



## Wondering about Service Learning A 30- 45 Minute Session

This session has been adapted from the 2016 Practice Discipleship Curriculum on *Wonder*. The full session can be downloaded at [www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship](http://www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship) or [www.practicediscipleship.org](http://www.practicediscipleship.org)

### **SESSION DESCRIPTION**

Service learning moves service projects and mission trips from one-time events to experiences that open minds and hearts to new ways of thinking and acting. For example, youth might ponder tough questions about poverty in your hometown, notice the incredible artistry within God's creation, or glimpse the wisdom of a senior citizen in a simple conversation. By emphasizing adequate preparation, intentional reflection, and sharing stories with others, service experiences can be brought to life in profound, astonishing ways.

### **BIBLICAL FOCUS**

James 2:14-26

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

Bible  
Markers, crayons, pens  
Handout or sheets of paper

### **LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION**

#### **Prepare: We Wonder – Identifying Issues and Topics (15 Minutes)**

The following exercise is intended to identify a number of topics and issues that your group might be able to wonder about together (and later used to discuss a service experience that might aid your group in exploring issues further).

Pass out sticky notes or index cards (several to each participant). Ask participants to consider:

- What issues do you think or wonder about? What concerns you?
- What controversial issues are being faced in our community?
- What are “hot topic” issues in our nation or world?

Give participants a couple of minutes (on their own) to brainstorm responses. Ask them to write one topic or issue per note/card and encourage them to come up with several. Remind participants these might be topics that are difficult to talk about, are controversial, or don't necessarily have an easy answer. (If you need to provide suggestions, you might offer several,

such as homelessness, violence, immigration, senior citizens, bullying, racism, terrorism, water shortage, climate change, world hunger, etc. Or, you might suggest they think of major issues talked about in the news recently.)

As they finish, have participants post their responses on a wall or board (if sticky notes) or spread them on the floor or a flat surface (if index cards).

Ask a couple of individuals to help group the notes/cards according to themes, moving them around as necessary. Other participants may offer suggestions as they observe the process. The goal is to quickly identify similarities among responses and group them accordingly. Don't be too concerned about making the categories perfect.

Describe what you see as the topics or issues that seem to have emerged for the group (for instance, "Over here I see ... We've also identified ... Over there I see ..."). Invite sharing if a particular response needs further explanation, though affirm responses (i.e., do not question or make fun of responses). Continue to move or reorganize topics if necessary. You might end the exercise with a statement such as "Wow, we've identified a lot of issues and topics we can wonder about and discuss together."

(Note: As an alternative to this exercise, you could plan an extended time together and take your group for a brief walk in a neighborhood or community around your church or another part of town. Have participants think and wonder about what issues/topics/questions emerge as they observe the context.)

### **We Wonder – We Learn and Act (10 Minutes)**

The group now has the opportunity to consider how a service or mission experience can "open the issue" identified earlier. The purpose is to design a service experience based on what the group might wonder about and use the service learning process to provide insights, dig deeper, or bring about a solution.

Write the topic or issue identified earlier in large letters on the board or a large piece of paper. Make sure the topic is clear, summarized in 1-5 words. Below, write "What if we ...?"

Ask participants to think of a service, mission, or immersion experience that would allow the group to explore the issue, posed in the form of a question beginning with "What if we ...?" Invite participants to share as many responses as possible. (For example, if your group identified an environmental concern, responses might include a highway litter cleanup project, assisting with [or starting] a neighborhood community garden, planting trees, or touring a local water treatment facility.)

You might need to challenge participants to think beyond service projects (in which participants "do" something tangible) and consider immersion experiences (such as visiting an individual, organization, or community) for the sake of listening and learning more about the topic.

### **Plan: Try It Out: Using Service Learning (15/20 Minutes)**

Your group now has the opportunity to begin creating a service, mission, or immersion experience using three key elements of service learning (introduced in the section above). For this exercise, choose an example from the “What if we ...?” exercise earlier. You might choose the idea that seemed to have the most energy surrounding it, is unique, or you as the leader see potential for combining meaningful service with a learning opportunity. Alternatively, you could suggest three options and have the group decide or vote to choose one.

Pass out copies of “Service Learning Planning Guide” (see appendix) to each participant. Spend 10-15 minutes (adjust according to the time you have remaining) working through the worksheet to develop a potential outline for a service learning experience. (Note: If your group is larger than 10-12, you may wish to split into smaller groups and compare thoughts later. Adapt as needed.)

As the leader, keep the conversation lively and moving forward; don’t become too involved in specific details. If your group intends to move forward with an actual service experience, additional planning time will likely be required.

(Note: It might be difficult to determine what your group might do for the debrief and sharing stages until after the actual service experience happens. Even so, be intentional now in thinking how you might make space for these important elements of service learning, even if details are determined later.)

### **Closing the Conversation**

Thank the group for their participation and make any final remarks or announcements. Then offer this closing prayer (or one of your own):

*Gracious God, give us insight into issues we think and wonder about, questions we wrestle with, concerns we raise, challenges we face, opportunities we identify, and stories we share. Provide us with courage to wonder and explore, and call us into a faithful response as Christians in the world. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*



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## APPENDIX

### Ideas for Reflection on Service Experiences

- *keep a reflection journal*
- *write a poem*
- *compose music or write a song*
- *paint a picture, draw, or doodle*
- *capture and share photographs*
- *gather for group conversation*
- *create a photo slideshow*
- *produce a video*
- *choreograph a dance*
- *create a sculpture*
- *create a dramatic presentation (such as monologue, skit, or pantomime)*
- *design a brochure, information sheet, or flyer*
- *create a blog, inviting each person to contribute reflections*
- *use lectio divina or other reflective prayer practices*
- *create an artistic piece from items collected at the service site*
- *create a scrapbook of memories associated with the service experience*
- *create a website or social media page to share photos and stories*
- *write a story from another person's perspective (such as a person encountered during the service experience)*
- *write a "Letter to the Editor" of a local news publication*
- *stage a debate to discuss two opposing views*
- *create role-play situations to demonstrate issues raised*
- *create a question-and-answer panel, with participants serving as panel members*

Topic/issue selected:

## **STEP 1: PREPARE WELL**

### **Service Project Planning Guide**

(1) **Study the issue.** Spend time studying the topic/issue to better understand it, consider who is involved or affected, what perspectives exist, etc. You might utilize books, videos, online resources, guest speakers, or facilitated conversation.

(2) How can we study and more fully explore this topic/issue?

**Listen to others.** Listen to voices of those specifically affected or impacted by the issue (perhaps through a pre-service gathering, on-site orientation, or video clip).

*Who can we invite to share their story and perspective(s) regarding this topic/issue?*

(3) **Explore Scripture.** Select a biblical passage or two that speak to the topic/issue. Identify insights that emerge, as well as Christian faith perspectives that might be helpful in exploring the issue.

*What biblical passage(s) can be explored related to this topic/issue?*

*What perspective(s) from the Christian faith speak to this topic/issue?*

## **STEP 2: DEBRIEF THE EXPERIENCE**

(1) **Reflect on the experience.** Provide time and space to debrief the group's experience to discuss insights, answers, solutions, new questions, concerns, etc. Use a variety of reflection methods to honor multiple learning styles.

*When and where can we provide an opportunity for reflection and debriefing?*

*How will we debrief? What reflection methods can we use?*

(2) **Return to Scripture.** Revisit the Scripture passage(s) used previously to reinforce the experience or discover new meanings or insights in light of the group's experience.

*When, where, and how can we revisit the Scripture passage(s)?*

(3) **“What’s next?”** Consider how the group might continue learning, be involved in action related to the topic/issue, how the experience leads them to act differently, or how attitudes or beliefs might be changed.

*When, where, and how can we invite the group to consider “what’s next?”*

### **STEP 3: TELL THE STORY**

(1) **Craft the message.** Determine what message or story can be told in light of the service learning experience (such as describing the issue, sharing how perspectives changed, insights gained from Scripture, etc.).

*When and how will we determine the message/story we have to share?*

(2) **Share with others.** Determine one or more ways your service learning experience can be shared. Find ways to incorporate insights from the reflection process earlier. Be creative!

*Who might we share our experience with? How might we do it?*