

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

As we practice giving testimony and witness on a daily basis, we not only experience the change in the here and now, but we also add to the future of our world as people of God active in that world. God's vision for us is amazing and we have the chance to be part of it. God is still speaking, and we have hope for a bright future. All we have to do is pay attention.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants may practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help to provide greater comfort in venturing out to share those thoughts with others. The activities for the workplace and community are ways you can witness to your own faith in the larger sphere of daily life and may help you have more confidence sharing your faith beyond the comfort of home or church.

As with all faith practices, giving testimony and witness requires discipline. Some of the activities are low-risk, while others will require more courage. You have to be willing to accept resistance or flat out rejection. Sharing is a two-way street; if you are also willing to listen to others the rewards are great.

About this Exploration

A glimpse of God's realm becomes possible every time we practice testimony and witness. In this Exploration we move daily to express the presence of God through language, symbols, and rituals, as we increase our hope and vision for ourselves and future generations. By sharing our experiences of God's love day to day, we pass on the all-encompassing grace that sets a foundation for the church of tomorrow. Acknowledging that the practice of testimony and witness is an ongoing process, we focus our attention upon God's continuing revelation, as we move toward the future "kin-dom" (the realm of God where all are kin).

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
Philemon 1:1–25

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Picture This

Supplies:

- Bible
- camera
- poster board
- (optional) journal
- computer to download pictures

Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. We can trust in God for our future. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone knew God's love, trusted in God, and lived a life of care for the whole creation. Try to use the medium of photography as a way of witness.

Spend time in prayer so that you might be open to God. You will be taking pictures either inside or outside that represent how we as a people interact with God today. Also, choose images that represent what it might be like if tomorrow we woke up and everyone trusted in God and was living a life of caring for the whole creation. Be creative—the images need have meaning only for you. You can explain them later. As a group decide on a plan to take the pictures. Will you take them individually or together? When you have finished taking pictures, create a poster to express and/or contrast what you witness today and what you hope for tomorrow. Some will be self-explanatory, while others will require a caption or even a full explanation. Share with one another.

Where did you see God while doing this activity? What did you learn that was expected? What did you find that was unexpected? In your part of the world, how are we doing as a people? How did you think this activity was a witness to God's presence and activity in the world?

Say a prayer for the future. Thank God for the ways we are moving on the right path, and ask God to be a guide for continuing on the path to the future that is full of God's love.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Hope for the Flowers

Supplies:

- book *Hope for the Flowers* by Trina Paulus. Purchase a copy for yourself, or you can read it online at: <http://tinyurl.com/4yrruq9>.
- Bible

Read *Hope for the Flowers* together and talk about it, using the discussion starters below.

- This little book is called “a tale partly about life, partly about revolution, and a lot about hope.” In what way is it about revolution?
- What responses do you have to the pillar of caterpillars, and what’s at the top? Does the experience of climbing to the top feel familiar to you?
- Where, if anywhere, is God in the story? Does the story speak to you about priorities, about changing anything in your life?
- Stripe gets restless, while Yellow is content with their life together. Which kind of caterpillar are you?
- What kinds of sacrifices does Yellow make in order to learn to fly? How are her sacrifices different from the ones Stripe makes? What does this say to you about the decisions and choices you make in your own life?
- The temptation to “climb the ladder” applies to children and teenagers as well as adults. How does society encourage us to step on others in order to get ahead? How can we be countercultural in our choices to live differently?
- Read Mark 16:1–8, about the resurrection of Jesus. In what way is *Hope for the Flowers* a resurrection story?

Sending & Serving Activities



③ Hugs

Supplies:

- YouTube video [“Free Hugs”](#)
- “Safe Hugs,” Attachment: Activity 3

Wouldn’t it be a wonderful place to live, where you knew that others cared about you? Bearing witness to the truth that we are all one in God is a powerful testimony of our faith.

Look at the video and discuss with one another what you think. What do you think a hug represents? Do you think you could do this? In your family? At your church? On the street like this guy? What response did he get? What kind of response do you think you’d get?

Try it. Practice with one another. Share the feelings you experienced when you give a hug and those you experience when you receive one. What can you say? You could say “God bless you,” “You are a beloved Child of God,” or say nothing and let the act of kindness speak for itself. This is a high risk endeavor because

it requires you to reach out and make physical contact with someone else. One person may enjoy a hug, but another may not. If you approach it as an invitation, it might be better received. Alternatively, a pat on the shoulder or the hand or a handshake might be more comfortable for some. Physical contact with another individual may seem difficult, but the results may be surprising. Remember to ask the person if he or she would like a hug before giving one and pay attention to body language indicating that touch is not wanted. The handout shows safe hugs and suggests alternatives. If someone would rather not be touched, respect this.

With children be aware of the issue of good touch/bad touch as well as safety around strangers. Do not place children in situations of discomfort or danger.

Every day you encounter persons who may gain much from human contact. Be careful and safe (see attachment). You may have to step outside your comfort zone for this one. Begin in a relatively safe place, like church. There are many elderly persons who really appreciate a hug. It is often easy to find someone who could use a hug. With prayer those in need will become obvious. If you do this activity as a family, you add a level of protection.

When we give another person a hug we imitate the love, caring, and inclusiveness God has shown for us. It is another way to share our faith and show other persons how much God loves them.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Create a Time line

Supplies:

- paper and writing instruments or
- string and note cards with clothespins or
- Post-it notes
- (optional) journal
- “Sample Time lines,” Attachment: Activity 4

Our faith develops over time. This faith practice may not appear to be something easy to do, but if you look back over your faith journey, you will notice many times when you have made testimony or witness to God’s active presence in your life.

Begin with your early childhood experiences of faith and make a time line, marking turning points, milestones, and experiences that made an impact on you—either deepening faith or causing you to rethink your beliefs. Your time line may be straight or curving (see “Sample Time lines,” Attachment: Activity 4). You may choose to put the events on post-it notes and place them on a bulletin board or wall. You could stretch a string across your room and add events on note cards attached with clothespins.

This spiritual autobiography will reveal the importance of events in your life in the past and present and help you to be more mindful of God in the future. It will also help you to see that you already have made witness and have been able to show the love of God active in your life to others. It is important to remember

that, even in those times when you didn't feel God's presence or felt a definite absence, God was still at work.

Giving witness and testimony is an outward sign of faith and also serves to strengthen your own understanding of faith. A dynamic faith is a healthy faith that shows God's work is active and constant.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Letter to Future Generations

Supplies:

- paper and pen
- (optional) journal
- (optional) digital camera or video recorder

We witness to God in our lives in the here and now, but what we say and do now can and will impact others in the future as well. Our actions today will be experienced by persons in the future. What do you want your life to say to those yet to come or to those who are young and encounter you today? Spend time considering what you believe and how you want to live that out in your life so that those who come after you will know what God meant to you.

Find a place that is a good place for reflection. Spend a little time thinking about who God is to you, how Jesus fits into your thinking, and how you want to live a life that reflects those beliefs. Write these thoughts in your journal or on the paper. It might be more comfortable for you to draw a picture or create a poem. Another way to record your present state of faith is to take pictures or record a video statement or a dance or anything that expresses your thoughts. Be creative, but try to be honest about your understanding of God in your life. This may take a while.

Put your document away and pull it out again in a month or some other time frame that you set. Review it at that time and see if there are changes in your life as a result of having done it. If you wish to share it with someone, do so. If you want to put it away again, you can add comments or insights. This is a good long-term activity that will help you in several ways: 1. You have to organize your thoughts in order to document them. 2. You will have found a way to articulate your faith to someone else. 3. You can make it a self-evaluation tool by making testimony to yourself.

Thank God for the time spent.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 What in the World?

Supplies:

- local newspaper or other news source

As we ponder what the future could bring if we are true to God's vision, it is helpful to see where we are in the community where we live. Skim your local newspaper and read a few stories. How does this view of the world show us in contrast to the world envisioned by God for us? Is there justice? Do we care for one another? Are we one body in Christ?

Take the articles and place them in two categories: God's vision versus the world's vision. What would you say to the parties in the stories to let them know God's good news?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Pass It On

Supplies:

- small box (1"–2") or a small block of wood
- wrapping paper with bow

Take the empty box or piece of wood and wrap it in the paper, complete with bow. Think about how God has gifted you today. Pass the box to someone else, explaining that the box contains a blessing. You can share how God has blessed you today and that you want to share that blessing with the person. The box is not to be unwrapped, but passed along in the same way. Perhaps the box will return to you in the course of the day or perhaps you will not see it again.

Option: You may want to write a prayer to put in the box so that you are not passing an empty box. Also include instructions for rewrapping the box and passing it on to someone else.

Later, reflect upon the experience. Pray for the persons who will receive the gift.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Fair Trade

Supplies:

- websites: [Find Fair Trade](#), [Fair trade clothing](#), [WFTO](#)
- Bible

Read Philemon 1:1–25. In the letter Paul implores Philemon to accept his former slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ. How does this expression of Christianity, where there is no longer slave or free, but only brothers and sisters in Christ, inform our understanding of justice?

As we look to a future of justice and fairness for all, we must evaluate how many places and situations in the world are unfair and unjust now. Brainstorm ways you can work toward a more just world.

What are some issues that keep us from being a just world? How does the over-consumption of resources in the Western world hurt others in the world? Exploitation of small farmers is a serious injustice. One way to help overcome this is by using fair trade products. Purchasing these products helps insure that the farmers receive a fair price for their goods. Farmers are just one group who are exploited. What others can you name? What actions can we take to help ensure justice in these situations?

When coffee is served at the workplace or in a community gathering, insist that fair trade coffee is used. This coffee is available in many places (see the “Find Fair Trade” link in the supply list). Check the labels when purchasing coffee. Many stores carry fair trade products.

9 Care Survey

Sending & Serving Activity

Supplies:

- telephone
- phonebook
- computer
- (optional) notepad

Research care agencies in your local area. You might check with churches, seminaries, larger agencies, the Internet, or a phone book. Make a list and include the name, address, phone number, and e-mail address of the agency. Find out what they offer, who is served, how many are served, and how you can help. Once you have compiled the list, consider the following: Were you aware of these agencies? Do you think they are making a difference? Is there anywhere you wish to volunteer or donate?

Make the list available to various groups in your community with which you are affiliated. You might share the list with coworkers, your church, a community group, or a neighborhood group. In this way you could encourage others to participate in community service as your faith calls you to serve others.

Reflect

We must live our lives in such a way that those who encounter us will know that we follow Christ and that we love God so much that we share that love freely. In this way we will make testimony that will touch the lives of others in the present and in the future. Hearing another person’s story enriches our lives, too.

Attachment: Activity 3

Safe Hugs

The gift of touch is one that can offer healing, peace, and support.

Touch can also cause confusion, fear, and shame. We want to be especially careful with our children and youth. We want everyone to feel loved and cared for rather than uncomfortable.

CONSIDER: Why do you touch?

Do you touch to share God's compassion and care?
(In our free hugs activity this should be the only motivation for touch.)

CONSIDER: How would you like to be approached?

Always ask permission first. Would you like a hug? Open your arms, let the other person initiate the hug.

CONSIDER: What kinds of touch are appropriate?

You can judge from the person's reaction. If they pull away, stop.

Here are examples hugs that are appropriate for this activity. In all instances people share human touch but there is nothing that can be misconstrued as unsafe. Keep hands off the chest. It is never appropriate to touch below the waist.

A-Frame hug—In this kind of hug there is no full body contact. Your contact is confined to the shoulder area, keeping the torsos separated.

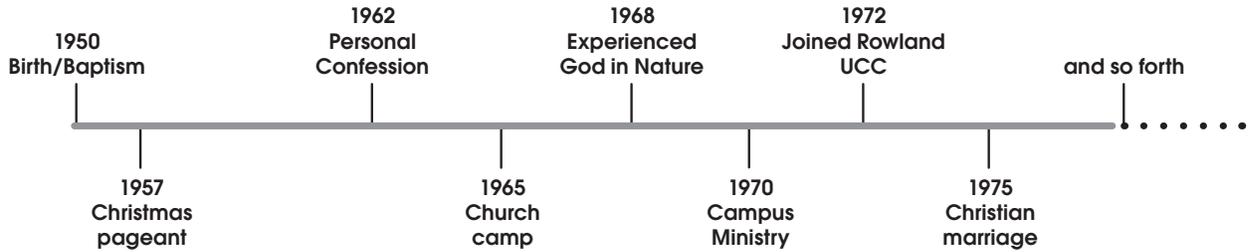
Sideways hug—As it sounds, it is a hug given with one arm, with persons side by side.

Touch on shoulder or back—Some people are uncomfortable with a hug but will accept a shoulder or back pat.

Handshake—Some will offer their hand as a sign that they don't want a full hug.

Attachment: Activity 4

1. Simple Time line



2. Decade Time line



3. Period of Life Time line



4. Complex Journey Time line

