

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

As we share our own experiences of God, we join all those who have gone before, like those whose witness occurs in our Holy Bible. The activities suggested may encourage reflection on scripture and how our own testimony adds to that witness.

The activities designed for the individual may 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 will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help 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

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God's larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren't perfect, which invites us to tell our stories in response. In John's account of Jesus and the blind man, the man's witness sparked a process that touched on people's relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man's testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation. Similarly, our stories may shape other people's response to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1–41

Psalms 116

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Bringing the Bible to Life

Supplies:

- Bibles
- space to act out the scene

Gather the people in your home for a time of sharing. Invite everyone to listen carefully. Have one person read John 9:1–41. Pose these questions: *What stood out to you? What seemed odd or unusual? What seemed normal? With which character do you most closely identify? Why?*

Assign roles and have the group act out the scene. Then pose these questions: *What stood out for you this time? Did someone act out something you didn't expect? When have you felt like one of the characters in this story? How do you think you would have shared this story if you had been healed in this way?* Repeat the dramatization, this time with everyone taking a different role. What did you learn or experience from this perspective?

Share your thoughts and reactions. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to contribute something. Read the passage once again.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



2 Telling Your Story

Supplies:

- paper, loose leaf or plain sheets
- pens, pencils, crayons or markers
- "Poetry Forms," Attachment: Activity 2

Scripture is a collection of many stories of witness and testimony. We each have a story to tell. In this activity we will tell our story by writing or drawing. Spend time thinking about an occasion when you knew God was there with you. Write a story, a poem, or words to a song. You might feel more comfortable drawing a picture. An easy form of poetry for young children is to create an acrostic using the letters of one's first name. See the attachment "Poetry Forms" for an example of an acrostic and for descriptions of several other poetry forms.

Practice testimony by sharing your story with one another. Following each time of sharing, everyone can thank God for being in his or her life. Have the speaker invite another person in the group to tell his or her story. In this way you can practice listening and being witness to another person's testimony.

You may use this prayer or a prayer of your own: *O God, you are active in our lives, and we are grateful for the chance to tell our stories like those who witness to your love in the Bible. Help us to share your love more often. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities

③ Write a Psalm

Supplies (optional):

- Bible
- paper and writing instruments
- art supplies
- musical instruments

Psalms are believed to be the songbook of the Old Testament. Read Psalm 116 together. In this case the psalmist is singing out thanksgiving for prayers answered. Consider a time when your prayers were answered. Choose a way to give thanks to God, and work on it for the next 30 minutes or longer if desired. It could be written in the form of a poem, a story, or perhaps lyrics to a song. Maybe your expression will be an artistic creation in visual arts, music, or dance. The activity is an outward witness to the grace of God in your life. Be creative. Share with one another as a form of worship.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ God Is Still Speaking

Supplies: None

The message of the Bible is that God is love. Only when we live in love where all are welcome and justice prevails is the world anywhere close to what God desires for creation.

The United Church of Christ Still Speaking Ministry calls for a vision of church where God is all-loving and inclusive, where a church welcomes and accepts all just as they are. The church is a place where our mind is nourished as much as our soul, where Jesus the healer meets Jesus the revolutionary, where together we grow a just and peaceful world, and where joining in community is by testimonials, not tests, of faith.

Think about the people you consider to be good examples of being faithful Christians. How does their witness help you in your faith journey? In what way does your behavior and testimony show that God is in your life? How is being inclu-

sive, loving, and accepting a witness to God? How does this add to the witness we find in our Bible?

Ask God to help you to take God's vision for the world into your heart so that you can share it with others.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Heroes of the Bible

Supplies:

- Bible
- website: Heroes Articles (<http://tinyurl.com/3lc9dt7>)
- Bible concordance or Bible dictionary or other Bible reference book

The Bible is a book of witness to God's presence and action in the lives of people and communities. Moses, Deborah, David, Paul, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Joseph and Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the many who testified to being cured or made whole by Jesus are a few of these witnesses.

Look up at least one of the biblical characters named above, or others that you know, in a Bible concordance or dictionary or other reference book. Read the person's story in the Bible. Reflect on that character's story and how the person bore witness to his or her faith. What stands out to you? Why? Is it what the person said or did or who he or she was? What conflict did the person face? How did the person persevere? What witness did the person make?

Consider how you have given testimony and witness in your life. Remember that by accepting Christ into your life you are a living testament to him. Compare to these scriptural heroes. How is your experience similar? How is it different?

You may find you want to read more about one of these biblical heroes. There are several books available for children and adults, or you can follow this link for a series of articles on heroes of the Bible: [Heroes Articles](#).

Sending & Serving Activity



6 Write a Statement of Faith

Supplies:

- "Statement of Faith Samples," Attachment: Activity 6
- writing materials
- (optional) camera

It is a good exercise to write your own statement of faith. It is useful to have to put into words the way you experience God in your life. Our beliefs change over time. Creating a document can be intimidating, but if you remember that it reflects where you are at a specific time and not written in stone, it can be a tool to focus your thinking so that you can share it with another if called upon to do so.

Your statement of faith is personal. It may require a lot of soul-searching. It doesn't have to include everything you believe in detail. It is just the basic statement of your faith. You don't have to share it with anyone. It is for you, so that you might find words to share when you want to make testimony or witness. It may take the form of a credo, which is a set of beliefs, or it may be a statement that reveals your relationship with God. It might be easier to do in pictures, as a poem, in music, or some other creative outlet. The attachment includes samples of creeds and faith statements.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Movie (or Play) and Conversation

Supplies: None

Organize a night out to go to the movies or to see a play followed by dinner or snacks somewhere to discuss what you saw. Invite everyone into a conversation about the movie/play, encouraging all to listen before speaking and making it clear the goal is not to argue or persuade others to think alike, but to be able to hear and share beliefs. Talk about the moral issues raised in the movie or play. Talk about the positive and negative experiences you notice.

As a person of Christian faith, give examples from the movie or play that support your understanding of a Christian life. *What was offensive or counter to the teachings you learn in your faith tradition?* Remember to allow each person to comment. You might want to discuss how your views are the same or different.

Having such conversations allows you and those with you to find voice for what you each believe. This activity involves some risk, and you should be aware that conversations about religion can be hard. It is helpful to return to the context of the movie or play if the conversation becomes confrontational and to remind one another the goal is to share thoughts, beliefs, and/or testimonies, not convince, change minds, or argue.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Who Are These People?

Supplies:

- note cards or small slips of paper
- tape

If you want to play a game at a work or community party or gathering, this one will be fun. Prior to the gathering write down the name of several persons on small pieces of paper. Everyone in the room should be able to recognize the names, for example, Jesus, Moses, famous political figures, national heroes, or famous actors. Be sure to include people of faith. Then, tape one of the names on the back of each person present. Everyone must now go around and ask people

yes or no questions about who is on their back. They can only ask each person one question. See who can guess it in the least number of questions asked. As the identities are discovered, there is an opportunity to talk about why these persons are known.

Alternatively, you can ask each person present to write the name of a well-known person who has influenced his or her life. Then, the person tapes this name onto the person on his or her left. The game proceeds as described above, and at the end the writer is given a chance to say why that particular person was selected.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Blessing or Grace

Supplies: None

An important part of testimony and witness is the willingness to hear another person's story. In this activity you will give someone else an opportunity to share his or her own story and add to the total witness of God's grace and blessing in the world.

To prepare, consider a recent blessing. Thank God for it. Seek out someone with whom to have a conversation. When it feels comfortable, share a comment about how you have been blessed or received a grace. Ask the other if he or she has a story about a blessing to share with you. Listen carefully and thank the person for it. Reflect on God's loving connections and how you have been affected by hearing the testimony of another child of God.

Reflect

We are people of story. There is power in the sharing of our stories. Scripture provides a multitude of personal narratives about how God was active in people's lives. Our testimony and witness adds to the full truth of a loving God, and we are blessed to give and receive our stories with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Attachment: Activity 2

Poetry Forms

Acrostic

Write a word, such as your name, in a vertical column. For each letter of the word, write a phrase that fits the theme of the poem. For instance,

Title: God was with me, by Karla

Keeping watch over me
As I played with my friends on the playground
Remembered to be nice to someone I didn't really like
Let someone else go first on the swings
Always with me

Cinquain

Poetry with five lines. Line 1 has one word (the title). Line 2 has two words that describe the title. Line 3 has three words that tell the action. Line 4 has four words that express the feeling, and line 5 has one word that recalls the title. There are at least three different styles:

First style:

Line 1: One word
Line 2: Two words
Line 3: Three words
Line 4: Four words
Line 5: One word

Second style:

Line 1: A noun
Line 2: Two adjectives
Line 3: Three "-ing" words
Line 4: A phrase
Line 5: Another word for the noun

Third style:

Line 1: Two syllables
Line 2: Four syllables
Line 3: Six syllables
Line 4: Eight syllables
Line 5: Two syllables

Tanka

A Japanese poem of five lines, the first and third lines are composed of five syllables and the other lines have seven syllables.

Attachment: Activity 6

Statement of Faith Samples

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith (in the form of a doxology)

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust your forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.

A Personal Statement of Faith

I believe in God, who is almighty and in heaven.

I believe in Jesus Christ, who is my personal savior.

I believe the church exists to provide community for those who love God.

I believe we are sinners but that God's forgives.

I believe that we will go to heaven when we die.

A Personal Statement of Faith

God is in my life. I am not alone.

God sent Jesus to earth to bring us into love.

If I go to God in prayer, the answers can be trusted.

When I am lost, I turn to God and I will be found.

The church is a gathering of those who believe in God and that God wants us to be a community that loves one another because we are loved.

I come from God and will return to God.