



Wondering about the Church 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 or www.practicediscipleship.org

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Recommended age: high school and adult

We were born for this. This is our watch as leaders and we want more than survival for our congregations and especially for the children, youth, and families we serve. We are called to lead the Christian movement forward in our own feeble little way—even if we are struggling to find the path ourselves. We can't focus on everything so we are compelled to set priorities. The process introduced in this session is effective for deepening faith and expanding the worldview of both leaders and congregations of all sizes and locations. It involves cultivating a new behavior that will open up our imagination as we join in God's Mission. This is the behavior of listening.

We are part of a long line of faithful servants who were often as unsure of themselves as we are. We are thinking about Abram and Sarai, Moses, Elizabeth and Mary, Peter and Paul, you get the drift. It may feel audacious to compare ourselves to these saints of the faith, yet we are convinced that on their watch, they had their own doubts and fears. We can courageously say that when we read scripture, we see that God's people have often felt uncertain as they followed God into the future. The first step they each took was to listen. We can do this!

BIBLICAL FOCUS

- Acts 10 - Peter's Vision

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles and/or Acts 10 Drama Script (see below)

LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION

(5 -10 minutes)

We are leading at a time in the church where there's a lot of change so it's important to ask ourselves what's in the way of our leadership.

- What is stopping you from growing as a leader in the church?

We can't focus on everything, but we can do something. We can pay attention and listen to God in prayer and scripture, in each other (the congregation), and in the people in our neighborhood.

- What does it mean for us to deeply and intentionally listen to God in this way?

WHAT? (5-10 minutes)

We all have biases and make assumptions based on our experiences. True listening starts with recognizing our own worldview and a willingness to set it aside to listen to others without judgement. This openness to discovering God in another person comes when we can see how God is working in our own lives and the lives of others.

Paper Folding Exercise

1. Give everyone a sheet of paper.
2. Tell everyone to close their eyes and follow your instructions.
3. Start giving instructions about what to do with the piece of paper. Examples :
 - a. fold it in half
 - b. fold the lower left corner over the upper right corner
 - c. turn it 90 degrees to the left
 - d. fold it again
 - e. rip a half-circle in the middle of the right side
 - f. etc....
4. Once you have given quite a few instructions (more than 10 at least for a great success), tell everyone to open their eyes and unfold their piece of paper.
5. Even though they all received the same instructions and had the same starting material, pretty much everyone will have a different result.

Conclusions:

- We don't all start with the same base (some held their piece of paper vertically or horizontally) so we don't all have the same results
- Some interpreted to rip a piece of paper as removing a big piece, some as a small piece
- Having eyes closed = not receiving feedback on our performance
- Some instructions appear vague to some and clear to others.
- Many other conclusions can be drawn on the fly from this

SO WHAT? (15 Minutes)

Read Acts 10 from the Bible or use the drama script and divide out parts. Discuss the following:

Imagine yourself hanging out in the very early church of the First Century. This means letting go of our own worldview and trying as hard as we can to locate ourselves in Peter's world. This was a world where there was no "Christian" understanding. The followers of Jesus were practicing Jews who in addition believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Think of them as a sect in Judaism that was not very popular with the Jewish leaders of the day. Peter, like the others, was still observing the purity code that prevented him from eating certain

things, associating with certain people, and encouraged a life set apart from those around them who were caught up in the cult of the Roman Empire. To be Jewish meant to live differently than others in the community. Most worshiped a pantheon of gods while the Jewish community was monotheistic, deeply shaping every aspect of their unique culture.

Wonder together about our own transformation using these 21st Century Christianity questions:

1. What have you been learning about yourself or others as you ponder these scripture readings? What questions do these texts raise for you? For your congregation?
2. How is your view of God shifting, based on these scriptures? What about your view of God's people, like Peter?
3. What about your view of those on the outside of the community like Cornelius? Who is outside of the community based on the current membership of your congregation?
4. What significance does this have for listening to God as you move to listening in the congregation? Or the neighborhood?

NOW WHAT? (5-10 minutes)

Throughout scripture, God moves people of faith from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Think about your own congregation. Use these questions for some honest conversation:

1. If your congregation disappeared tomorrow, what would the neighborhood miss?
2. Why does your congregation exist?

Listening to God in scripture and prayer, in the congregation, and in the neighborhood provides three great listenings that open up new possibilities for joining in God's mission.

PRAYER

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Initiative and modified by the Northeastern MN Synod Practice Discipleship team. Practice Discipleship is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network in close partnership with the ELCA and its synods. It is funded by the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA as an extension of the ministry of the ELCA Youth Gathering. Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials. For more information please visit www.practicediscipleship.org.

Acts 10 Drama Script

Narrator: In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him,

Angel of God: Cornelius.

Narrator: He stared at him in terror and said,

Cornelius: What is it, Lord?

Angel of God: Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.

Narrator: When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa. About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying,

Voice: Get up, Peter; kill and eat.

Peter: By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.

Narrator: The voice said to him again, a second time,

Voice: What God has made clean, you must not call profane.

Narrator: This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him,

Spirit: Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.

Narrator: So Peter went down to the men and said,

Peter: I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?

Men: Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.

Narrator: So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. But Peter made him get up, saying,

Peter: Stand up; I am only a mortal.

Narrator: And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them,

Peter: You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?

Narrator: Cornelius replied,

Cornelius: Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.

Narrator: Then Peter began to speak to them:

Peter: I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ-- he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Narrator: While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said,

Peter: Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

Narrator: So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.