

Faith Sharing in the Family

Children form their concepts of God at a very early age. The role of the family in their spiritual formation is greater than the part played by church or school. Parents hand on a living experience. Family traditions and faith rituals build a sense of identity that will last for many years to come. There are so many changes in the children's larger world that they will receive great comfort from the reassuring repetition of memorable family traditions. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Hold hands around the table while saying grace. A gentle squeeze at the end helps to unify and connect everyone.

Prayer:

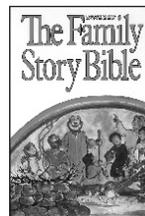
For food in a world where many are hungry,
for friends in a world where many are alone,
for faith in a world where many are afraid,
we give you thanks, O God. Amen



- Have one candlelit meal each week (possibly Sunday?) Follow the meal with a faith sharing activity from that week's suggestions.
- Set aside time each evening to read together. This might be an individual story or one that continues over many evenings. (Adults build warm bonds reading aloud to each other, too!) Choose books that raise questions and help to develop Christian faith and values. (See *The Family Story Bible*, below.)
- Pray with your child at bedtime. Talk about the day's events and the things that you want to thank God for. Is there anything we wish to tell God we are sorry about? Whom do we want to ask God to care for especially right now?
- Keep photograph albums handy so they often can be shared.

The Family Story Bible

We have been asked by parents about a good Bible story book for use at home. *The Family Story Bible* is an excellent resource which uses the latest biblical research, insights, and images in stories told in simple inclusive language. The realism of the illustrations is a powerful addition to the text for both children and adults alike.



The Wondering Church



As September begins, we are just over halfway through the Season after Pentecost – a time when we explore what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ. The Unit 1 theme “The Wondering Church” grew out of gospel passages which are full of questions. The Gospel of Mark explores what it means for Jesus to be “the Christ” by showing the disciples struggling to understand who Jesus is and what his ministry means. Questioning is one of the ways the community of disciples, then and now, seeks to understand Jesus and the significance of his ministry.

While questions are an important part of faith, we do not come to understand through right-brained examination only. We need to be open to a connection with a sense of wonder and awe. The logo for this unit reflects this. It shows three children carefully examining a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, the hardened protective covering (or cocoon). As we follow the upturned faces of these three figures, what do we imagine they are talking about? What might their questions be? How is a sense of wonder and awe, about God's creation and by extension about God, an important feature of the journey of faith? As a community of people we gather with our various experiences to question, learn, and celebrate together.

September	2	God's Beautiful World
	9	What Does It Mean to Be Open? (<i>Recovenanting Sunday</i>)
	16	Who Is Jesus?
	23	Who Is Most Important?
	30	Who Are the People of God?
October	7	How Do We Know God Is with Us? (<i>Canadian Thanksgiving/Worldwide Communion</i>)
	7	What Does God Want for Us? (<i>Worldwide Communion</i>)

A word about the At Home Leaflet...

The *Whole People of God* curriculum is based on the 3-year cycle of scripture readings from the *Revised Common Lectionary*. Four scripture passages are chosen for each Sunday.

The *At Home Leaflets* are designed to give some background to each week's theme and to help facilitate continued discussion and activity in the home. Users of the leaflet are encouraged to choose those activities that best suit them and add others of their own.

It is hoped that all members of the congregation will use the leaflet to gain some background in the lectionary passages, be informed on what the children in their congregation are studying, and explore for themselves the ideas and activities which are an extension of that Sunday's scripture readings. The At-Home Leaflet can also be useful for doing some initial reading and preparing for upcoming worship and adult discussion sessions. The passage on which the children's lesson is based is in **boldface** type.

Week 1 – September 2, 2018

God's Beautiful World

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23



Aim: **To celebrate how beautiful God's world can be.**

Background

We are in the Season after Pentecost which is also known as Ordinary Time. It is the longest season of the church year and underlines the reality that much of our faith is lived out in the ordinary, everyday events of our lives. The first 2 readings today are beautiful poetry, celebrating love, human beauty, and the wonder of nature in all its glory. That these writings have been included in scripture reminds us that ours is a faith expressed in every part of our lives. We must never forget that the context for all of our worship and celebration, is God's heartbreakingly beautiful world. The James reading highlights that we must recognize God as the source of all gifts, including our membership in the community of faith. Each verse is full of suggestions for daily life. In the gospel reading Jesus objects strenuously to the idea that being holy was simply a matter of being ritually clean and culturally correct. Instead he gives priority to a spirituality of the heart which goes beyond a legalistic approach to keeping religious laws. He declares that following him is life-giving and can lead to a new and transformed relationship with God and God's beautiful world.

Faith Sharing

Read Song of Solomon 2:12-13 together. If you were writing a poem about God's beautiful world in your area, what would be the things that you would describe at this time of year? Take a walk together noticing the many gifts of nature that we often hurry by in our everyday lives.

Week 6 – October 7, 2018 (for churches not celebrating Thanksgiving)

What Does God Want for Us?

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Psalm 26

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16



Aim: **To explore the kinds of relationships God wants for us.**

Background

The decision to pick up on Jesus' teaching about divorce in Mark's gospel for Junior and Youth classes was deliberate. It was based on requests from curriculum users and the awareness that it is part of the lives of many children. For children and youth, no matter how difficult their home situation, divorce still brings the stress of change. Many children are not really aware that divorce is pending and are surprised by the events. They would probably have a great deal of sympathy for Job as he wonders what he did to attract so much misfortune and suffering. "This just isn't fair!" they will shout to whomever they trust with their hurt. How can a grieving child, a divorced parent, a man sitting in ashes know God's love? Hopefully the gift of God's community is a place where our brokenness is welcomed. We share our hurt and anger, as well as our capacity to express empathy and care for others. The younger children focus on the part of the passage where Jesus says "Let the children come to me," and celebrate their place in the church family.

Faith Sharing

1. If you experienced Communion today, talk together about it being a Worldwide Communion celebration. Who do you know that would be attending worship in another church or another community who would be celebrating communion, too. Try to imagine people in other countries at all hours of this day sharing in this special meal as followers of Jesus.
2. Read the story "Jesus and the Children" from *The Family Story Bible* page 232-233.
3. Choose an issue over which there has been conflict in your home. Have each member of the family paint (or draw) about their feelings on a sheet of paper. When finished, share the pictures and try to tell about those feelings. Then, see how accurately you can restate each others' point of view. Paint (or draw) a second picture with shapes and colors to celebrate that our relationships can be restored.
4. Choose a regular time each week to have a family meeting to talk about current problems and work on solutions. Make sure everyone has a chance to participate.
5. Make a special snack together and celebrate your relationship as a family. Say a prayer of thanks for being part of a church family, too.

This curriculum is used by churches of different denominations and in a variety of countries. Some congregations in Canada will be celebrating Thanksgiving next Sunday. If this is your practice, please prepare with your family to participate in whatever special thanksgiving project that your church has chosen. Some rural congregations celebrate Thanksgiving at the time of the harvest in their community. Congregations in the USA celebrate Thanksgiving in November. For those congregations not celebrating Thanksgiving on October 7, the regular lectionary readings are provided. So, the next 2 pages contain both the Thanksgiving outline and the regular lectionary week for those not observing Thanksgiving.

Week 6 – October 7, 2018 (Thanksgiving Sunday)

How Do We Know God Is with Us?

Joel 2:21-27
 Psalm 126
 1 Timothy 2:1-7
 Matthew 6:25-33



Aim: To celebrate God's faithfulness in good and bad times.

Background

It takes a good deal of courage to choose to live with life's often difficult questions rather than to opt for superficially easy answers. That courage is easier to muster knowing that God is with us. But how do we know? How can we stay aware of God's faithfulness in bad as well as good times? What voices will reassure us? Prophetic voices like Joel's can inspire people in the midst of the most appalling circumstances. Singers' and poets' voices like the psalmist's, can move people with rhythm and metaphor and a vision beyond the reality of present hardship. Letter writers' voices like Timothy's can provide a personal relationship and an assurance of the connectedness of shared experience. Teachers' voices like Matthew's and Jesus' can enable us to discover for ourselves a perspective on life that leads to the deepest sense of satisfaction in a relationship with God. Let us thank God for all these timeless voices as well as for our own voice.

Faith Sharing

1. On a wall in the house create a collage of words and pictures to represent those things for which you are thankful. You can draw and use cut-outs from magazines and newspapers.
2. From all your friends and acquaintances name someone with whom you have not corresponded for a while. Write a letter which includes a contribution, either in word or picture, from everyone.
3. Next Sunday is World Food Sunday. It offers us an opportunity to put our Thanksgiving into action. Plan to go shopping as a family to purchase things that you really like to eat, and then take them as a gift to a food bank.



Week 2 – September 9, 2018

What Does It Mean to Be Open? (Recovenanting Sunday)

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23
 Psalm 125
 Romans 2:1-10 (11-13) 14-17
Mark 7:24-37

Aim: To wonder what it means to be open.



Background

On this Recovenanting Sunday we again make the choice to be part of a community of faith and we celebrate the gift of community. Questions are an important part of the Christian community. As individuals we ask the question "Who am I?" and "What does it mean to be part of a Christian church community?" Together we ask "Who Is Jesus?" and "What does God want for us?" To be part of a "Wondering Church" we must open ourselves to God and to one another – to risk asking our questions and to listen to others who may think differently to what we have believed. Today the scripture passages challenge us with the provocative question "What does it mean to be open?" In the story from Mark's gospel, even Jesus needed the prodding of the Syro-Phoenician woman (a Gentile) to see where he was not as open as God intends. Where some of us might get defensive, especially when tired as Jesus was, Jesus compliments the woman, opens himself fully to God's power and heals the woman's daughter.

Faith Sharing

1. Look together at the logo on the front of this leaflet. What do you see? What do you see first? Share ideas of what the logo means to you.
2. Talk as a family about what helps people to be open to God (e.g. going to church together, saying grace at meals, reading a Bible story together, etc.)
3. Take a walk or a hike together. Be open to God's presence in nature. Look for things that are open and things that are closed. What are the advantages of each? Notice that sometimes both ways are needed.
4. Together list the names of people that you feel open to. Talk about the qualities they have. List the people you feel closed to. What might you do to make this relationship different?

Week 3 – September 16, 2018

Who Is Jesus?

Proverbs 1:20-33
 Psalm 19
 James 3:1-12
Mark 8:27-38

Aim: To explore who we are and why we have come together.



Background

In today's Psalm, the psalmist reminds us that God speaks to us through God's loving Creation, and through the Law which tells us how to live in loving ways. The gospel writers proclaim that God speaks to us through Jesus. This question that Jesus asks his disciples in today's story "Who do you say that I am?" is a key question for every Christian. While Peter was able to declare, "You are the Messiah" he was not open to a new interpretation of what that meant. Jesus' understanding of what he was called to do did not fit the traditional definition of the Messiah. Peter had made a big leap of faith but he still had a long journey of learning ahead. Our recognition of this need to continually learn and grow brings us together as a community of faith.

Faith Sharing

1. Read the story "Simon becomes Peter" from *The Family Story Bible* page 210-211.
2. Each person takes a turn to ask "Who am I?" The rest of the family answer in as many ways as they wish, always beginning with the words "You are..." (Help each other see the many gifts and relationships that are ours.)
3. Everyone says one question that is important to them on that day. The questions do not have to be answered, only asked.
4. Put a large piece of paper on the fridge and at the top write the question "Who is Jesus?" During the week write answers on the sheet. At the end of the week, get together, look at the answers and say what you have learned.

Week 4 – September 23, 2018

Who Is Most Important?

Proverbs 31:10-31
Psalm 1
James 3:13—4:3, 7-8a
Mark 9:30-37



Aim: **To celebrate that all have an important place in Christ's community.**

Background

Last week we struggled with the question "Who is Jesus?" This week's passage from Mark provides another interesting answer when Jesus places a child among the disciples and says that the person who welcomes such a child also welcomes him. Who else might we welcome as if they were Jesus? If we were to treat each individual as if that person were Jesus, what difference would that make to our relationship and to that person's sense of worth and importance? The verses from Proverbs provide a detailed description of the capable wife and the Psalm gives characteristics of the faithful man. Like the wife and the man our importance can sometimes be measured in terms of what we *do*. Jesus, in choosing the child, indicates that *doing* can be overemphasized. We are important just in our *being*.

Faith Sharing

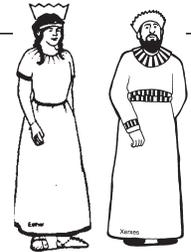
1. Read the story "Jesus and the Child" from *The Family Story Bible* page 214-215.

2. Make a paper silhouette of each family member and tape it on a wall somewhere in the house. At the top write the person's name followed by the sentence "(person's name) is important to this family because..." Invite family members to fill in various things throughout the week. Older members will need to print for youngest members.
3. Find photographs of each family member as a child or younger child than today. Take turns looking at each person's photographs. Name how special each person is to your family.
4. Light a candle, perhaps before a meal or before bedtime. Stand around it holding hands. For each person say together "(person's name), you are an important member of this family and we thank God that you are part of it."

Week 5 – September 30, 2018

Who Are the People of God?

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22
Psalm 124
James 5:13-20
Mark 9:38-50



Aim: **To explore the cost of belonging to God's community.**

Background

This week the story of Esther draws attention to our identity according to the communities of which we are a part. We say "I am a Christian," or "I am Jewish," or "I am Australian," or "I am Protestant," or "I am Catholic," etc. Having done that, we then discover that belonging to a community has both promise and cost. One promise or pay off is that I belong somewhere. The cost is that there are responsibilities I must share. And some people don't belong; they are excluded even as I am excluded in certain communities. The disciples were concerned about a strange leader who was casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus tells them not to stop the man because "Whoever is not against us is for us." Jesus shows us a way of making our communities much more inclusive.

Faith Sharing

1. Read "Esther Saves Her People" from *The Family Story Bible* pp 126-129.
2. Make a list of all the different communities of faith in your city, town or area. What do you know about each one? Choose one that you would like to know better. How will you find out more?
3. Involve everyone in planning a mealtime visit from a family or individual of another culture (foreign exchange student, city/farm, older person/family with young children, etc.)
4. Listen to some folk songs from other places and times. Talk about what the people who sang it wanted to tell other people.