



Wondering with Children & Youth Prayerfully Wondering A Five-Minute Devotion

This devotion has been adapted from the 2016 Practice Discipleship Curriculum on *Wonder*. The full session can be downloaded at www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship or www.practicediscipleship.org

SESSION DESCRIPTION

The most important thing we can do for children and youth is help them think theologically. Thinking theologically does not require us to memorize and recite Martin Luther or James Cone. Rather, it requires us to see our world through the lens of biblical faith that is humble, prophetic and hopeful. Brazilian education theorist, Paulo Freire claims all education is always either about domestication or praxis. Christian education in service of domestication spoon-feeds dogma and doctrine to young people for the sake of initiation and institutional maintenance. Christian education in service of praxis draws from the lived experiences of our young people, helping them understand, interpret and draw power from these experiences as encounters with earthly forces of death and God's power of resurrection and redemption. Douglas John Hall defines theology as God's people seeking to discern good news that will actually displace someone's bad news. Helping young people think theologically empowers them to proclaim Christ's good news into their neighbors' lives. This lesson will help you imagine way of helping children, youth and their families to think theologically.

In *Thinking the Faith* Douglas John Hall reminds us of the philosopher Heidegger's critique of optimism and pessimism as "childish categories" and, instead, urges us to use the biblical categories of sin & hope when reflecting on life. When we ask others to share their highs and lows, we are limiting them to the childish categories of optimism and pessimism. We miss the chance to develop the skill of reflecting theologically.

This devotion is a small piece of The Awareness Examen. The Awareness Examen is an old way of reflecting prayerfully over one's day. It was developed in the 1500's by Ignatius of Loyola as a form of prayer that is used broadly across most Christianity.

If your devotion time allows more than 5-minutes, I encourage you to practice the full Awareness Examen as seen in the handout.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Prayerful Wondering Handout for Leader

DEVOTION PLAN

Open with prayer & ask God to help see the moments of sin, brokenness, hope & healing in our lives and where God was in those moments.

Have your group pair up in twos or threes.

Ask your group to prayerfully look back over a specific period of time (a day, a week, a month).

Have your pairs take two minutes and share with one another about a moment where they encountered sin, or brokenness and how God was at work in that situation?

Then, take two minutes and share a moment when they encountered hope or healing in their lives and how God was at work in that situation.

After both partners shared, take a minute to close in prayer. Have partners pray for one another.

If time, discuss as a large group: How could you see using this exercise with the young people in your congregation?



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PRAYERFUL WONDERING

The Awareness Examen

In *Thinking the Faith* Douglas John Hall reminds us of the philosopher Heidegger's critique of optimism and pessimism as "childish categories" and, instead, urges us to use the biblical categories of sin and hope when reflecting on life. When we ask kids to share their highs and lows we are limiting them to the childish categories of optimism and pessimism. We miss the chance to help them develop the skill of reflecting theological upon their days. The *Awareness Examen* offers us a theological alternative to highs and lows.

The *Awareness Examen* is an old way of reflecting prayerfully over one's day. It was developed in the 1500's by Ignatius of Loyola as a form of prayer to be practiced twice daily by his order of Jesuits. It is now a form of prayer that is used broadly across most Christianity.

The *Awareness Examen* accomplishes three things.

1. It helps us develop eyes to see and ears to hear God at work in our world.
2. It helps us hear and see God at work in our world in both sin and hope.
3. Overtime it changes our very being, converting us into people who expect to see God working in our world in strange and mysterious ways.

When practicing the *Awareness Examen* . . .

1. Sit comfortably but upright with your spine straight, your feet flat on the floor and your hands in your lap.
2. Sit quietly with your eyes closed for a minute, allowing your muscles to relax, taking long deep breaths.
3. Prayerfully look back over a specific period of time (a day, a few days, or a week). Ask God to help you see the moments where you encountered sin, or brokenness in your life.
4. When you identify this moment, spend time pondering what was going on and how God was at work in that situation.
5. Again, prayerfully look back over the same period of time, asking God to help you see a moment when you encountered hope or healing in your life.
6. When you identify this moment, spend time pondering what was going on and how God was at work in that situation.
7. Give thanks to God for this time.
8. When practicing with a group it is good to give group members the chance to share their moments with one another if they wish. You can do this in many ways including allowing them to draw pictures of the moments that came to mind, or write poems, journal, strike poses, etc. before sharing with the group.