



vibrant**faith**

+ Generations Together

God in Our Midst

Here is an intergenerational session for all members of the congregation exploring God's immanent presence in our lives—as individuals, families, and as a community. This session is designed to be conducted in about 90 minutes, and can be adapted for a shorter or longer timeframe.

Introduction

We can encounter God anywhere, anytime. When we realize God's presence is so close we will probably feel a little uncomfortable. Yet God acts to put us at ease so we can put others at ease in God's presence. Consider your encounters with God and be prepared to speak peace to others.

I. Gather

[use the following adaptation of the activity Hand Prayers]

Needed:

Bible – open to Philippians 4:4, 6-7

Activity Plan

1. Have participants gather into family groups or small groups of 4 – 6 persons. Pray aloud:

God, open our eyes to your presence each day. Surprise us by the places we can see you and send us to help others see you, too. Amen.

2. Mention that the apostle Paul taught people about living as Jesus' followers. One thing he told Christians to do was to pray every day. Open your Bible and read aloud Philippians 4:4, 6-7 or use the following text:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Comment that sometimes it's hard to remember to pray or to think of what to pray about. At times like that, looking at one of your hands can be a simple guide for prayer. Offer up your prayer petitions as you wiggle each finger:

Thumb: The thumb is closest to your heart. Begin by thanking God for the people who are closest to you, including parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives, and close friends and neighbors. Ask God to love and protect these people.

Pointer finger: The pointer finger reminds you to pray for those who teach and heal—people who "point" you in the right direction. This might include teachers, doctors, coaches, priests or ministers, and Sunday School teachers. Pray that the Spirit will give them wisdom and patience.

Tallest finger: The tallest finger reminds you to pray for those who are in charge, including leaders of your nation and area leaders like the mayor and governor. Pray that God will guide them to make wise decisions.

Ring finger: The ring finger is the weakest finger; it reminds you to pray for those who are weak, sick, hungry, or in pain. Pray that God will strengthen and heal them, and send people to care for them.

Little finger: The smallest finger reminds you to pray for yourself.

II. Grow

[use the following adaptation of the activity God and a Photograph]

Needed:

- Photograph of a magnolia tree flower (see last page) – one copy for each person.
- Optional materials: paper; pencil, markers, colored pencils or crayons

Activity Plan

1. Invite participants to find a comfortable place to sit or lie down, and come to quiet.
2. Ask them to take at least three full minutes of silence and just look at the photo of the flower. Let God speak to you through the photo.
3. Sat to the participants that when their family or small group is ready they can talk about one or more of the following questions. You might also like to write or draw your responses. (Post these questions for all to see.)
 - If this flower could speak to you, what might it say?
 - How many different colors can you find in this photograph?
 - I wonder how God feels when looking at this flower?
 - Notice what the flower is holding gently in one of its petals: the pieces of itself that are falling off from the center. Who are some of the people who hold you gently?
 - Describe the place where you think this flower lives.
4. Ask participants to conclude their conversation and then spend a few more moments in silence looking quietly at the photo.
5. Say the following to conclude the activity: "Finish your lectio divina by doing something called 'contemplation' (con-tem-PLAY-shun). Contemplation means resting in God. You might want to keep looking at the flower, or not. Quiet your heart by taking a couple deep breaths. Then rest for as long as you'd like. As you rest, maybe you will feel God speak to you, or maybe not. God loves the

beautiful magnolia flower and God loves you. God has been with you as you've looked at the photograph. Rest."

6. As an optional follow-up, encourage participants to do this same reflection activity using a favorite photo from home.

III. Go Forth

Needed: sufficient copies of the following activities:

Holy Smoke
Lord, Hear My Cries
Reading a Story with God
Praying with the Senses

Activity Plan

1. Invite participants to gather in a large group. Invite general discussion on these questions:
 - What have you learned about the presence of God in our midst today?
 - What will you do to seek and discover God's presence at home?
2. Tell participants that you want each household to continue to reflect on God in our midst. Therefore, you want them to take at least one of the following activities with them as they leave. Briefly describe these activities:
 - Holy Smoke (adult/couple, young adult, mature teen): We can encounter God anywhere, anytime. When we realize God's presence is so close we will probably feel a little uncomfortable. Yet God acts to put us at ease so we can put others at ease in God's presence. Consider your encounters with God and be prepared to speak peace to others.
 - Lord, Hear My Cries (teen family): Before Jesus was taken to be crucified, he knelt in prayer. He called upon God in that bleak moment, and God heard Jesus' prayer. No matter what sorrow or fear we are experiencing, God listens to our prayers.
 - Reading a Story with God (young family): Lectio divina (LEK-see-oh di-VEEN-uh) means "holy reading." When we do lectio divina, we slow down and pay attention. Why? Because God is with us and maybe God wants to say something to us. In this activity, you'll try lectio divina with a story book.
 - Praying with the Senses (young family, all ages): When families pray together, they help one another to talk and listen to God. Tap your imaginations for entering into God's presence by stimulating your senses. Smell the bread, taste the grape juice, listen to the sound of frying fish, experience the quiet of an outdoor garden.
3. Conclude the session by inviting participants to join you in the hand prayer exercise learned earlier. Simply voice an impromptu prayer for each finger. Or you can invite them to do this exercise in their family / small groups.

Thumb: The thumb is closest to your heart. Begin by thanking God for the people who are closest to you.

Pointer finger: The pointer finger reminds you to pray for those who teach and heal—people who "point" you in the right direction.

Tallest finger: The tallest finger reminds you to pray for those who are in charge.

Ring finger: The ring finger is the weakest finger; it reminds you to pray for those who are weak, sick, hungry, or in pain.

Little finger: The smallest finger reminds you to pray for yourself.



Photograph by Beth Beall

Hand Prayers

By Julie Filby

Encourage one another to pray regularly, even when it's hard to think of what you want to say or you can't remember who needs your prayers. Learn to look at your hand to help you recall at least five prayer petitions or intentions.

For

Young Family

Season

Spring, perhaps on the first Friday in March (World Day of Prayer) or the first Thursday of May (National Day of Prayer)

Needed

Bible



Activity Plan

1. Gather in a comfortable space and pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for always listening to our prayers. Amen.

2. Recall that the apostle Paul taught people about living as Jesus' followers. One thing he told Christians to do was to pray every day. Open your Bible and read aloud Philippians 4:4, 6-7 or use the following text:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Comment that sometimes it's hard to remember to pray or to think of what to pray about. At times like that, looking at one of your hands can be a simple guide for prayer. Offer up your prayer petitions as you wiggle each finger:

Thumb: The thumb is closest to your heart. Begin by thanking God for the people who are closest to you, including parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives, and close friends and neighbors. Ask God to love and protect these people.

Pointer finger: The pointer finger reminds you to pray for those who teach and heal—people who "point" you in the right direction. This might include teachers, doctors, coaches, priests or ministers, and Sunday School teachers. Pray that the Spirit will give them wisdom and patience.

Tallest finger: The tallest finger reminds you to pray for those who are in charge, including leaders of your nation and area leaders like the mayor and governor. Pray that God will guide them to make wise decisions.

Ring finger: The ring finger is the weakest finger; it reminds you to pray for those who are weak, sick, hungry, or in pain. Pray that God will strengthen and heal them, and send people to care for them.

Little finger: The smallest finger reminds you to pray for yourself.

Holy Smoke

By Chip Borgstadt



We can encounter God anywhere, anytime. When we realize God's presence is so close we will probably feel a little uncomfortable. Yet God acts to put us at ease so we can put others at ease in God's presence. Consider your encounters with God and be prepared to speak peace to others.

For

Adult / Couple

Season

Spring

Needed

Camera or mobile phone with camera feature, willingness to be surprised by God, device to play YouTube video [Written in the Word - Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

Prepare in Advance

Arrange to interact with another adult for a few minutes each day. Interactions may be face-to-face, on-line or via text.

Activity Plan

1. Pray together at the beginning of the week:

God, open our eyes to your presence each day. Surprise us by the places we can see you and send us to help others see you, too. Amen.

2. Open your Bible and read Isaiah 6:1-8 (or see text on last page). Now, view the video [Written in the Word - Isaiah 6:1-8](#).
3. Make a timeline or list in order what Isaiah experienced in this passage. Include words that describe his feelings at each point in the experience.
4. Discuss what you might think, feel, and do in a similar situation.
5. Each day during the week, watch for places God might show up in unexpected ways. (For example, in talking with a stranger on the street, or in an unexpected kind act performed by a co-worker.) Use your camera or mobile phone to capture a picture of that place. Share the picture in person or electronically with your partner. Share the story of your "God encounter" as well.
6. At the end of the week, make a timeline or list of your experiences, identifying the feelings you have experienced.
7. Share with your partner how God communicated with you during the week and what you feel you are better equipped to do to help others encounter God.
8. Pray for each other.

Isaiah's Vision

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Lord, Hear My Cry

By Audrey Cox

Before Jesus was taken to be crucified, he knelt in prayer. He called upon God in that bleak moment, and God heard Jesus' prayer. No matter what sorrow or fear we are experiencing, God listens to our prayers.

Even in fear-filled moments, God is listening.

For

Teen Family

Season

Spring

Needed

Bible, computer, Internet access, cup, small pieces of paper, pens

Prepare in Advance

Go online to the video "Walk with Me" by Lecrae, and prepare to view it as a family: ["Walk with Me" by Lecrae](#)

Activity Plan

1. Begin by praying aloud:

Be with us, God, and hear the cries of our hearts, just as you heard the cry of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

2. Open your Bible to Luke 22:39-46 and read it aloud, or use the following text:

Luke 22:39-46

And [Jesus] came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

3. Give three small pieces of paper and a pen to each person. On each of his or her pieces of paper, have each person write one feeling Jesus may have had when he was at the Mount of Olives with his disciples. (This took place right before Jesus was betrayed by Judas and taken away for his trial and crucifixion.)
4. Watch the video "Walk with Me" (link given above).
5. Have each person take his or her pieces of paper and, on the blank side, write something that causes (or has caused) him or her to have those same feelings. For example, if you think Jesus may have been feeling sorrow—on the other side you might write "I am so sad Grandma died." Allow time for everyone to complete all three pieces of paper.

6. Spend a few moments in silence, allowing time for family members to pray to God about the things they wrote. After praying, have family members wad up their scraps of paper and put them in the cup.

7. Ask for a volunteer to pray this prayer:

Lord, hear our cry! Sometimes it's hard to reach out to you when the things we have to say include our most painful and fear-filled feelings. Let this cup be a reminder that you are always listening. Strengthen us to trust that you take these burdens from us each and every day. Thank you for hearing us when we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

8. You may want to leave the cup on your table for a few days as a reminder to take your worries to God and then dispose of the papers.

Reading a Story with God

by Beth Beall



Lectio divina (LEK-see-oh di-VEEN-uh) means “holy reading.” When we do lectio divina, we slow down and pay attention. Why? Because God is with us and maybe God wants to say something to us. In this activity, you’ll try lectio divina with a story book.

For

Just for Kids

Season

Spring

Needed

The book *Goggles!* by Ezra Jack Keats. Your school library or public library may have a copy. (Don’t worry if you can’t find a copy of the book. You’ll see a suggestion at the end of this activity that invites you to use a book you already have.)

Optional: drawing materials (colored pencils, crayons or markers; paper)

Activity Plan

1. Begin with a prayer. Maybe you want to pray silently. If you’d like to use words, you might try these:

“Loving God, I know you are always with me. Help me to see this story with your eyes, and to hear whatever you might want to say to me. Amen.”

2. Read through the entire story of *Goggles!* Take your time, pausing to pay attention to whatever words and illustrations speak to you.

3. Optional: You might like to look through the story a second time, either re-reading the words or simply looking at the pictures.

4. With the book open before you, think or talk about one or more of the following questions.

- The Bible tells us that “a true friend sticks by you like family” (Proverbs 18.24). In this story, Archie and Peter are good friends. Who is one of your good friends? Why do you like being with that person? Maybe you’d like to draw a picture of your good friend.
- While Peter and Archie are playing together, Peter discovers some goggles. Then some bullies appear and try to take the goggles. In the picture where the bullies say, “Give us those goggles,

kid,” how do you think Peter and Archie are feeling? I wonder what God might say to the bullies in this scene? I wonder what God might say to Peter and Archie?

- Peter, Archie, and Willie-the-dog all rush away to their hideout spot to get away from the bullies. Do you have a hideout spot? The Bible says that God is our hiding place (Psalm 32.7). If you’d like, draw a picture of you or some other people hiding in God.
 - Near the end of the story, Peter and Archie trick the bullies, and the bullies run away. On the last page, we see Peter, Archie, Willie-the-dog, and some other children having a relaxed and peaceful time together. If you were in this picture, what would you be doing?
5. Finish your lectio divina by doing something called “contemplation” (con-tem-PLAY-shun). Contemplation means resting in God. You might want to close the book and set it aside. Or you might want to leave the story open to a picture that especially speaks to you. Quiet your heart by taking a couple deep breaths. Rest for as long as you’d like. God has been with you as you’ve read *Goggles!* God is with you now, and always.

Using this Activity with Another Story Book

Choose a favorite story book that you have at home. Even if you like to read long chapter books, it would be helpful to try this activity first with a short story book. A story book with pictures you like would work well. These are the basic steps for doing lectio divina with a story book:

- Pray. Invite God to join you in looking at this book.
- Read slowly. Pay attention to what stands out to you and to how you feel during the story. You may want to look at or read through the story a second time.
- What do you wonder about? Try talking with God about the story, just as you’d talk with a friend. Listen for whatever God might want to say.
- Spend some time in contemplation. Remember that God has been with you while you read, and will be with you always.

Praying with the Senses

By Beth Herrinton-Hodge

When families pray together, they help one another to talk and listen to God. Tap your imaginations for entering into God's presence by stimulating your senses. Smell the bread, taste the grape juice, listen to the sound of frying fish, experience the quiet of an outdoor garden.



For

Young Family

Season

Spring

Needed

Bible, supplies to correspond with the Scripture you choose in "Prepare in Advance." Optional: bread machine, bread mix

Prepare in Advance

Read the following scripture passages and select one to explore with your family:

- Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30: Jesus eats the Last Supper with his disciples. (Supplies: loaf of bread, pitcher of grape juice and cups, napkins)
- Matthew 26:36-39: Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Supplies: fresh flowers, spray bottle of water, small stones, blanket to sit on)
- John 21:4-14: Jesus serves breakfast. (Supplies: pieces of fish to fry, cooking utensils, plates, forks, loaf of bread)

Activity Plan

1. Gather in a comfortable space with the supplies for the Scripture you have chosen. Say this prayer aloud to begin.

God of life, you are everywhere: in the sky, in the wind, around our family table. Help us to see and touch and taste and know you through our prayers. Amen.

2. Invite family members to talk about God's presence, which is all around you. Ask: In what ways do we know that God is present with us? (When you pray or worship, you rest in God's presence, trusting that you are with God and God is with you. Another way to know God is present is through God's Word, the Bible. You can imagine that God is speaking to you through the stories in the Bible. Sometimes we sense God is present through the loving words and deeds we receive from other people.)
3. Open your Bible and read the selected Bible story aloud, or use the text given below. Follow the suggestions for involving your senses in a time of prayer after the story:

Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30:

- Place the bread, juice, and cups in front of the family. Option: Make bread in a bread machine, timing it to still be warm as you begin.
- Read the passage aloud, pausing before verse 26.
- Before reading verse 26, break the bread and invite each family member to smell its fragrance.

- Before reading verse 27, pour the juice from one cup to another. Ask family members to listen to the sound of the juice being poured. Let each person smell the fragrance of the juice.
- After the reading, hold a time of silence while each person drinks some juice and eats some bread.
- Invite each person to speak one word or one sentence to God. This is your prayer. Then let everyone say, "Amen."

Matthew 26:36-39:

- Move outdoors, if possible. If not, sit on a blanket on the floor. Pass around the fresh flowers so that each person can smell them and look at them.
- Before reading the scripture passage, take a moment to sit quietly and listen to the sounds of life around you.
- Invite each person to name something that he or she hears. Ask: How is God present in these sounds?
- Have each person say how he or she feels, sitting together as a family.
- Have family members close their eyes to listen to the Bible story as it is read aloud.
- Following the reading, have family members imagine that they are in the garden with Jesus while he is praying. Encourage them to imagine what they see and hear.
- Ask: What does Jesus say to you? What do you say to Jesus? This is your prayer. Then let everyone say, "Amen."

John 21:4-14:

- Read aloud the first part of the story, John 21:4-8.
- Gather around a cooking area to cook the fish, frying it if possible.
- Transfer the cooked fish to a serving plate and take it to the table and have everyone sit down. Place a loaf of bread on the table with the fish. Option: Make bread in a bread machine, timing it to still be warm as you begin.
- Read the rest of the story, John 22:9-14.
- Break the loaf of bread and pass it around, inviting each person to break off a piece.
- Pass the cooked fish, inviting each person to take some to eat.
- While eating, have family members close their eyes and enjoy the fragrance and the flavor of the food.
- As you savor the food, imagine you are sitting by the shore of the lake, eating this meal with Jesus. Ask: What does Jesus say to you? What do you say to Jesus? This is your prayer. Then let everyone say, "Amen."

4. Say this prayer aloud:

All-present God, in everything we hear and see and taste, we come closer to you. Remind us that you are with us in every sound we hear and in every move we make. Our very thoughts are prayers, O God. We pray in Jesus' name.

Let everyone say, "Amen."

The Last Supper

Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30

¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸ He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. ²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-39

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Jesus Serves Breakfast

John 21:4-14

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.