bulk at a health food store. Choose fabrics in restful colors and patterns (like moon and stars). Make a pattern shaped like fat eyeglasses without ear pieces. Cut two pieces of fabric in this shape, put the right sides together, and sew around the edge, leaving an opening two inches wide. Turn the pillow inside out and fill it with the seed and blossoms. Stitch the opening shut. Then have participants lie on their backs, close their eyes, place the pillows on their eyelids, and feel the relaxation! (Note: Eye pillows make lovely gifts.)

## 7. Take time each day

Divide participants into small groups and ask them to make an agreement that they will spend ten minutes every day during the coming week in silence (but not asleep). During this time of silence, members may do one of the following activities, or they may do nothing.

- Take a walk, breathe deeply, and notice what is around you.
- Read a poem or a prayer more than once. Let the rhythms and images sink in.
- Write a poem.
- Try a prayer exercise from the *Way to Live Prayer* chapter.
- Write in a journal, not just about what happened, but about your hopes, fears, dreams.

Urge participants to agree to share what they did, how it felt, and what they learned when they meet again next week.

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, keeps us by night and day, this moment and always.*

**Read:** Psalm 121

**Closing Prayer:** O God, who neither rests nor sleeps,  
shield us this day and shelter us at night.  
Bless each moment with your presence  
and shape our lives by your love  
now and always.  
Amen.

### 1. Bedtime prayers

Invite participants to share a favorite bedtime prayer or song they remember from childhood. (Some may not know one to share). After each prayer or song is shared, have the group repeat each prayer and sing as a group. Ask participants to share thoughts and hopes about what it means to entrust ourselves to God's watchful care every night while we rest. (Option: Collect these prayers in a booklet or post them on your group's website.)

### 2. Pray the day.

Turn the events of the day into prayer. Invite group members to share prayers in response to this question: "Where did I meet you today, God?"

### 3. Morning and evening hymns

Look in your hymnal for morning and evening hymns for the group to sing or recite together. Morning hymns include "Morning Has Broken," "This is the Day," "O Day of Radiant Gladness." Evening hymns include "Now the Day Is Over," "All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night," "Abide with Me," "Day Is Done." (Option: Sing "Holden Evening Prayer," by Marty Haugen, GIA Publishers.)

#### 4. Don't wear your watch.

Challenge the group: Some Sunday, try not to look at a clock all day long. Go to worship in the morning and just *be there*—you'll have no way of knowing if the service is “too long.” Let the rest of the day be unstructured too. At the end of the day, discuss how this felt (if your group meets on Sunday nights).

#### 5. Prayer chime

Invite participants to set their watches this Saturday to chime every hour (if their watch has that feature). When the watch chimes the hour, ask them to stop whatever they are doing and say a short prayer to God.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Time at your next gathering. If you do, ask each person to collect materials for Challenge activity #6 and assign people to be deejays for Challenge activity #5. Play the songs while participants work on the eye pillows. Or, set up a time to do Link activity #3.**

#### Link

1. *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* by Dorothy C. Bass (Jossey-Bass, 2000), written primarily for adults, includes stories, poems, and theological reflections about living faithfully in time, as well as many practical suggestions for shaping the days, weeks, and years of our lives.
2. Have the group watch the movie *Groundhog Day*. Help them identify and discuss the different responses of the main character to being stuck in time. Then ask participants to talk about parallels in their own lives. **Ask:** How do you experience the ringing of your alarm clock each morning? How would you react to some of the frustrations Phil encounters? How does he become un-stuck? Would it have been so bad to be stuck in time if the weather were better and the place more exciting?
3. Have the group listen to the song “I’m Busy” from the Veggie Tales video *Are You My Neighbor?* Ask them to identify times when they’ve felt too busy to help someone in need.
4. Encourage participants to read *A Geography of Time* by Robert V. Levine (Basic Books, 1998) and discuss cultural differences in people’s experiences of time.
5. Read the children’s book *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant (Pearson Learning, 1993). **Ask:** What does your family do when it spends time together? How do you know when the time has been enough? What are the signs?



# Truth

## Main Idea

**Live truthfully:** Truth is about more than not cheating or telling lies. Living truthfully means bringing our words, actions, and heart into alignment with God's desire for our integrity and wholeness. We should surround ourselves with people who speak the truth about their lives and take well-chosen risks in speaking truth.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity #5 (15 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (20 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #5 (20 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #2 (10 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Examine common expressions.

Ask the group to identify and list common expressions such as “truth or consequences” or “white lie” and sayings such as “honesty is the best policy.” Help them discuss what each expression conveys about the practice of living truthfully.

### 2. Gossip versus testimony

In group discussion, ask participants to compare “gossip” and “testimony.” (The first is usually whispered and supposedly secret, while the second is declared aloud in a very public setting.) **Ask:** Is one always false and the other true? Does gossip have any good purposes? Can you think of times when speech that has been labeled gossip might be testimony that has not dared to go public for fear of reprisal?



### 3. Link private and public behavior.

Ask the group to reflect on this observation by a popular sportscaster: "When I'm calling a game, I want to be as transparent and uninhibited as possible. That's why I'm careful never to use profanity when I'm on the golf course. I'm afraid if I use foul language in private, even when playing alone, it will seep into my public sportscasting as well."

### 4. Truth in the courtroom

Review the transcript between Ms. Wiginton and Brittany Simpson in the Truth chapter in *Way to Live*, page 158. **Ask:** What sense of truth did this court case establish? (Option: Watch the trial section of the film *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What truth emerges during this trial? )

### 5. Truth statements

Designate one side of the room **Agree**, another side **Disagree**. Read the following statements and ask participants to move to the side of the room that best answers the question for them. Afterwards, encourage them to discuss their responses.

- Being truthful means more than not telling a lie.
- Cheating is a serious problem in my school or workplace.
- I would tell a "white lie" to preserve a friendship.
- Not telling the whole truth to a parent is the same as lying.
- Every politician spins the truth to gain advantage.
- My faith gives me the support I need to live truthfully.

### 6. Two Truths and a Lie

Have each group member tell three interesting things about themselves or their past, one of which is a lie. After each person goes, have the rest of the group try to guess which one is a lie.

## Join the Story

#### 1. *Lectio text*

Mark 14:55, 66-72 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

#### 2. Serving a higher standard of truth

Tell or read Exodus 1:15-21, the story of Shiphrah and Puah, Hebrew midwives who saved their people by giving Pharaoh inaccurate information about the birth of Hebrew babies. **Ask:** How were these women serving a "higher standard of truth"? Using related stories from a more recent period, ask the group to reflect on passages from *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed* by Philip P. Hallie, and *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, in which courageous people

sheltered others from danger by withholding information from the Nazis. **Ask:** In what ways were these people serving a larger sense of truth?

### 3. Moment of truth for Moses

Have the group view the scene from the animated film *The Prince of Egypt* where Moses learns the truth about his heritage from his sister Miriam and his Pharaoh “father.” **Ask:** How does this self-knowledge help Moses see and respond to the larger truth of his situation?

### 4. What is truth?

Read aloud John’s account of the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate (John 18:28-19:16). **Ask:** What prompts Pilate to ask “What is truth”? In what ways does Pilate’s understanding of truth differ from Jesus’ understanding?

### 5. Spiritual autobiography

Saint Augustine did not write *The Confessions* as a sensationalist exposé; rather, in this autobiography Augustine laid bare his soul before God. He included honest reflection on his past as well as his current yearning for God. Ask the group to list the questions they would pose to themselves if writing their own spiritual autobiographies. Allow time to begin writing their spiritual autobiographies.

## Challenge ■■■■

### 1. “The Secret sits”

Robert Frost wrote: “We dance round in a ring and suppose, But the Secret sits in the middle and knows” (*Robert Frost Poetry & Prose*, edited by Edward C. Lathem and Lawrance Thompson, Henry Holt, 1984). Have the group ponder this couplet. Then **ask:** What does it suggest about our quest to know the truth? Encourage participants to write their own couplets about their longing to know what is true.

### 2. Truth in the public realm

Help the group identify a situation in which a business or political leader did not tell the truth. **Ask:** What did the person have to gain from lying or cheating? Who was deceived, betrayed, or injured because of the leader’s actions? How has this leader been held accountable for this deception? Was confession involved?

### 3. Barriers to truthful living

In the *Way to Live* chapter on Truth, the authors identify three barriers to living truthfully: the pressure to succeed, the fear of losing relationships, and finding ourselves in overwhelming situations (pages 159–163). Form three groups and ask each group to identify a case that illustrates one of these barriers.

#### 4. Preaching uncomfortable truths

At its best, preaching is much more than personal testimony; it is also public testimony that encourages the gathered faith community to live truthfully. Suggest that participants interview a panel of preachers about how they wrestle with proclaiming uncomfortable truths in their sermons.

#### 5. Truth in advertising

Advertising is the platform for much of the public testimony we experience today. Have the group watch selected television commercials (videotaped in advance) and **discuss:**

- What is being sold, and to whom?
- What is the ad saying or claiming in order to sell the product?
- What do you suspect this product will in fact do?
- What testimony does this ad give to the values and priorities of our society?
- In what sense does this ad “tell the truth”—and not?

#### 6. Hear testimony from marginal living.

Invite people who have lived on the margins of society—migrant workers, refugees, homeless persons, ex-convicts, people on welfare—to share testimony with your group about their lives and their relationship with God.

### Worship ■ ■ ■ ■

#### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *God's way is just, God's word is truth; we seek to live and speak the truth at all times.*

**Read:** Psalm 119:41-48

**Closing Prayer:** God of all wisdom,  
we confess the whole truth of our lives to you  
and ask you to lead us in the way of integrity.  
Give us the courage to speak the truth in love  
and the grace each day to live your truth  
spoken to us in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.

## 1. Candle confession

Gather the group around a bowl or plastic tub filled with sand. Nearby, have a basket of candle tapers and matches. Invite people to a spirit of confession by having them say together the words of Psalm 51:1-3 (from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*):

Generous in love—God, give grace!  
Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.  
Scrub away my guilt,  
soak out my sins in your laundry.  
I know how bad I've been;  
my sins are staring me down.  
(Silence)

Encourage silent thought about any distance from God or from other people. As people feel led, they may light a candle, prop it in the sand, and say aloud "God, make a fresh start in me."

## 2. Lead the group in singing hymns to encourage truthful living.

- "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian"
- "Be Thou My Vision"
- "Lord, Speak to Me"

## 3. Worship in Spirit and Truth.

In the Gospel of John Chapter 4 Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman about worship. Jesus says that "the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." **Ask** participants to discuss the following questions: When, if ever, have you experienced or participated in a worship service that felt "spirit-filled" and "true" to who you are and the way you worship God? What enabled it to be that way? When have you experienced a worship service that did not feel "spirited" or "true"? What made it that way? This may lead to an interesting discussion about worship in your congregation. Results of this conversation may be helpful for your church's worship committee.

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Truth at your next gathering. If you do, explore barriers to living truthfully (Challenge activity #3) as a group, or check out the film in Link activity #3.

## Link

1. *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* by Anne Lamott (Anchor, 2000).
2. *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* by Frederick Buechner (Harper San Francisco, 1991 reprint).
3. *The Apostle* (film, 1997). "Sonny" Dewey is a Texas evangelist on the lam after clubbing his wife's lover into a coma with a baseball bat. Baptizing himself with the new name "Apostle E.F.," he flees to a small town in the Louisiana Delta and continues his ministry by preaching on a local radio station and renovating an old church.

4. **Matewan** (film, 1987). Set in Mingo County, West Virginia, in 1920, this story relates the experiences of a local teenage preacher caught in a struggle between coal miners, union organizers, company operators, and gun thugs. Note the testimony shared about the power of non-violent resistance (Mennonite bravery). Note also the young preacher's skill in using indirect communication through his clever recounting of Joseph being framed by Potiphar's wife.
5. **Liar Liar** (film, 1997). Fletcher Reede is a fast-talking attorney and habitual liar. When his son Max blows out the candles on his fifth birthday cake, the boy's single wish is that his dad would stop lying for 24 hours. When Max's wish miraculously comes true, Fletcher discovers that his biggest asset (his mouth) has suddenly become his biggest liability. Legal and emotional havoc ensue as Fletcher tries to keep his practice afloat and his ex-wife Audrey from taking their son and moving to Boston.
6. Jean Kilbourne is recognized for her pioneering work on alcohol and tobacco advertising and the image of women in advertising. She is best known for her award-winning documentaries *Killing Us Softly*, *Slim Hopes*, and *Pack of Lies*. Kilbourne is author of *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* (Touchstone, 2000). See also **The Center for Media Literacy** (<http://www.medialit.org>), an organization that provides curriculum and training for analyzing and evaluating the powerful images, words, and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture. Learn also about the **Truth Campaign** at <http://www.thetruth.com>.
7. Other films include *A Few Good Men* ("You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!"), *JFK* (exploring the truth about the assassination of President Kennedy), *The Pelican Brief* (a law student discovers the truth about a manufacturer dumping waste in the Everglades), and *The Insider* (a scientist employed by a major tobacco company testifies in court about the truth of the tobacco industry).



# Choices

## Main Idea

**Choose wisely:** Teens face many choices, and the path to a wise choice is not necessarily easy and straightforward. The Christian practice of discernment—a process of deliberate decision-making within a community that supports us as we explore our lives in the presence of God—can help us to choose wisely. Slow down, ask questions, pay attention to yourself and to God, find traveling companions, take time for reflection, then act.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity #3 (20 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #1 (15 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #5 (20 minutes)

Do Focus activity #4 (10 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #2 (5 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. List choices youth are allowed to make.

Help the group list together some of the common choices teenagers are allowed to make (friends, music, clothes, hobbies, activities, level of participation in school). **Ask:** What choices are teenagers *not* allowed to make? Explore with the group some of the places where teen choices are limited (for example, curfews) and discuss their impact and value for teens' lives.

### 2. Guidelines for good choices

Form small groups and give each group a piece of newsprint with "I know I've made a good choice when..." written on it. Ask the groups to list ways to complete this sentence and then share their lists with the whole group. **Ask:** Are most of the guidelines the same? Any surprises?

### 3. Know thyself

Knowing ourselves and our preferences are important factors in making good choices. Make enough copies of the following survey for each person in your group. Then invite them to complete the survey to find out more about themselves. See instructions for follow-up discussion after completing the questions.

1. Name as it appears on your birth certificate:
2. Nickname:
3. Number of candles that appeared on your last birthday cake:
4. Date that you regularly blow them out:
5. Height:
6. Eye color:
7. Hair color:
8. Piercings:
9. Tattoos:
10. Your favorite job (paid or unpaid):
11. Birthplace:
12. Hometown:
13. Current residence:
14. Citizenship:
15. Favorite lifetime pet:
16. How many times have you been in love?
17. Favorite food:
18. Favorite movie:
19. Favorite quote from any movie:
20. Favorite holiday:
21. Favorite beverage:
22. Favorite day of the week:
23. Favorite song:
24. Favorite TV show:
25. Toothpaste:
26. Least favorite daily activity:
27. Favorite subject in school:
28. Favorite fast food place:
29. Your last hospital visit as a patient:
30. The color of your bedroom:
31. Number of times you failed your driver's license test:
32. Where you see yourself in ten years:
33. The last person you got E-mail from:
34. Store where you'd most like to receive a huge gift certificate:
35. What you usually do when bored:
36. What word or phrase you use way too often:
37. Name a friend who lives the farthest from you:
38. Best thing in life:
39. Bedtime:

**Discuss:** Which answers reflect your choices? (Circle these.) Which are beyond your control? (Underline these.)

Notice

- your innate gifts and aptitudes
- your family's habits and values
- the influence of advertising
- society's requirements
- peer pressure
- your faith
- other factors (name them)

Do you see any patterns?

#### 4. Who you gonna call?

In the business world, consultants are sometimes paid big bucks to help companies make good decisions (though enlisting a consultant does not guarantee good choices). Pass out paper and pencils and ask participants to list the top four persons with whom they would consult when making a significant life decision, such as where to go to college or what job to take. What do they find *trust-worthy* about the people they would consult? How could these persons help them make a decision that they can own and feel confident about? Discuss answers in the group setting.

### Join the Story ■■■■

#### 1. *Lectio text*

Mark 12:28-31 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

#### 2. Trees giving glory to God?

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968) said that a tree gives glory to God by fully being a tree—by living for the purpose for which it was created! Merton also said that as humans we give glory to God by being what we were fully meant to be—using all the capacities and gifts given by God. Form small groups and give each group newsprint, markers, scissors, masking tape, and a stack of colored construction paper. Ask each group to read Psalm 1 and then draw a large fruit tree on the newsprint. After helping participants name their talents and gifts, invite each person to cut out a fruit-shaped piece of construction paper, write their gifts on it, and attach it to the tree with tape. Display each group's tree on the wall. (Option: Bring a bowl of fruit to use as a worship center. Arrange participants in a circle during closing worship and offer prayers of thanks for all the gifts represented on the paper fruit. Then invite participants to enjoy the real fruit following worship.)



### 3. Dylan and Jesus

Play a recording of Bob Dylan's "Gotta Serve Somebody" (from CD *Slow Train Coming*, lyrics at <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/serve.html>). Reflect on Dylan's song in light of Jesus' saying in Matthew 6:24 ("No one can serve two masters").

### 4. Learn about Saint Francis.

The Choices chapter in *Way to Live* (page 180) talks about Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Born three centuries earlier, Saint Francis of Assisi also founded a radical reform movement within the church. Have the group watch the 1972 film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, the story of how young Francis renounced social privilege to serve God.

## Challenge

### 1. To discern...or not

Write the word *discern* on newsprint with these definitions:

- To distinguish between; to sift
- To detect with the eyes; to detect with senses other than vision
- To come to know or recognize mentally; to see or understand the difference

**Ask:** What might the culture *not want* you to discern? If you were more discerning about your daily patterns, what products and services might you *not* buy? What alternatives might you seek instead? (Leaders note: This is a tie-in to the chapter on Stuff. Every chapter in *Way to Live* suggests some choices teens need to make. You could devise a *discernment* process around any one of these choices.)

### 2. Communal discernment

Help the group host a dinner for adult leaders in your congregation. After dinner, have group members interview leaders about some of the most significant decisions this congregation has made over the years and how these decisions were made—or, in the terms of this chapter, what *discernment process* guided these decisions. Interviewers should listen for ways in which the congregation sought God's guidance during important times of decision.

### 3. Honoring dissent

Explain that when making decisions as a group, it's important to listen hard in order to hear those who do *not* support a particular position or course of action. When a majority-rules vote is taken, dissent is honored when the group at least acknowledges the minority vote; sometimes it also receives a minority report. When decisions are made by discerning an emerging consensus, dissent is honored by allowing members to "stand aside"—not supporting but not blocking a course of action. Persons who have strong objections may also dissent by "standing against" to redirect the course of action being considered. **Discuss:** How are decisions typically made within our group? How do we honor dissent? When have members felt that their dissent was not respected? How can we improve this aspect of group decision-making?

#### 4. WWJD?

Ask participants to commit to read *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and to form a book group/discussion group to share insights about it.

#### 5. Practice responding to Ignatian examen questions.

For an evening session, give each person a card with the questions below. Allow ten minutes for personal reflection, then have participants share in pairs or small groups for another ten minutes.

- For what moment today are you most grateful?
- For what moment today are you least grateful?
- When today did you feel most alive?
- When did you feel life draining out of you?

An examen exercise can also be a very helpful way of reflecting on a mission trip, a weekend retreat, or another special event.

#### 6. Convene a clearness committee.

The next time someone in your group needs to make an important decision, experiment by forming something like a Quaker *clearness committee*. Invite four to ten church members and friends to take part. Begin and end the meeting with silence, maintaining a spirit of openness and prayerful waiting. Ask the person the kind of questions that try to help him or her find clarity—such as, questions that help surface issues, concerns, and understandings, without judging. The clearness committee does not give advice or try to solve the person's problems, but focuses instead on the person seeking clearness. The intent is to lead seekers, through their own answers and considerations, to a conclusion affirmed by all committee members. Quakers trust that through this discernment process, "way will open."

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *God knows us completely, our thoughts and plans, our questions and our confusions.*

**Read:** Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

**Closing Prayer:** God of Mystery,  
we will never know your thoughts,  
but you know our deepest desires and needs.  
You are always near, holding and supporting us.  
Grant us wisdom as we make decisions and  
give us wise guides and good friends  
who will help us choose your Life-giving way.  
Amen.

**1. Pray this portion of the Saint Patrick Breastplate Prayer:**

I bind unto myself today  
the power of God to hold and lead,  
an eye to watch, the might to stay,  
an ear to harken to my need;  
the wisdom of my God to teach,  
a hand to guide, a shield to ward;  
the word of God to give me speech,  
the heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me,  
Christ within me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ beside me,  
Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me;  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet,  
Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

(Text attributed to Saint Patrick, trans. Cecil F. Alexander)

**2. Lead the group in singing hymns to support one another in choosing wisely.**

- "Spirit of the Living God"
- "Guide My Feet"
- "Be Thou My Vision"

**3. Pray for Choices**

Have group members get in pairs and tell the partner one thing they are in the midst of deciding. It could be a major decision or a relatively minor one. Have the group members pray for each other and their decisions. Ask them to continue praying for each other and their decision during the week.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Choices at your next gathering. If you do, view together the film in Join the Story activity #4, and round it out with Worship activity #1.**

## Link

1. *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose: Vocation and The Ethics of Ambition* by Brian J. Mahan (Jossey-Bass, 2002).
2. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* by Parker J. Palmer (Jossey-Bass, 1999).
3. Learn about the life of **Peace Pilgrim**. Carrying in her tunic pockets her only possessions, the woman who called herself "Peace Pilgrim" walked more than 25,000 miles across the USA saying "yes" to peace and "no" to evil, falsehood, and hatred. See <http://www.peacepilgrim.org>.
4. *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace* (1999). This film depicts the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian who was imprisoned and executed for his resistance to Nazism.
5. *Romero* (film, 1989). In El Salvador the new bishop Oscar Romero spoke out against the death squads and the terror campaign the military government was waging against democratic reforms. Until his assassination, Romero continued to oppose the violence even as fellow priests were attacked and churches shut down by government operatives.



# Friends

## Main Idea

**Be a good friend:** Friendship is about risky caring and respectful give-and-take. It's more important to *be* a friend than to *have* lots of friends, collecting them like baseball cards. Jesus teaches us the value of having a circle of close friends while being open and welcoming toward new companions.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #1 (20 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (30 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #1, while listening to Friend songs  
(Focus activity #1) (10 minutes)




Close with Worship activity #2 (5 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Friend songs

Have the group listen to “You’ve Got a Friend” sung by James Taylor; “That’s What Friends Are For” sung by Elton John, Dionne Warwick, Stevie Wonder, and Gladys Knight; “Friends” sung by Michael W. Smith; and “You’ve Got a Friend in Me” sung by Randy Newman, from *Toy Story 2*. Distribute the lyrics to these four songs (available on the web) and ask the group to compare what each says about being friends. According to each song:

-  What qualities does a true friend have?
-  What does being friends require of you?
-  Who are the partners in a friendship? (Triadic relationships involve mutual loyalty to a third “person,” such as God.)

## 2. Give-and-take

The Friends chapter in *Way to Live* describes how friendships require healthy give-and-take. Ask the group to compare *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (Harper-Collins, 1986) and *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister, translated by J. Alison James (North South Books, 1992). **Ask:** What does each book convey about healthy giving and taking? What type of mutuality do we see at the end of each story? Which story would you prefer to be part of, and why?

## 3. Popularity versus friendship

Write the word *popular* on newsprint and ask teens: What does it take to be popular in your school? (For adults: What did it take to be popular when you were in high school?) List responses. Then make a second column with the heading *friend*. **Ask:** What does it take to be a friend? How are your answers the same? How do your answers differ?

## 4. When friendships shift over time

Ask if anyone can explain “plate tectonics” (a geological term describing the constantly shifting land masses underneath what appears to be “solid ground”). Then ask how this term relates to our experience of friendships. The book chapter claims that for most of us, friendships tend to ebb and flow and shift over time. Ask participants to choose conversation partners and recall a time when they experienced a “seismic shift” in a significant friendship.

## 5. Draw a diagram of your school cafeteria.

Divide teens into groups according to the various schools they attend. Give each group newsprint and markers and ask them to diagram their school cafeteria by sketching tables and labeling where different cliques sit during lunch period. Ask groups to share their diagrams and describe the social groups at their school. After all groups have shared, **ask:** Do you wish your lunchroom could be different? How? Is there anyone who seems to be upset or unhappy during lunch? Can you imagine Jesus walking into your lunchroom? Whom would he sit with? Would anything change? (Option: Introduce this activity by viewing the scene from the film *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), in which a new boy is taken around the high school and oriented to the different social groups.)



## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

John 15:12-17 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. True friends

Ask the group to list qualities of true friendship and to compare their list with the one below:

-  True friends are loyal.
-  True friends can trust each other.

- True friends have sincere respect for each other.
- True friends develop a balance of give-and-take.
- True friends have boundaries.
- True friends can change.
- True friends help each other.

Ask the group to consider the TV sitcom *Friends* or another show about friendship. **Ask:** How do these fictitious friendships measure up to the above list of qualities?

Now read or summarize the story of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-5, 20:1-42). **Ask:** In what ways did Jonathan prove to be a trustworthy friend? David trusted Jonathan with his own life, even when he knew Jonathan would have to betray his father. How do you get someone to trust you that much? What other qualities of true friendship did David and Jonathan exhibit? Have the group compare this to the list above.

### 3. Four loves

Divide participants into four groups. Ask each group to invent a story or tell a story they have experienced, read, or seen on film that illustrates one of these four types of love as described by C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* (Harvest Books, 1971):

- *Storge*—family love
- *Philia*—friendship love
- *Eros*—romantic love
- *Agape*—sacrificial love

Encourage groups to share stories with the other groups. Ask how *agape* differs from other forms of love. Then read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a and list the qualities of *agape* as Paul describes it. Invite each person to write a short “love poem” based on the 1 Corinthians 13 passage.

Suggest using haiku (<http://jfg.girlscouts.org/Space/Poetry/Haiku/Index.asp>) or cinquain (<http://jfg.girlscouts.org/How/make/cinquain.htm>) form. Encourage participants to share poems during closing worship

### 4. From enemy to friend

Read aloud or summarize the story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:1-19. Then have the group listen to Ken Medema's “Sittin’ by the Window Prayin’” (From CD *Yesterday's a Sign*), a song about Ananias going to meet Saul. **Discuss:** What enabled Ananias to address his enemy as “Brother Saul?” Have you ever experienced—or can you even imagine—an enemy becoming a friend by loving and praying for that person? What makes this change possible?

## Challenge

### 1. Friendship inventory

Hand out this inventory with these instructions: How many of these things do you do for your friends? Rate yourself 1 to 5 on each item (with 1 = “rarely” and 5 = “all the time”). Compare ratings with others in your group.

1 2 3 4 5 I attend friends' sporting events, piano recitals, drama performances.

1 2 3 4 5 I bite my tongue when I could gain a lot by telling a secret.

1 2 3 4 5 I only make promises I can keep.

1 2 3 4 5 I return borrowed items promptly—especially money.

1 2 3 4 5 I show up when I say I will.

1 2 3 4 5 I reply to E-mail and phone messages.

1 2 3 4 5 I share special rituals with my friends to reinforce our friendship.

### 2. Circle of friends

Form small groups and ask them to identify their friends using the following categories: *companions*, *mentors*, *soul friends*, *famous friends*, and *kindred spirits* (list the categories on newsprint and read chapter descriptions in *Way to Live*, page 199). Then provide stationery, stamps, and pens and invite each person to write a letter to one of the friends they named.

### 3. Become literal “companions.”

Encourage teens to organize a dinner club with several close friends. Once a month, they could plan a nice meal together at one of their homes. They could take turns inviting someone new each time.

### 4. Read and pray with friends.

Subscribe the teens in your group to the monthly teen devotional magazine *Devo'Zine* (<http://www.devozine.org>—click on *Subscribe*). Encourage them to gather in homes each month to share insights from their reading and to pray together. Use the *Devo'Zine Guide for Mentors and Small Groups* to facilitate the discussion (see same link as *Devo'Zine* and click on “Using *Devo'Zine* in Groups”).

### 5. Friendship forum

Invite a group of teens from your area to talk openly and honestly about diversity issues and to identify ways to cultivate friendships across class, racial, and religious boundaries. (Option: Organize or support a school club that has this goal. Monitor school activities that encourage or discourage boundary-crossing friendships.)



## 6. Kindred spirits

Encourage participants to plan a time for food and fellowship with friends who belong to faiths other than Christianity. Prior to the gathering, provide this list of discussion questions to all participants:

- How do people of your faith tradition feast and fast together to celebrate special religious seasons?
- What does your faith tradition teach you about welcoming the stranger and attending to the needs of others?
- How does your faith tradition teach respect for life and for the human body?
- How does your faith tradition shape your attitude toward serving God in all aspects of your life?
- What does your faith tradition teach about how human beings should treat the earth and its resources?
- What hymns or songs come to mind when you think of your faith?

## Worship ■■■

### Pray the scripture.

**Opening Sentence:** *Ruth binds herself to her mother-in-law Naomi in love and friendship.*

**Read:** Ruth 1:15-18

**Closing Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ,  
you befriend each child and everyone who needs you.  
You bind yourself to us in love and promise never to leave.  
Teach us to be good friends and faithful companions to each other,  
just as you have been to us.  
Amen.

### 1. Share love poems.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a. Then invite participants to read the poems they composed (Join the Story activity #3—"Four loves"). Close by leading the group in singing "Though I May Speak."

### 2. Friendship in Christ

Read aloud the final three paragraphs of the "Friends" chapter in *Way to Live* (page 200). Close by singing one of the following:

- "Bind Us Together"
- "Blest Be the Tie that Binds"
- "Jesu, Jesu"
- "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

### 3. Prayer Wall for Friends

Set up a newsprint wall and have markers available. Ask participants to think of friends they have who are in need of prayer. While soft music is playing, invite participants to go to the wall and write a prayer request for their friends. They can write as little or as much as they want, perhaps just a name, or write the situation of an anonymous person. As a group, spend time praying for the people listed on the wall.

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Friends at your next gathering. If so, do Challenge activity #2 or Worship activity #3.

### Link

1. *Circle of Friends* (1995) is a film about the lives, loves, and betrayals of three young Irish women as they go to Trinity College, Dublin. **Discuss:** What is your circle of friends like? Is it open and welcoming? Or is it enclosed by high walls, with a border guard to check the credentials of anyone who wants in?
2. Watch the film *Remember the Titans* (2000) and discuss how these teens develop friendships across racial boundaries.
3. *A Prayerbook for Spiritual Friends: Partners in Prayer* by Madeleine L'Engle and Luci Shaw (Augsburg Fortress, 1999).
4. *The Wisdom of Each Other* by Eugene H. Peterson (Zondervan, 2001). Through a series of letters written to an old friend, Peterson demonstrates that what we need most of the time isn't "expert advice" but rather a friend's wisdom.
5. "A Circle of Friends" (Chapter 7) in *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul-Tending for Youth Ministry* by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster (Upper Room Books, 1998).
6. The song "Circle of Friends" by Contemporary Christian music artists Point of Grace.



# Welcome

## Main Idea

**Create a space:** Welcoming is about creating space in our lives for other people, and especially for “strangers.” This means knowing how to be a grateful guest as well as a gracious host. Communities honor Jesus—who was often homeless himself—as they make people feel “at home” and offer them a place at the table.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

- Open with Focus activity #4 (15 minutes)
- Do Join the Story activity #2 (20 minutes)
- Do Challenge activity #2 (30 minutes)
- Close with Worship activity #1 (5 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Play the lunch table game.

Give everyone a slip of paper with a made-up name, an identity, a hero, and a favorite TV show. Invite them to picture themselves in a new high school on the first day of school at lunchtime. Tell them to wander the room and form themselves into “lunch tables” of six people each. **Ask:** How did your lunch table groups form? Were any unexpected alliances created? Was anyone left out? How did you feel as you did this exercise? How does this experience compare to real life?

### 2. Unintended consequences

Read to your group the book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff and Felicia Bond (HarperCollins, 1985). (Option: Read the 1991 sequel *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* by Numeroff and Bond.) Ask participants to share experiences of when hosting a guest involved more than you counted on. Then write “Good host” and “Good guest” on newsprint and ask the group to list qualities for each. **Ask:** What’s the difference between *tolerating* someone and *welcoming* that person? Tell about people you know who have a special knack for making people feel “at home.” What specific things do they do?

### 3. Master of the house

Form small groups and give the following instructions: You have just inherited a charming bed and breakfast in a small city. You can only keep it if you make it a “welcoming place.” What will you name it? What will be your specialty? What will you serve? Who will be your clientele? What furniture and decorations will you use? After time in small groups, gather participants in a larger group and let them compare their plans. **Ask:** Would you like to receive such an inheritance in real life? Why or why not?

### 4. Welcome mat

Have the group listen to the theme song from the old TV series *Cheers*. It describes our yearning to be in a place “where everybody knows your name.” Ask the group if they each have such a place in their own lives, a place where the welcome mat is always out for them. Ask those who do to tell what it is about the place that says “Welcome! We’re glad you’re here.”

### 5. Greeting rituals

In advance of the session, ask members of your group to research the origins of various greeting rituals (such as shaking hands and bowing) and expressions (such as *namaste* and *aloha*). Encourage them to share these with each other and practice them together. Don’t forget to include new people in the ritual by teaching it to them. (Option: Choose a special greeting ritual to share as a group. Be sure everyone remembers it and uses it to greet one another at your next gathering, and during the time in between too, if possible.)

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio text*

Matthew 25:31-40 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Two homeless brothers

Read aloud Luke 15:11-32 (“Prodigal Son” parable) and invite the group to consider how both brothers in this story become “homeless.” Form three groups—one representing the father’s perspective, one the older brother’s, and one the younger brother’s. Have each small group write a first-person account of how this story might end with everyone feeling “at home” again. Instruct each group to elect one person from each group to read these story endings. **Discuss:** What makes it difficult for the older son to welcome his younger brother back? Why do you suppose Jesus told this parable? Who in particular needed to hear this story? (Suggest participants read Luke 15:1-2 to find out.) Who in particular needs to hear this story today?

### 3. Entertain angels unawares.

Read aloud Genesis 18:1-8, the story of how Abraham and Sarah welcomed strangers into their home. Invite participants to list specific acts of hospitality. **Ask:** What huge difference did these strangers make in this elderly couple’s life? Read aloud Hebrews 13:2, which refers to the Genesis story. **Discuss:** Have you ever entertained angels without knowing it? What difference did this make in your life?

#### 4. Jesus as guest and host

**Ask:** What kind of people did Jesus hang out with? How did he treat them? Assign small groups to answer these questions by reading John 4:7-15, Matthew 8, Matthew 9:10-11, Luke 19:1-10, Luke 10:38-42, and John 2:1-11. Instruct the groups to identify the guests in each story, name the hosts, and then discuss the guest-host dynamics in these passages: Whenever Jesus shares meals with others, “guests” become “hosts” and “hosts” become “guests.” Contemplate the role reversals that occur in the story of the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). What happens when Jesus is “hosted” by Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10)? When Jesus comes as a guest to Martha (Luke 10:38-42), what does he teach her about hosting? How might guests end up as hosts, giving us the gift of their presence? What happens when an act of hospitality not only welcomes strangers, but also recognizes their holiness?

### Challenge

#### 1. Map your comfort zone.

Provide newsprint and markers. Ask each person to draw a circle in the middle of the page, and inside the circle sketch “the place you feel most comfortable.” Then **instruct** the group: Around this circle draw three concentric circles (total of four circles). In the second circle, sketch a few other places you feel “at ease.” In the third circle, sketch places you go that make you feel “uncomfortable.” In the fourth circle, sketch places that are completely “out of your comfort zone.” In small groups, invite participants to compare drawings and discuss what might help them feel more at ease in going to their third and fourth level circles.

#### 2. Church walkabout

Divide participants into teams and instruct the teams to walk around your church building. Ask them to pay attention to features that convey hospitality and those that do not, making notes about signs, directions, images on the walls, handicap accessibility. Later, ask participants as a group to discuss their findings and propose changes to make the church building a more welcoming space.

#### 3. Plan for *Las Posadas*.

*Las Posadas* (Spanish for “shelter” or “lodging”) is a traditional Mexican festival that reenacts Joseph’s search for room at the inn. For nine evenings in a row (from December 16 to 24), people “become” the weary couple or the innkeepers, exchanging at various houses the ancient request for shelter (*posada*) and the traditional rejection. On the ninth night, Christmas Eve, one innkeeper offers the couple his stable, and then people celebrate the birth of Jesus as well as the generosity of the innkeeper. *Las Posadas* is a ritual of rejection and welcoming, slamming the door on the needy and opening it wide. Help youth plan this ritual for the entire congregation or do it as a youth activity, processing to the homes of youth in the group. Suggest the group browse websites or partner with a local Hispanic congregation to learn more about *Las Posadas* customs and activities. (Option: Help the group learn and perform Dave Brubeck’s arrangement of “Cantos para Pedir las Posadas.”)

#### 4. Provide night shelter.

Encourage participants to volunteer as a group to assist in meal preparation and service at an overnight shelter for homeless persons. Lead them in reflecting afterwards on their experience by discussing these questions:

- What were your feelings as you served in this setting?
- How did the location and space communicate welcome and respect?
- What did you observe about how the guests and the hosts related to each other? Did you notice any power dynamics?
- What surprised you? What troubled you? What inspired faith for you?
- What will you take with you from this experience?

#### 5. Plan for panhandlers.

Suggest the group research organizations in your area that house and feed people on an emergency basis. Suggest they make a simple brochure with copies of addresses, phone numbers, and directions to nearby service agencies and provide these brochures to members of your congregation to give to panhandlers.

#### 6. Be good guests.

Plan group visits to worship with different local religious communities. In preparation for each visit, review with the group *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's Religious Ceremonies*, edited by Arthur J. Magida and Stuart Matlins, revised edition (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 1999).

#### 7. Refugee ministry

Invite workers from a local refugee ministry to speak with your group about sponsoring families or assisting with resettlement. Take the group on a virtual tour of a refugee camp at <http://www.msf.ca/refugeecamp> (sponsored by Doctors Without Borders). Another recommended resource is *With Our Own Eyes* by Don Mosley (Herald Press, 1996).

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *As a mother bird gathers her young beneath her wing, so God welcomes us and shelters us from harm.*

**Read:** Psalm 91

**Closing Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ,  
you invite the stranger and the sinner,  
the outcast and the orphan into your wide embrace.  
Like a nesting bird, you shelter and protect the weak  
beneath your compassionate wings.  
Hold us close and fill us with your love,  
that we might welcome others as you first welcomed us.  
Amen.

### 1. Celtic Rune of Hospitality

(Help the group memorize this rune by repeating one line at a time, then two together, and so forth.)

We saw a stranger yesterday.  
We put food in the eating place,  
Drink in the drinking place,  
Music in the listening place,  
And with the sacred name of the triune God  
He blessed us and our house,  
Our cattle and our dear ones.  
As the lark says in her song:  
Often, often, often goes the Christ  
In the stranger's guise.

### 2. Hymns

- "Help Us Accept Each Other"
- "Here I Am, Lord"
- "Here in This Place"
- "Jesu, Jesu"
- "O for a World"

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Welcome at your next gathering. If you do, ask some members to do Focus activity #5, and others to prepare for Challenge activity #3 or Challenge activity #4 sometime during the week.

Link 

1. Learn about the **Sojourners Community** and their ministries in Washington, D.C. at <http://www.sojo.net>.
2. ***Making Room: Recovering Hospitality As a Christian Tradition***, by Christine D. Pohl (Eerdmans, 1999). Study guide also available.
3. ***The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*** by Parker J. Palmer (Crossroad, 1983).
4. ***Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*** by Henri J. M. Nouwen (Image, 1986).
5. ***The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day*** by Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement (Harper San Francisco, 1997).
6. The song "Be Our Guest" from Disney's animated film *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).
7. View and discuss ***The Lunch Date***, a 12-minute story-on-film by Adam Davidson that won an Oscar as Best Short Film in 1991. (Order video from The Lantz Office, 212-586-0200.)
8. ***The Visitor*** (33 minutes) and ***Martin the Cobbler*** (30 minutes) are short films; both are based on Tolstoy's classic story, "Where Love Is." A cobbler named Martin feels abandoned by God after losing his family. A friend from the past assures him that an important visitor is coming. Because Martin thinks the visitor will be the Lord, he finds new strength and faith. (Order from <http://www.visionvideo.com>.)
9. ***Weapons of the Spirit*** (1989) tells the moving story of a mountain community in Nazi-occupied France in which 5,000 Jews were taken in and sheltered by 5,000 Christians. Pierre Sauvage—the film's writer, producer, and director—was born in this unique Christian oasis, Le Chambon, at a time when much of his family was being tortured and murdered in the Nazi death camps. It was only at the age of 18 that he learned that he and his family were Jewish and survivors of the Holocaust. (See <http://www.chambon.org/weapons.htm>.)





# Forgiveness

## Main Idea

**Forgive and be forgiven:** God created us to be in relationship with God and with others. When our “relational web” gets frayed and torn, we need to learn how to name and let go of the wrongs we have suffered and the wrongs we have done. Receiving and sharing God’s forgiveness helps us to mend what was torn and sets us free to enter the future with one another.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity #3 (15 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #3 (20 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #5, along with the feet- or hand-washing ceremony (40 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.




## Focus

### 1. Mime revenge and forgiveness.

Form groups of three. Ask each team to create two short mimes—one for revenge and another for forgiveness. Then have the groups perform these mimes for the whole group. Invite comments afterwards on similar themes the group observed.

### 2. Case studies

Divide participants into three groups and assign each group one of the three stories of Denise, Eric, and Michele from pages 218–220 of the Forgiveness chapter in *Way to Live*. Ask groups to discuss these stories using the following questions:

-  How have relationships been damaged?
-  What are obstacles to forgiveness?
-  How can the relationship be healed?

### 3. Forgiveness—true or false

Make a handout with the following statements and ask participants to mark them true or false.

- Forgiveness is easy.
- Forgiveness is covering up your feelings.
- Forgiveness is condoning or even tolerating the wrong that was done to you.
- Forgiveness is not as satisfying as getting even.
- Forgiveness is a sign of weakness.
- Forgiveness is just mouthing the words.
- Forgiveness is excusing the person who hurt you.
- Forgiveness is dismissing the right to seek justice and even reparations.
- Forgiveness is inviting someone to hurt you again.
- Forgiveness is something you do all alone.
- Forgiveness is forgetting.
- Forgiveness is hard work.
- Forgiveness is acknowledging your feelings of pain and hurt and sadness.
- Forgiveness is naming the wrong that was done to you.
- Forgiveness is a sign of remarkable strength.
- Forgiveness is holding the other accountable for what he or she did to you.
- Forgiveness is overcoming fear and shame and blame.
- Forgiveness is a decision not to suffer anymore.
- Forgiveness is moving on and taking steps to health and wholeness.
- Forgiveness is without any strings attached.
- Forgiveness is a process.
- Forgiveness is a declaration of hope in a better future.

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Matthew 5:43-48 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Speck and log

Make two columns on newsprint headed by the words “Speck” and “Log.” Read aloud Matthew 7:1-5 and ask the group to list examples of “specks” we see in the eyes of others while having “logs” in our own eyes. Encourage participants to think about this on a national as well as personal level. **Ask:** How do these “logs” make it more difficult for forgiveness to occur?

### 3. The unforgiving servant

Read aloud Matthew 18:15-20. This is the “manual” Jesus gives his disciples on reconciling with someone within the church. **Ask:** Why does Jesus recommend first taking up the matter directly with the one who has offended us? (The exception to this principle would be in cases of physical or sexual abuse.) Now read aloud Matthew 18:21-22. **Ask:** Why does Peter seem intent on knowing how many times he has to follow this procedure? Do you think Jesus was serious about forgiving the same person this many times? For further reflection, dig into the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35). Act out this parable by assigning the following roles: narrator, king, servant #1, servant #2, fellow servants, prison warden. **Ask:** What happens if we fail to forgive small debts when we've been forgiven a large one?







### 4. Jesus and Judas

Ask for volunteers to read the following passages aloud in this order from Matthew 26:14-16, 26:20-25, 26:47-50, and 27:3-5. **Ask:** Do you imagine Jesus forgave Judas? Why or why not? Then have the group read and reflect on the poem “The Ballad of Judas Iscariot” by nineteenth-century poet Robert Williams Buchanan (describes the resurrected Jesus welcoming Judas to the banquet).

## Challenge

### 1. Non-forgiving strategies

List the six non-forgiving strategies below on newsprint and read descriptions from the Forgiveness chapter in *Way to Live* (pages 225–226):

-  The perpetual victim
-  The doormat
-  The angry abuser
-  The caustic cynic
-  The denier
-  The projector

Have participants briefly discuss each strategy and ask them if they wish to add another strategy to this list. Then divide them into groups to identify at least *one constructive behavior* to help move each of the above toward a more forgiving way to live.

## 2. Assurance of pardon

Does your worship service include a prayer of confession and assurance of pardon (or declaration of forgiveness)? If so, copy the words used for the assurance of pardon to review with your group. **Ask:** What is the basis for pardon? What images are used to convey forgiveness of sins (example, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us”)? Form groups to compose their own declarations. Pass the declarations along to the pastor or worship committee as feedback or for use in future worship services.

## 3. Bricks in your backpack

Get enough bricks or large rocks for each member of your group. Write words on the bricks such as *anger, resentment, jealousy, fear, contempt, disgust*, and so on. Stack these bricks as a wall in the middle of the room. Invite participants to talk about how our unwillingness to forgive causes us to carry around grudges that are as heavy as these bricks. Challenge those in the group who currently harbor a grudge against someone to take a brick or large rock and carry it in their briefcase or backpack throughout the coming week. Ask them to return the bricks the following week and shape them into a cross as you read aloud Matthew 11:28.

## 4. “I’m sorry.”

Read the scene from Herb Gardner’s play *A Thousand Clowns* when Murray tells Sandra about his experiment in standing on an Manhattan street corner and saying “I’m sorry” in such a way that passersby forgave him. (Option: Show the scene from the 1965 film.) Invite the group to discuss how it feels when someone sincerely says “I’m sorry” to them. Ask them to think of one person they need to apologize to or to forgive during the coming week and to commit to doing so.

## 5. Acting on it by acting it out.

Have the group identify some of the words, actions, and gestures of forgiveness. Invite them to discuss concrete ways we can express to someone that we are sorry for what we have done and to share personal stories of when such gestures have helped heal broken relationships. (Option: Following this discussion, plan a handwashing or footwashing ceremony as a closing worship experience for your group.)

## 6. Write your anger.

Encourage participants to write letters to the person they need to forgive, expressing their rage and anger and holding nothing back. Be sure they DON’T mail the letters. Later, have participants write another letter after reading to themselves the first one. Allow them to rage more. Instruct them to keep this letter too. Finally, have participants write a third letter after reading the first two. They’ll probably notice less rage in themselves by this third letter. Be sure participants DON’T mail any of the letters. They should keep them all and read them from time to time. Encourage participants to let go of the letters when they are ready—to burn them and scatter the ashes.

## Worship

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *When we confess our sin, God forgives us, heals us, and sets us free.*

**Read:** Psalm 32:1-7

**Closing prayer:** God of mercy,  
you know our failings and our fears.  
We can hide no secret from you.  
Forgive our sin. Turn our hearts toward you again.  
And grant us the grace to forgive others  
as you have forgiven us through your Son, Jesus.  
Amen.

### 1. Pray the prayer of Saint Francis.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.

### 2. Forgiveness walk

Have the group do a strolling prayer or walk a labyrinth (outside or on the floor), praying one of these prayers:

“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”  
(Matthew 11:28, NRSV)

### 3. Hymns

- “Amazing Grace”
- “Down by the Riverside”
- “Forgive Our Sins, As We Forgive”
- “Standing in the Need of Prayer”

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Forgiveness at your next gathering. If you do, check out the film in Link activity #3 sometime during the week. Conclude your viewing by singing one of the songs in Worship activity #3.

### Link

1. A **Campaign for Forgiveness Research** is an effort to deepen our understanding of forgiveness and to begin the process of building many different roads to reconciliation (see <http://www.forgiving.org>).
2. Filmed along the route that the actual Alvin Straight traversed in 1994 from Laurens, Iowa, to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin, *The Straight Story* (1999) chronicles Alvin's patient odyssey and those he meets along the way. When not rolling along at five miles an hour aboard his '66 lawnmower, Alvin encounters a number of strangers who color his pilgrimage toward reconciliation with an estranged brother.
3. The 1995 film *Dead Man Walking*, based on Sister Helen Prejean's 1993 non-fiction book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, portrays the relationship between Sister Prejean and Matthew Poncelet, a convicted rapist/murderer on Louisiana's death row.
4. The film *On Golden Pond* (1981) is the story of how Norman Thayer, a retired professor, becomes reconciled with his estranged daughter Chelsea as he cares for her stepson at the family's summer cottage.
5. *Don't Forgive Too Soon: Extending the Two Hands That Heal* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1997) connects the forgiveness process with stages of grief.
6. In *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Doubleday, 2000) Archbishop Desmond Tutu shares lessons learned while presiding over South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
7. *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How* by Lewis B. Smedes (Ballantine, 1997).



# Justice

## Main Idea

**Seek justice for all:** God wants all people to blossom and flourish, yet unjust social structures cause many to wither and perish. Seeking justice includes trying to be fair to people we meet and also working for fair treatment in society. God's justice means more than "balancing the scales" and making things fair, however. God's justice works through God's mercy, which gives human beings the freedom and the grace to live justly and mercifully with one another.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activity #2 (20 minutes)

Do Focus activity #6 (20 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #5 (20 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #2 (10 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. "It's not fair."

Ask participants to recall incidents when something blatantly "unfair" occurred. In sharing stories, encourage them to **discuss**: What was at stake and what was the grievance in each case? Did fairness ever prevail, or was there a lingering sense that the situation was not resolved fairly? What did this experience teach you about fairness and justice? (Option: Choose a characteristic such as height or eye color and instruct everyone of that type to remain silent while the rest of the group briefly discusses a random topic such as reactions to a current movie. Then invite the silenced folks to share their feelings about the fairness of the process.)

### 2. World Volleyball

Play a volleyball game in which players represent nations with certain powers and handicaps. See <http://www.churchworldservice.org/wecantoo/sim4.html>.

### 3. Justice collage

Form groups and give each group poster board, scissors, glue, and a stack of recent newspapers or news magazines. Ask them to make a collage of current justice issues. (Option: Assign each group a different justice issue such as racial, economic, or gender justice.)

### 4. Hungry Decisions

Invite your group to reflect on the realities of world hunger by using the “Hungry Decisions” simulation (available at <http://www.churchworldservice.org/decisions/index.htm>).

### 5. Play “Loaded Monopoly.”

Using a Monopoly game board, give each player an envelope with money and property, chance cards, and community chest cards that assign them to different economic groups. Play the game and reflect on the fairness factor. (Option: Give out M&Ms according to the distribution of the world's wealth and then give people a sheet for purchasing certain goods such as housing, food, indoor plumbing, and so on.)

### 6. Beyond fixing

Write the term *noblesse oblige* on newsprint and ask what this means. The literal meaning in French is “nobility obligates,” stipulating that those of high rank or birth have an obligation to help others. Ask the group what some of the potential pitfalls are when service projects are initiated “from above” by those in positions of power. One liability of service from above is the desire to “fix problems.” *Fixing* is a form of judgment that leads to disconnection. Ask the group to consider this quotation from Rachel Naomi Remen:

“In fixing there is an inequality of expertise that can easily become a moral distance. . . . We serve life not because it is broken, but because it is holy.” (Quoted in *The Godbearing Life*, pages 113–114)

Ask the group to describe how *compassion* is different from fixing. Compassion means to suffer alongside, to be present to others in such a way that the gap between servant and those served is bridged.

### 7. Whose justice?

Have participants write the following descriptions in random order on newsprint. Ask them to work in teams and put the descriptions in order, ranging from simple to more complex ways of understanding justice, and to give illustrations for each mode. Invite the group to identify their personal “default mode.”

Before the groups begin working, **say:** How we experience justice and fairness can evolve as we grow. Below is a sequence of how we come to know justice in increasingly more complex ways. While the first two below are characteristic of children, adults in given circumstances can be oriented primarily around these perspectives, too.

- Justice means that people who are bigger and older are in control and have power over you: “might makes right.”



- Justice means that people who are the most useful to you should get preferential treatment: “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”
- Justice means that “good people” (as defined by my family and friends) should receive the best treatment.
- Justice means whatever “the law” says it means: law-abiders deserve just treatment under the law.
- Justice means that laws must be held accountable to treating all persons as ends in themselves and not means to an end.

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Micah 6:6-8 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Justice for the king

Read aloud or summarize the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-27), a steamy tale of lust, intrigue, and kingly irresponsibility. **Ask:** How many examples of injustice do you find in this story? Who was guilty? Now read aloud “the rest of the story” in chapter 12:1-19. Invite the group to discuss how Nathan exposed David’s injustice by appealing to his sense of justice. **Ask:** How did Martin Luther King Jr. use a similar strategy in exposing racial injustice in this country?

### 3. Justice rap for your home town

Write *foretell* and *forth-tell* on newsprint. Explain to the group that prophets do not “foretell the future” as much as they “forth-tell the present.” Gifted with vivid imaginations, the Hebrew prophets read the signs of the times through their visions and dreams. Form two groups and assign Amos 5:21-24 to one group and Isaiah 58:6-12 to the other. Ask each group to list specific images of justice and injustice in these passages. Then reflect on your own town or nation: What are parallels to these images? Use these images and contemporary parallels to compose a “justice rap” for your local community. Allow the groups to share their list of images and the justice rap with each other.

## Challenge

### 1. Plant a justice garden.

One prevalent image of justice in the Bible is that of a well-watered garden (see Isaiah 58:11). God’s original plan included a garden called Eden (see Genesis 2:8-9, 15-16). Encourage the group to look in gardening magazines, consult gardeners they know, and draw up a landscaping plan for a “justice garden” on your church property or in a community garden. They should consider what kinds of plants and perhaps even some sculptures (clay, wood, scrap metal) they would like to include in the garden. Encourage them to work together to keep this garden flourishing as a symbol of their commitment to justice, and suggest they deliver the produce or flowers to a shelter. (Option:

Encourage the group to inform their research by reading a biography about César Chávez or Dolores Huerta, who organized the United Farm Workers of America. **Ask:** What agricultural justice initiatives is the UFW currently advocating?—see <http://www.ufw.org>.)

## 2. Learn about local advocacy.

Encourage participants to learn about the work of Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative of Alabama (<http://www.eji.org>). Invite local legal defense advocates to address your group on the topic of criminal justice.

## 3. Justice in other faith traditions

Invite a rabbi to speak with your group about the Jewish concepts of “justice” (*mishpat*) and “righteousness” (*tsedaqah*). (Option: Help your group host an interfaith conversation, asking each panelist to share a story that conveys the theme of justice and to explain in terms of their faith tradition the difference between the following dimensions of justice: retributive, distributive, restorative.)

## 4. Church social justice

Encourage participants to check out the websites for your Christian association or denomination and to report on four justice initiatives—two national and two international—in which your church is actively involved. Encourage the group to choose one of these initiatives to support.

## 5. Singing about God's justice

Make copies of justice hymn lyrics (see Worship section below) and have participants circle God's actions and underline human actions in these texts. Invite the group to discuss what these songs teach us about human cooperation with God's passion for justice.

## 6. Fair use

Encourage participants to see World Resources Institute data (<http://earthtrends.wri.org>) for profiles of energy and resource consumption. Suggest they compare annual per capita consumption by the United States and other high-income nations with consumption by the rest of the world's population. Help them prepare a newsletter article about the justice issues this comparison raises.

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *God brings justice to the poor and the powerless, the stranger and enslaved.*

**Read:** Psalm 146

**Closing Prayer:** Faithful God,  
you never break your promises.  
We pray for all who are orphaned by war,  
bent low by poverty, or held captive by prejudice.  
Teach us to practice your justice and seek your mercy  
until every person flourishes in the garden of your grace.  
Amen.

### 1. Litany for justice

Adapt for your group "A Litany for All Involved in Seeking Justice"  
available at <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/forum/rjweek/christ/plite.shtml>.

See also the liturgy and justice bibliography prepared by the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy at <http://www.liturgy.nd.edu/bibliography/justice.shtml>.

### 2. Justice hymns

- "Go Down, Moses"
- "Let Justice Roll Like a River"
- "Oh, Freedom"
- "We Are Called"
- "We Shall Overcome"
- "What Does the Lord Require?"
- "When a Poor One (Cuando el Pobre)"

For more hymns, see <http://www.osjspm.org/songslst.htm> or the social concern section of your church's hymnal.

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Justice at your next gathering. If so, bring ideas for a justice garden (Challenge activity #1) or do Challenge activity #3, so your group will be reminded you're not alone in seeking justice.

## Link

1. In *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Owl Books, 2002), author Barbara Ehrenreich steps out of her upper-middle-class world to take on the challenge of living on entry-level wages of low-skill jobs such as being a waitress, a cleaning maid, and a Walmart employee.
2. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* by Naomi Klein (Picador USA, 2000) presents an account of brands' function within the global economy—not just in media and on the street but increasingly in the schools as well. Klein discusses at length the tactic of hiring “permatemps” who can do most of the work and receive few, if any, benefits such as health care, paid vacations, or stock options.
3. *Free the Children: A Young Man Fights Against Child Labor and Proves that Children Can Change the World* by Craig Kielburger with Kevin Major (Harper Perennial, 1999). As a 12-year-old, Kielburger, a Canadian, began to research the issue of child labor in South Asia. He enlisted the help of schoolmates and began spreading the word about conditions in factories in such distant countries as India, Pakistan, and Thailand. **Free the Children**, which he founded, has raised awareness of labor conditions in South Asia as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars for the cause.  
See <http://www.freethechildren.org>.
4. *Romero* (1989). This film takes place in El Salvador, where the new bishop speaks out against the death squads and the terror campaign the government is using in an attempt to crush the guerilla war that is being waged against them. Romero continues to oppose the violence as the stakes are continually raised.
5. *Gandhi* (1982). This film is the story of how Mohandas K. Gandhi introduced the doctrine of non-violent resistance to the colonized people of India and led them to national independence.
6. *The Long Walk Home* (1991). This film dramatizes the events in 1955-1956 in Montgomery, Alabama, when blacks boycotted public transportation because they were forced to sit at the back of the bus.
7. *Places in the Heart* (1984). In this film a small farm is transformed as a widow with two young children opens her household to strangers in the midst of the Great Depression. Social injustice and wrongdoing are overcome by grace and mercy.
8. Read the story “**The Bishop’s Candlesticks**” adapted from Victor Hugo’s 1862 novel *Les Miserables*.
9. *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* by Peter Menzel (Sierra Club Books, 1994) has photographs comparing the economic status of people in many different countries.



# Grieving

## Main Idea

**Share your grief:** The death of a loved one comes crashing in like a sudden storm. To lament means to go public with our pain, sharing our tears and anger with God and others instead of keeping it all bottled up inside. Through lament we trace the rainbow through the rain.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #2 (20 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #3 (30 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #3 (10 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Dying—to talk about it

Form several small groups and give each group newsprint and one marker. Ask them to have “a silent conversation” about death on the newsprint, taking turns writing words or short phrases. After several minutes, invite the groups to share their newsprint commentary with others, noting common themes. (Option: Compare your group’s thoughts and feelings about death to those expressed in “The Day of the Dead” holiday in Hispanic cultures. Have the group watch the 21-minute documentary *El Dia de los Muertos* [1991, in English] produced by the Institute of Texan Cultures [800-776-7651].)

### 2. Dying—not to talk about it

Suggest the group play charades, having several people act out a euphemism about death or dying (kicked the bucket, passed away, croaked, pushing up daisies, and so on). If the group is large, form several smaller groups so that everyone can get involved in thinking of the euphemisms and acting them out. **Ask:** What do these euphemisms reveal about our cultural attitudes toward death?

### 3. Broken beyond repair

Share this story:

A seven-year-old boy had been playing at a next-door neighbor's and came home later than the agreed time. With his head hanging low, he trudged into the kitchen where his mother was busy preparing dinner. "Tom," she said, "Where have you been? I was expecting you half an hour ago." "Sorry I'm late, Mom. We were playing outside and Chris broke his new Tonka Truck." "Oh," his mother offered in an understanding tone of voice, "so you stayed to help Chris fix his truck?" "No," Tom replied. "I stayed to help him feel sad."

In a society obsessed with "fixing the problem," sometimes the most faithful response is simply to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. Ask the group to make a list of things that can't be fixed when broken. Ask participants to recall a time when something they cherished was broken beyond repair. **Ask:** How did this make you feel? How is the death of a loved one similar? Do you remember the first time someone you knew died? How did you feel? What did your body do? What did you do to cope?

### 4. Mourning colors

Give participants drawing paper, paints or watercolors, and a brush. Ask them to paint a picture of what it feels like to lose something or someone they cherish. The picture can be shapes, colors, designs, or a specific image. Play an adagio or sad music in the background while they paint. Then invite them to share by **asking:**

- What colors did you choose, and why?
- What in your picture expresses your sense of loss?

(Option: As each person is showing his or her picture, draw a small teardrop on that person's right cheek with face paint to represent sadness. As a closing worship ritual, read aloud Revelation 21:1-4 and have participants take turns painting a rainbow over each person's teardrop.)

### 5. Getting angry with God

Ask the group if they feel it's really okay to come before God "just as we are," with our full range of feelings. Does this include raging at God? After several responses, suggest the group consider the testimony of Ms. Johnson, a courageous veteran of the Civil Rights struggle:

I could not have lived to be a 74-year-old black woman in this country without getting fed up with God on a regular basis. But you know what? It's okay for me to be angry with God, because God and I have a long-term relationship, and God can handle my anger. And in my Bible, I read the Psalms, and they give me a language for my anger.

**Ask:** Do we have an intimate enough relationship with God to say this? Or are we afraid to let God know how we truly feel about injustice, oppression, and suffering?

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Psalm 46 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Psalms of lament

**Ask** the group: What's the difference between whining and lament? Can you think of any recent world events (catastrophes) that needed to be lamented, not just by individuals, but by an entire community? Have you ever taken part in a communal service of mourning? What was it like for you?

Ask participants to choose a partner and identify elements of biblical lament (below) in one of the lament psalms (6, 22, 28, 42, 43, 69, 77):

- Invocation of God (calling on God to be present)
- Complaint
- Recollection of God's saving power/acts
- Request /demand for help
- Thanksgiving for God's (as yet unknown) response

Ask each person to write a brief personal lament using the above structure. Read aloud these laments in your closing worship.

### 3. Comfort quotes

The Christian tradition has named the funeral "a service of witness to the resurrection." Discuss the significance of this name with your group. Then have different people read sentences of scripture that are typically read at such services to comfort mourners: John 11:25-26; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 103:1-5; Psalm 121:7-8; Romans 8:38-39; Revelation 1:17-18; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 5:4; Romans 14:8; John 10:14, 27-28; John 14:1-3. Ask participants to select a passage that gives them special comfort. Encourage them to memorize these verses and speak them to one another as "benedictions" at the end of your session. (Option: Provide calligraphy pens and paper to write scripture sentences from scriptures, poetry, or hymns so they can be given as gifts or kept in a notebook of "comfort quotes.")

### 4. Jesus wept

Read aloud the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). Appoint a narrator and stage the interactions among main characters in the story. Then ask the group these questions:

- What was Jesus' relationship to Lazarus?
- What euphemism does Jesus use for death, and how do his disciples misunderstand?
- In what ways does Martha interact with Jesus? What about her sister Mary?
- What moves Jesus to tears? Why was he "greatly disturbed" if he knew Lazarus would rise again?
- Why was it significant that Lazarus had been dead *four* days?
- What does Jesus reveal about God through this miracle?

## 5. From Psalm 22 to Psalm 23

Read Psalm 22:1-2, 11-19, 21b-24 aloud. Then invite participants to read the verses silently. Ask one or several of the following questions:

- With which line or image from the psalm do you most identify?
- In your words, how do you describe how your body or spirit feels when you are depressed, feel despair, or are threatened by others?
- Do you call out to anyone when you feel this way? To whom?
- Why do you think Jesus remembered and said this psalm as he was dying?
- Why does this psalm end in thanksgiving?
- True or false: God will listen to you when you are in despair and act to save you. Explain your answer.
- Describe a time when God saved you from despair or depression.

(Note: Clinically diagnosed depression may require medical care. Be alert to this kind of depression among group participants.)

Now read aloud Psalm 23. Instruct participants to use the reverse of the sheet on which they drew “mourning colors” to draw a second picture of what *hope* feels like (its color, shape, texture, and so on). Invite each person to share again by **asking**:

- What colors did you choose and why?
- What in this picture makes you feel happiness or joy?
- Which picture was harder to draw, and why?

(Option: While each person is showing his or her picture, use face paint to draw a sun on that person's left cheek.)



## Challenge

### 1. Write lament letters.

Are members of your group grieving the death of a close friend or relative? Encourage them to write letters to the deceased and to share their pain and grief over their loss of this person to death.

### 2. Lament in three acts

Think about someone who has died (even a pet). Help the group write a “three-act play” as described on page 253 of the Grieving chapter of *Way to Live*:

Act I: What is your argument with God?

Act II: In what specific ways has God cared for and provided for you?

Act III: How can you put your trust in God and tell God “thanks”?

(Option: Bring guitars, drums, microphones and amplifiers and set up a recording studio in the church basement. Discuss with the group the biblical experience of exile and read psalms of lament, especially Psalms 6, 22, 28, 42, 43, and 69, to discover a range of images for expressing their own feelings of anger and disappointment about life. Encourage them to play through the pain and try to incorporate all three lament movements in their music.)

### 3. Piano solace

The chapter on Grieving relates the story of how Thomas A. Dorsey composed “Precious Lord” following the death of his wife and baby boy. Have the group sing this song together or listen to a recording. **Ask:** What does Dorsey express to God through his words and music? Now have the group listen to the song “Prayer for Taylor” by Michael W. Smith (from *Freedom* CD). A couple of months before Taylor’s death, Michael recalls participating in a small prayer group: “Everyone else prayed out loud and I agreed with them but kept silent. I was discouraged and distraught. I went to the piano, closed my eyes, and poured it out to the Lord.” **Ask:** What does Smith express to God through his words and music? Help participants identify other songs or instrumental music composed as a response to grief. Invite them to bring music to share at the next session.

### 4. The gift of anger

Write this quotation on newsprint for group reflection:

“The gift of anger is that it locates our wounds, helps us defend ourselves and energizes us to correct what needs correction” (*Don’t Forgive Too Soon* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, Paulist Press, 1997, page 42).

Discuss ways to honor anger by paying attention to our feelings without “editing,” even to the fantasies anger evokes within us. This doesn’t mean we’re called to *act* on these anger fantasies (“Don’t get mad, get even!”) or *publish* them (like Eminem’s rap songs). But neither are we called to *deny* anger by telling ourselves “Nice people don’t get angry” or “I shouldn’t be feeling this way.” What are things we can *do* to deal constructively with our anger, especially when it flows from grief? (See Grieving chapter for suggestions.)

## 5. The brink of despair

Invite someone who has worked the local suicide hotline to talk with your group about what happens and how to talk to someone “on the edge.”

## 6. Make a “shivah call.”

Tell the group: In the Jewish tradition, families “sit *shivah*” for seven days following a death (the word *shivah* means “seven”). Members of the community make a “shivah call” to the mourners. Christians too can walk with someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. Talk with your group about how to make such visits. Advise them that having an open heart and a willingness to listen is the most important way to show support. They should refrain from giving lectures or explanations (it might be helpful to list examples of what *not* to say) and learn to ask open-ended questions that don't put the mourner on the defensive. They may say the name of the person who died, keeping in mind the phrase “Tell me about it”:

- Tell me about (name of person who died).
- Tell me about your relationship with him/her.
- Tell me what was special to you about (name of person who died).
- Tell me what you'll miss about (name of person who died).
- Have you thought about ways to celebrate his/her life in the coming years?

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *When we are weak and full of sorrow, we cry out to God in whom we trust.*

**Read:** Psalm 31:9-16 or 2 Samuel 1:23-27

**Closing Prayer:** When our hearts are weak with sorrow  
and our bodies ache with grief,  
we cry to you, O God.  
When we don't have words to pray,  
receive our sighs and tears.  
Comfort all who mourn; mend their broken hearts.  
Let your children sing a joyful song again.  
Amen.

## 1. For all the saints

Help your group create an All Saints Day worship service for those grieving deaths within the past year. Suggest the group write the names of the deceased on crosses and attach these to the ends of the rows or pews. Remind the group to include moments of silence, time to express memories, and songs/music in the worship service. They could also weave in the elements of biblical lament above. See <http://www.aidsquilt.org> for commemorating those who have died of AIDS.

## 2. Service of anointing

Help your group prepare for this service by procuring a small vial of oil (any olive or scented oil will work fine). Explain to the group that anointing is used prior to surgery, when someone is in pain or has chronic illness, after a divorce or other broken relationship, or for other healing. It is a ritual of the church that helps restore our relationship to God and to others. It includes opportunity for the anointed person(s) to confess anything that is bothering them, to ask for forgiveness, and to forgive others. Read aloud James 5:13-16. Then invite everyone to think for a few moments in silence about any broken relationships or troubling areas in their life. **Say:** As you feel led by a desire for healing, reconciliation, or forgiveness, come and sit in this chair and be anointed. I will touch you with a bit of oil on my hand, anointing you “for the strengthening of your faith, for the forgiveness of sin, and for the healing of your body, mind, and spirit according to God’s grace.” Then I will close with prayer. (Anoint with the sign of the cross on the forehead. To bless, place your hands on each person’s head or shoulders.)

## 3. Prayers for Those We Miss

Have each participant think of someone for whom they still grieve in some way (because of death, moving away, growing apart, and so on). Ask them to think of one thing they miss about that person and one thing they still cherish about that person. Have participants get into pairs and share these things with each other. Pray for each other and for God’s assistance in their grieving.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Grieving at your next gathering. If so, prepare for Challenge activity #2 and Worship activity #2.**

## Link

1. *Healing the Bereaved Child: Grief Gardening, Growth Through Grief, and Other Touchstones for Caregivers* by Alan Wolfelt (Accelerated Development, 1996).
2. In *Dying Well: Peace and Possibilities at the End of Life* (Riverhead Books, 1998), Ira Byock mentions five common tasks for the dying. The tasks are, “I forgive you,” “Please, forgive me,” “Thank you,” “I love you,” and “good-bye.”
3. *Ordinary People* is a novel by Judith Guest (Ballantine, 1976) and also a 1980 film. Conrad Jarrett is a high school senior who lives in an affluent North Shore suburb of Chicago. Conrad’s older brother Buck drowned when the sailboat the two of them were riding in capsized during a storm. Racked by “survivor guilt,” Conrad attempted suicide by slashing his wrists and spent four weeks recovering in a hospital. His mother and father are both trying to move on with life by denying what’s happened and pretending everything is okay. Conrad begins to get in touch with his own repressed anger and move toward healing through the skillful and compassionate intervention of his therapist.

4. ***Lament for a Son*** by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Eerdmans, 1987). The author pours out his soul after his 25-year-old son Eric dies in a mountain-climbing accident. Post the following quotations for group reflection. Play quiet music and invite participants to walk around the room and read the quotes.

When we gather now there's always someone missing, his absence as present as our presence, his silence as loud as our speech....When we're all together, we're not all together. (page 14)

I shall look at the world through tears. Perhaps I shall see things that dry-eyed I could not see. (page 26)

Some say nothing because they find the topic too painful for themselves. They fear they will break down. So they put on a brave face and lid their feelings—never reflecting, I suppose, that this adds new pain to the sorrow of their suffering friends. Your tears are salve on our wound, your silence is salt. (page 35)

I have changed, yes. For the better, I do not doubt. But without a moment's hesitation I would exchange those changes for Eric back. (page 73)

God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers. . . . Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God. (page 81)



# Music

## Main Idea

**Singing our lives:** Music isn't some shrink-wrapped product you buy at the store. Making music rises up from our physical bodies and from the very physics of creation itself, opens us to be in community, and attunes us to the peace and justice God desires for all people.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Join the Story activity #4 (20 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #2 (20 minutes)

Close with Join the Story activity #1 (20 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Music and memories

Invite the group to discuss one of the following:

- Is there a particular song or a piece of music that goes straight to your heart? What feelings does it stir up in you?
- (For teens) Do you have a favorite song that you enjoy singing in the car with family or friends? How do you feel when you are singing this song in the car? (For adults) Recall a favorite song that you enjoyed singing in the car with family or friends. What memories does it bring back for you now?
- Recall a recent occasion when you heard music that triggered a memory. What was the occasion, the music, and the memory?

### 2. Surround sound

For previous generations—before electric sound recording—music was always a live event or performance. Today we can listen to recorded music almost anytime and anywhere—even in stores.

**Discuss:** Is music now so commonplace that something has been lost? Does hearing music playing everywhere make us take it for granted or appreciate it less?

### 3. What makes it *music*?

Prepare a tape or CD before the group time with a great variety of music styles and other sounds. Include instrumentals, pure percussion, whale sounds, solo voice, birds singing, classical music, rock, and whatever else strikes your fancy. Play the tape or CD for the group. Then **discuss:** What is the difference between music and noise? What makes something music to some people and noise to others? Is everything we call music really music?

### 4. Nature's music

Go outdoors as a group and listen to the "music" of nature around you for fifteen minutes. **Discuss:** What songs do you hear creation singing?

### 5. Be music critics.

National Public Radio selected the "Top 100 most important American musical works of the twentieth century" (available at <http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/vote/100list.html>). Print out this list and post it on a wall. Give adults red markers and teens green markers, and invite each person to review the list and put a check mark by his/her top five favorites. Have participants compare adult and teen preferences and then discuss their selections in small groups. **Ask:** If you could add one music piece to this list, what would it be? Let everyone write his or her addition on the list.

### 6. Drum Circle

Put a variety of percussion instruments (drums, tambourines, rain sticks, finger cymbals, maracas, wood blocks, bells, and so on) in the middle of a table or on a cloth on the floor. Then (as Mark W. says on page 261 of *Way to Live*) tell participants, "Choose the one that seems right for you." When everyone has an instrument and has tried it out, invite someone to get the group started with a beat. Others should join in as they feel moved. Let the rhythms and sounds continue as long as seems right; then let participants drop out when the time seems right. Let the silence ring.

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Psalm 100 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Compose your own psalms.

The Book of Psalms is an entire songbook in the Bible. Ask participants to locate psalms of praise and thanksgiving, and encourage them to review the *Way to Live* chapter on Grieving to learn about psalms of lament. Suggest they compose and record original songs of praise and lament. For examples of how to render the Psalms in contemporary language, see Michael Morgan's *The Psalter for Christian Worship* (Witherspoon Press, 1999).

### 3. Sing other biblical songs.

**Ask:** What common threads do you notice in these biblical songs? How do these songs help us sing our own lives to God? Try making up a tune for one of them:

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (a time for everything)
- Exodus 15:21 (Miriam's song)
- Luke 1:46-55 (Mary's song)
- Luke 2:29-32 (Song of Simeon)
- Philippians 2:5-11 (the Christ hymn)

### 4. Sing the church year.

Post big sheets of paper around the room, one for each of the major seasons of the liturgical calendar used by your congregation. Beginning with Advent, say a few words about each season, and ask the group to come up with a list of hymns and songs appropriate for that season. (For ideas, consult your hymnal or the Cyber hymnal at <http://www.cyberhymnal.org>. Some groups might even think of popular songs that fit the themes of each season.) Finally, have the group sing one hymn from each season together.

## Challenge

### 1. Trace the tunes.

Suggest the group trace the roots of the music they like. They should try to find out what part of the world it comes from, when this kind of music was first made, and by whom.

### 2. Debate “good” and “bad” music.

Divide participants into small groups and give each group a piece of newsprint with two column headings written on it: *Good Music* and *Bad Music*. First ask the groups to list the criteria they use for evaluating music as “good” or “bad.” Then ask them to list specific examples. (Warning: this may become a volatile discussion!) Then have the whole group compare notes and ask how people make choices about what they listen to.

A related issue is the question of what music is good for us. Reflect as a group on this statement: *We become what we hear and take to heart.* What does this imply about music that demeans women or glorifies violence? Is it possible to listen to such songs and screen out their messages?

### 3. Organize a benefit concert.

Encourage the group to decide on a cause worth supporting (such as a mission project or trip, an environmental advocacy agency, or a social justice agency in your community), and help them organize a benefit concert, inviting friends and local musicians to participate. The groups should urge at least a few of the performers to relate their acts to the goals of the cause the group supports.

### 4. Be creators—not just consumers.

Encourage participants, the next time they have a party, to ask their musical friends to bring instruments. They can have a jam session and do some singing together, maybe even write a song and record it!

### 5. Log your listening.

Most teenagers listen to 20–30 hours of music per week. Much of this listening is done alone. Ask group members to keep a music log of what they listen to and for how long. Ask them to compare their log with that of a friend or others in their youth group. Encourage them to trade some music and talk about what each of them finds exciting about the music they traded.

### 6. Sing me to heaven.

Ask participants to plan their own funeral service, including hymns, psalms, and songs. Encourage them to record their ideas, add to them as they think of others, and let someone know where the list is—sort of like a musical last will and testament.



## Worship

Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *In every moment, in every place, let all creation make music to praise God.*

**Read:** Psalm 150

**Closing Prayer:** Maker of creation's choir,  
you sing the Song of Love to us.  
Breathe your Spirit into our singing  
until the rhythm of your mercy  
shapes all our music-making  
and we join with one another to  
give you thanks and praise.  
Amen.

### 1. Sing new songs to God.

Invite a church musician to lead a worship event for your group based on this theme: *What music helps us worship God?*

### 2. Taize worship

Learn some of the songs of Taize together with your group ([http://www.taize.fr/en\\_rubrique12.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique12.html)), and help them hold a Taize worship service.

### 3. Sing your prayers.

Challenge your group to experiment with listening to music as part of their regular prayer time, to “pray” the music as they listen. Or suggest they sing their prayer times, for, as Saint Augustine wrote, whoever sings “prays twice.”

### 4. Old Hymns Made New

Using the metrical index found in the back of your church's hymnal, invite the group to find alternative tunes to familiar hymns. (For instance, the hymn “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” can be sung to the tune for “Away in a Manger.”) Sing the hymns to the new tunes. How do the new melodies affect the way you experience the hymn?

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Music at your next gathering. If you do, try Challenge activity # 5 and/or prepare to report on Challenge activity #1 sometime during the week.**

## Link

1. *Songcatcher* (1999) is a film about Dr. Lily Penleric, a brilliant musicologist who has been denied a promotion at the university where she teaches. She impulsively visits her sister, who runs a struggling rural school in Appalachia. There she stumbles upon the discovery of her life—a treasure trove

of ancient Scots-Irish ballads, songs that have been handed down from generation to generation, preserved intact by the seclusion of the mountains.

2. ***Music of the Heart*** (1999) is a film based on the story of Roberta Guaspari, a music teacher in New York City. Needing employment after her marriage fails, Guaspari convinces a Harlem school principal to let her teach a violin class. Though it's slow going at first, the violin program soon becomes so popular that students have to enter a lottery to get into the class. When the program is cut due to lack of funding, Roberta and her students devise a way to galvanize public support.
3. ***The Red Violin*** (1999, rated R). In present day Montreal, a famous Nicolo Bussotti violin, known as "the red violin," is being auctioned off. During the auction, we flash back to the creation of the violin in seventeenth-century Italy and then follow the violin as it makes its way through an eighteenth-century Austrian monastery, nineteenth-century Oxford, China during the Cultural Revolution, and back to Montreal, where a collector tries to establish its identity and secrets.
4. ***Mr. Holland's Opus*** (1996) is a film about Glenn Holland, an aspiring composer who takes a job as a high school music teacher to pay the rent so that, in his "spare time," he can strive to achieve his true goal—to compose one memorable piece of music to leave his mark on the world. After initial troubles connecting with students, Holland slowly discovers that he has a gift for teaching teens an appreciation of music—even though he cannot connect musically with his own son, who is deaf. Holland often has to battle the school administrators who don't approve of his using rock-and-roll as a teaching tool, and who threaten to cut the music program in order to reduce costs.
5. In the film ***Madame Sousatzka*** (1988), Manek, a brilliant 15-year-old pianist in modern London, is the son of a poor divorcee from India. His school arranges lessons for him with Madame Sousatzka, a formidably competent, dedicated, and eccentric woman. She takes him completely under her wing, teaching him how to live as well as how to play, because she passionately believes that becoming a great pianist entails a way of life, not simply skill and technique.
6. ***The Sound of Music*** (1965) is a classic musical that overflows with instances of "singing our lives." Maria is sent by her Mother Superior to serve Baron Georg Von Trapp, a retired naval captain, as governess for his seven children. She teaches the children to sing and that becomes their bonding force, eventually leading her to fall in love with their father and marry him. Maria and Georg are married in 1938 as Austria votes to be assumed by Nazi Germany on the eve of World War II. The Von Trapp Family Singers escape by singing their way out of the country.
7. Encourage your group to visit the "Sound Lounge" on the PBS website Continental Harmony at <http://www.pbs.org/harmony>.
8. ***Facing the Music: Faith and Meaning in Popular Songs*** by Darrell W. Cluck, Catherine S. George, and J. Clinton McCann Jr. (Chalice Press, 1999) is a unique tool for pastors and church educators to minister to youth through contemporary music.
9. Download the study guide for "The World's Most Dangerous Bible Study" by Eric Elnes at [http://www.ptsem.edu/iym/downloads/cow\\_study.pdf](http://www.ptsem.edu/iym/downloads/cow_study.pdf). This guide promotes a model for placing scripture and contemporary music in conversation.



# Prayer

## Main Idea

**Become a prayer:** To pray is to open ourselves to God. People often pray when they have wants or are afraid or thankful. Prayer can also be a way of life. As we practice prayer in our daily lives, we become more aware of God’s loving presence all the time—not just in emergencies. When we pray with Jesus, we “become prayer” and live within God’s promise to heal the whole creation, including us.

### For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:

Open with Focus activities #2 and #3 (20 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #1 (15 minutes)

Do Challenge activity #3 (20 minutes)

Close with Worship activity #1 (15 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. First prayers

Invite participants to remember the first prayer they ever learned. **Ask:** Who taught it to you? Do you still pray it? When? Invite participants to share these prayers and their stories with the others.

### 2. Deep longing

Read aloud the images at the opening of the Prayer chapter in *Way to Live*. **Ask:** What do you think each person is expressing in these moments? What “deeper longing” gives rise to each person’s actions, words, or silence? Do you see yourself in any of these images?

### 3. New images

Encourage the group to create a sixth image of prayer to add to the five at the beginning of the chapter, using their imagination or their own experience. Then invite them to share these images with one another.

#### 4. Santa/God

Ask participants to make an “If-I-could-have-everything-I-wanted-magically” list. Then ask them to make a “deepest-desires-that-reside-way-down-at-the-center-of-my-being” list. Ask them to choose one thing from these lists that they think is not only worthy of their prayers, but worthy of devoting their lives to. Invite participants to share their pictures with the group.

#### 5. A place apart

Jesus regularly withdrew to a quiet place to pray (have volunteers read Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28, 22:41-42). Ask participants to draw a picture of their “place apart,” a place where they can go, either physically or in their imagination, to be away from the noise and pressures of the day and to be quietly in God’s presence.

### Join the Story

#### 1. *Lectio* text

Philippians 4:1,4-9 or Ephesians 3:14-21 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

#### 2. Prayer parables

Help the group explore one or more of these stories—the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), or the midnight visitor (Luke 11:5-8)—using one of the study methods outlined in “The Story” (pages 25–29 of *Way to Live*).

#### 3. Pray-ers

Assign readers to these texts and ask the group to listen to these people praying: Moses (Exodus 32:7-14); Hannah (1 Samuel 1:9-18); David (2 Samuel 6:1-5); Daniel (Daniel 9:1-6,17-19); and Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:1-9). Help the group compare and contrast the places these people pray and the reasons they pray, how they use their bodies and voices, the words they speak or don’t speak. **Ask:** Do you recognize your own prayers in theirs?

#### 4. Whenever you pray

Have the group read Matthew 6:5-17 together using the Västerås method as described in “The Story” (pages 25–26 of *Way to Live*). **Ask:** How might this text shape your prayer practices?

#### 5. Heart’s desire

Read aloud each of the following stories, in which Jesus meets someone in deep need and grants his or her heart’s greatest desire: The widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17); a woman from the city (Luke 7:36-50); Jairus and the woman with a hemorrhage (Luke 8:40-56). **Ask:** Which of these persons prayed? Which did not? Why or why not? Whose prayer did Jesus hear? To what did Jesus respond? How?

## 6. The speech and reach of prayer

Help the group join the double healing story of a woman with a hemorrhage and a man whose daughter is dying (Luke 8:40-56), using the deep reflection method described in "The Story" (pages 26–28 of *Way to Live*). Encourage participants to imagine themselves in the story, either as one of the characters mentioned or as another character, paying particular attention to what they are feeling, what they need from Jesus, what they want to say, and what they are reaching for.

## Challenge

### 1. Write it out.

Help the group write the prayers of the people or intercessions for worship at your church one Sunday.

### 2. Praying through song

Suggest participants choose a song that opens them to God. Encourage them either to play a recording of it or sing it while they dance (in complete privacy, if that's best; in the dark if that helps), letting their body express the longing, lament, or praise of their heart in the presence of God.

### 3. Journal together.

Encourage the group to start prayer journals. Allow them to use group time in silence to journal to these two questions: When did I feel most alive today? When did I feel life draining out of me? (Or, When did I feel most open to God, others, and myself? When did I feel most closed or cut off?) Instruct the group to sit in silence and to breathe deeply, thanking God for the gifts of the day and placing into God's keeping the day's hurts and losses.

### 4. Angry prayer

Have the group watch the scene in *Forrest Gump* in which Dan Taylor straps himself to the topmast of the shrimp boat and screams at God. Then read aloud Psalm 88:13-18, an angry prayer cried out to a silent God. Invite participants to talk together about why it is difficult to love a God who seems absent or to pray to God when we are angry, especially when we are angry at God. You may close by reading aloud Psalm 30.

### 5. Letter writing

Explain to the group that Martin Luther King Jr. wrote an imaginary letter from the apostle Paul to American Christians (see *Strength to Love*, Fortress Press, 1963) calling on the nation to cease praying to the false gods of materialism, militarism, and self-advancement and instead to follow the way of Jesus, the way of self-giving, unarmed love. Instruct the group to write its own "letter from Paul" to American Christians encouraging them to "pray with Jesus" and to "become prayer" in specific ways. Publish your group's letter in the parish newsletter or website, or send it to the religion editor of your local newspaper.

## Worship ■■■■

### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *We long for God and open ourselves to God whose love is better than life.*

**Read:** Psalm 63:1-8

**Closing prayer:** God of mercy,  
You satisfy our deepest needs,  
our longing for love that is true,  
our desire to live in your presence.  
So fill us with your Holy Spirit  
that our whole lives become a prayer  
poured out for others,  
returned to you,  
in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

### 1. Pray a new prayer.

"Night Prayer" in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (HarperCollins, 1997) includes this alternative version of the prayer Jesus taught:

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever. Amen.

Read this prayer aloud. **Ask:** How does it differ from the version of the Lord's Prayer you know? How is it the same? What images of God does it evoke? Does it open the more familiar version to you in a new way? How? After the group has compared and contrasted the two versions, turn down the lights, light a candle, and instruct the group to sit in silence for a long minute. Have one person slowly pray "Night Prayer," followed by everyone praying the familiar version together.

## 2. Walking with Jesus

Allow time for the group to take a prayer walk around the neighborhood or in a nearby park or garden. Remind participants to take sunglasses, umbrellas, or caps and mittens—whatever makes it possible for all of them to be alert and alive during the walk. Instruct individuals to begin by asking Jesus to walk with them and to share any thoughts, worries, or concerns that come to them as if they were walking with a friend. They may close the walk by thanking Jesus as a group for his companionship.

## 3. Prayer stones

Gather enough smooth stones for everyone to have one. Place the stones in the center of your worship circle. Have someone read aloud Luke 19:37-40. Ask each person to choose a stone and hold it in his or her hands. **Say:** Let these stones remind us to cry out for justice, to plead for peace, to praise God for the wonders of life and love, and to become prayer for others. Ask everyone to respond, “Amen!” and then to give his or her stone to another person in the circle.

## 4. Even enemies

Read aloud Matthew 5:43-48. Explain to the group that “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” is perhaps the most radical teaching and practice of Jesus (see also Luke 23:32-34). Ask them to consider together those whom we call “enemy” as a nation, a people, or community. Then, during a time of silence, ask participants to bring to mind those whom they think of as their *personal* enemies—those who have harmed them or who mean them ill—and those who consider them to be *their* enemy. Then have the group stand in a circle, holding hands. Ask them to imagine all the “enemies” they have named aloud and in their hearts standing in the center of the circle. Close by having the group pray the Lord’s Prayer together.

## 5. Praying with Saint Francis

Explain to the group that Saint Francis looked at the world and everything in it and saw the goodness of God, the presence of the Creator in all creation. He believed that everything God made had the capacity, in its own way, to praise God. The plum tree praises God by being itself, blooming in the spring, bearing fruit in the fall, and standing starkly bare through the winter. The wind praises God by blowing gently or in stormy gusts; the sun by lighting the day; and the moon and stars the night. Suggest the group take a walk, by day or by night, and watch, listen, smell, and touch creation praising God. You may close the walk by reading aloud Psalm 148.

## 6. Prayer Wall

Prepare a room beforehand with signs around the wall with the names of different kinds of prayers (adoration, confession, illumination, intercession, thanksgiving, dedication). Then give each participant a pad of sticky notes and a pen. Have them write prayers or prayer requests (of any length) and post them under the appropriate heading around the room. Then silently view all the prayers and pray for the things found on the walls.

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Prayer at your next gathering. If you do, covenant together to keep your prayer journals daily (Challenge activity #3) or to do Worship activity #2 sometime during the week. Report back on these experiences next week.

## Link

1. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1995) is a simple, engaging, and colorful introduction to the examen, a prayerful awareness of God's loving presence during the highs (consolations) and lows (desolations) of each day.
2. *A Wee Worship Book*, (GIA, 1999) offers brief, lovely liturgies from the Iona community in Scotland, including prayers from around the world (pages 38–42) and hints about planning worship for small groups (see <http://www.giamusic.com>).
3. See <http://www.praythenews.org> for help in praying about the news and current events.
4. **Grace Cathedral** in San Francisco has a website explaining the labyrinth, its history and ministry, as well as an online, interactive labyrinth: <http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/index.shtml>.





# Practice

## Main Idea

**A new way to live:** We're free to risk living in new ways because we live in the promise that God loves us even when we fail. Growing into this way to live is not like having to do our chores before we can have dessert. We can have dessert along the way.

**For a 60- to 90-minute session on this practice:**

Open with Focus activity #2 (15 minutes)

Do Join the Story activity #2 (20 minutes)

Do Worship activity #2 (30 minutes)

Invite the sponsors to come back and close with Challenge activity #5 (20 minutes)

Note: This is a *suggested* sequence. Substitute options that best fit your group.

## Focus

### 1. Author chat

**Ask** the group: If you were to send E-mail to any one of the authors of *Way to Live*, to whom would you write and what would you say? Give each person a chance to respond.

### 2. Review the list of practices.

Post the list of 18 practices described in *Way to Live*. Provide green, blue, and red markers. Instruct the group to put a green check mark by the practice that speaks most to their heart; a blue check mark by the practice that most challenges them; and a red check mark by the practice that still seems strange or hard to understand. Allow several minutes for this activity and then evaluate the group profile. Circle and invite reflection on practices that received the most green, blue, and red check marks.

### 3. Practice magnets

Form groups and provide each group with a box of small magnetic words and a metallic surface to work on. See which group can post the most practices—actual names or descriptions—within fifteen minutes.

### 4. Practice charades.

Form two teams. Have them play charades using the names of the 18 practices.

### 5. Revisit “My Life” questions.

In exploring Chapter 1 (Life), Focus activity #3 asked participants to list questions they had about their own lives. If you saved this list, post it for this activity. If not, ask the group to recall some of the questions they identified and to record them now. **Discuss:** Which questions still feel relevant after exploring *Way to Live*? Which questions would you rephrase? What new questions would you add to this list in light of what you've learned?

### 6. Learning new skills

Give each person a tennis ball, with instructions to hold the ball in his/her main throwing hand. Ask participants to choose partners and throw the ball back and forth five times each using this hand. Then have the partners repeat the process using their non-dominant hand. Explain that practicing helps, but we'll probably never be quite as adept on our “off” side as our “dominant” one. **Ask:** Have you ever tried to make a change? Learn a familiar skill a new way? Often it seems it would be more efficient just to do it the old way. But what do you find when you get good at the new way? (Option: Instead of ball-throwing, have the group write the alphabet using their non-dominant hand.)

## Join the Story

### 1. *Lectio* text

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (See instructions for *lectio divina* in the introduction to this Guide.)

### 2. Abundant life

Read John 10:10b and revisit your group's initial understanding of “abundant life” (Chapter 1, Life, Join the Story activity #2). How does the group understand Jesus' words after reading *Way to Live*? Give each person a lump of modeling clay, with this explanation: Jesus invites us to live life abundantly. Your challenge and privilege are to live the abundant life of Christian practices where you are—in your family, your neighborhood, your school, your world. Shape your clay into some form that expresses what abundant life looks and feels like to you personally.

### 3. Print and post Bible passages.

Ask participants to recall something they read that connected with them so thoroughly that they felt like tearing it out and putting it up on the refrigerator. Explain that they can do this with their favorite Bible verses, though they don't have to tear them out of their Bible.

Instead, suggest they use a Bible search engine to find and print out passages. They can use <http://bible.oremus.org> to search the NRSV by passage.

### 4. Communion of saints

Ask the group to name some of the “invisible friends” they have enjoyed meeting during their study of Christian practices. Ask how have they been inspired by the witness of these ordinary yet extraordinary lives down through the ages. What ancient and modern saints would they like to learn more about? How do they plan to go about doing this?

## Challenge

### 1. Professional practices

Suggest participants interview a professional musician, an athlete, a lawyer, and/or someone from the medical field to discuss how their work is shaped by an understanding of their “practice.” Interviewers should ask them to reflect on and give examples of these aspects of their practice:

- My practice was already established or happening when I joined it.
- My practice relies on shared wisdom about how to do certain things.
- My practice is ongoing and often requires small steps taken daily—it's not activity that can be “finished.”
- My practice has given me a way to view my entire life.

Help the group compare panel reflections with the description of Christian practices in the Introduction to this Guide. **Ask:** In what ways is a life shaped by Christian faith similar to a life shaped by professional practice?

### 2. Write your own chapter.

Ask the group to explore a practice that is not in this book and write their own chapter about it, working in teams that include both adults and teenagers. Post this chapter on your church website. Encourage participants to share what they have learned with a larger group in a video, a report, or through a guided experience.

### 3. Give away copies of *Way to Live*.

Give each teen in your group an extra copy of *Way to Live*. Ask teens to think of someone to whom they would like to give this book, someone who would be a good recruit for helping plant one of the practices in your community. Have teens write notes of encouragement inside each book and give them as gifts to the persons they named.

#### 4. Chart your practices.

Suggest participants make a chart of the practices they are already living. **Ask:** How are these practices related to each other? How do other practices relate to the ones you've already charted? Help participants draw lines showing their relationships, and challenge them to take the first step toward one of those related practices, then the next, and then the next.

#### 5. Celebrate your growth.

**Ask:** Has someone in the group overcome something that used to drag him or her down into a hole of fear? Have new relationships emerged within our group since you started exploring practices together? Can someone tell of a recent experience of the presence of God? Ask each person to write down on an index card something positive they have seen in themselves or someone else. Have group members rotate the cards and take turns reading them aloud. As a group, thank God for moving in these lives, and then share a great dessert.

### Worship

#### Pray a psalm.

**Opening Sentence:** *With everything we are and in everything we do, we bless God whose love brings us life.*

**Read:** Psalm 103

**Closing prayer:** Blessed are you, O God,  
You bless us with your love  
and you call us to be a blessing to others.  
When we grow weary, renew our strength.  
When we are weak, tenderly care for us.  
When we fail, forgive us and fill us  
with the joy of your abundant life.  
Amen.

#### 1. Sing favorite songs.

Have participants review song suggestions from previous chapters in this Guide and select group favorites to sing in closing.

#### 2. Plan a worship celebration.

Send the sponsors to take a nap, and turn the youth loose to plan a worship celebration by themselves with no adult supervision. For an example, see the end of the chapter on Bodies in *Way to Live*, pages 44–46. They should consider the following questions in their planning:

- Where would be the most meaningful place to have a worship celebration?
- At what time of day would it feel most meaningful?
- What biblical passages would be included?

- What music would you sing or play?
- How would you light and decorate your worship space?

The group should also pay attention to lighting and music, or creature sounds.

**As a group, discuss whether you want to continue talking about Practice at your next gathering. If so, go over some Bible passages (Join the Story activity #3) and/or begin a plan to write your own chapter (Challenge activity #2).**

## Link

Participants can visit <http://www.waytolive.org> and <http://www.practicingourfaith.org> for more ideas on living Christian practices.