



# FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Find time to explore these questions as a family after each session.

## Session 1

- How do we/you know that God exists? How would you respond to someone who tells you that God doesn't exist?
- Have you experienced God's presence in your life? If so, when? If not, do you think you will ever experience God?
- Is it OK to have times of doubt and to question God's existence? Why or why not?

## Session 2

- We began the session with the question "Who is God?" Describe for your family or friends your understanding of God as a Trinity. What are some ways that the different persons of the Trinity are commonly thought of as functioning and interacting?
- Ask an adult what they have learned, either in their youth or more recently, about God as a Trinity.
- What impact on your life and faith (and those of family and friends) does the idea of the Trinity have?
- Share with your family or friends some of the new expressions for God as Trinity that you and the rest of the group came up with. What do they think of such expressions? What new Trinitarian images would they use to describe God?

## Session 3

- We began the session with the question "Why did God allow sin into the world?" Ask your family or friends to share their answer to that question. If they say that God didn't "allow" sin into the world, ask them where they believe sin comes from.
- Ask an adult to tell—as they remember it and without consulting a Bible—the story of the Garden of Eden and the origin of sin. Next, tell the same adult the story of the Garden of Eden and the origin of sin as well as you can remember it. Then open a Bible to Genesis 2–3 and read the story together.
- Ask family and friends how they deal with (and overcome) the presence of sin in their lives.

## Session 4

- Read some or all of Psalm 139 with an adult. Ask him or her to share the earliest thoughts he or she can remember having about God.
- We began the session with two questions: "Does God know what will happen before it happens?" and "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Ask your family or friends to share their answers.
- Ask your family or friends how they respond when bad things happen to them or to those around them. How do they think God calls them to respond to the presence of evil and suffering in the world?

## Session 5

- Read Exodus 33:7–11 to your family or friends; then ask them whether they would rather be Moses—who gets to speak with God privately—or the people who have to wait outside the tent while God and Moses talk, and why.
- Ask family or friends whether, given the chance to see God face to face, they would do it, and why or why not.
- Ask your family or friends to think of as many words as they can to describe God's character. Then share some of the words that the class came up with.

## Session 6

- Why do you believe or not believe in God? At what times or in what situations do you find it most difficult to believe in God?
- How confident are you explaining your beliefs to other people?
- How would you respond if someone asked you how to define *faith*?
- How would you respond to someone who told you he or she did not believe in God?





# **Why is there so much sin and evil in the world?**



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# Why do bad things happen to good people?



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# Where Can I Find God?



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# Is God in Control?



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# What is Good like?



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# Does God

# know what will

# happen before it happens?



# **How do we know that God exists?**



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# WHERE ARE YOU, GOD?

*Based on Genesis 1:1–3; Psalm 19:1–4a*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** Where is God?

**Females:** The heavens are telling the glory of God;

**Males:** and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.

**Leader:** But where *is* God?

**Males:** Day to day pours forth speech,

**Females:** and night to night declares knowledge.

**Leader:** But where *is* God?

**Females:** There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

**Males:** yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

**Leader:** And so where exactly is God? Let us pray:

**All:** God of mystery, we look around this world you’ve made, and sometimes we see signs of you everywhere: in the stars on a clear night, in the miracle of life, even in those hard places where we do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do. Other times, we stumble around in darkness, searching for you, but find only our fears, our selfish desires, our failures. Open our eyes and ears, we pray, to the reality that if we want to find you, we must be still and know that you’ve found us first! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



# CAN WE FIND GOD?

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Psalm 19. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Psalm 19:1–4a silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud to the rest of the group.

- What is the writer of the psalm saying about how we know that God exists?
- What do you picture in your mind when you read, “The heavens are telling the glory of God”? What does this picture tell you about God?
- How can there be language without words? (verse 3) What do you think this means?

**Step 2:** Think about how nature “works.” The earth orbits the sun, the atmosphere provides the necessary ingredients for life, plants and animals adapt to the changing earth in order to survive, and humans have the intelligence and capacity to thrive by growing food, building shelter, and creating a life-sustaining civilization.

- Do you consider these things proof that there is a God and that this God cares for the world and for us? Why or why not?

**Step 3:** Think about a time when you were faced with a choice to do right or wrong.

- Whether you actually did the right or wrong thing, what did your conscience tell you?
- Some consider conscience to be proof of God’s existence and influence in human life; do you agree? Why or why not?

**Step 4:** Read the following statement from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* silently. Then have a group member read the statement out loud to the group.

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave humans inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of God’s will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal God’s self, and to declare that God’s will unto God’s Church; and . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary . . .

—*Westminster Confession of Faith* (6.001)

The language seems pretty old-school, doesn’t it? (What do you expect—it’s over three hundred years old!) But we can clear up a few things to make it easier to figure out:

*Providence* = “God’s care for God’s creation”

*Manifest* = “show”

*Sundry* = “various”

*Divers* = “various” or “more than one”

- According to this statement, there are two ways that people come to know God; what are they? Are they equal in value? If not, which is more important?
- How does this statement “fit” with Psalm 19:1–4a?
- How would you put this statement in your own words?



# DOES GOD FIND US?

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Acts 17. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Acts 17:22–31 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud to the rest of the group. This is a speech by the apostle Paul (who can be a bit long-winded!) to a group of pagans in Athens, Greece.

“What . . . you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (v. 23).

This is a key statement: Before, the Athenians were stumbling around, looking for the gods in the world around them; now God, through Paul’s voice, is coming to the Athenians and saying, “Here I am!”

**Step 2:** Imagine that you, like the Athenians, have never heard of the Christian God—you’ve just always had a feeling that there must be something bigger than you out there, some ultimate source of all that *is*. So, you assign a god to the trees, a god to the animals, a god to the sun, and so on. And then along comes someone like Paul, claiming to tell you the truth about the gods (and God!).

- What would you think?

**Step 3:** In verses 24–29, Paul “backs up” his big claim from verse 23: He summarizes the biblical version of how the world and human society came to be. God created the world and then the first human being, and God planned out the growth of nations and peoples. Then, Paul proclaims that “we are God’s offspring” (v. 29), made in God’s image, and he asks the Athenians what makes them think that God can be found in an idol of gold, silver, or stone.

- What would you think if you were hearing about this one *true* God for the first time?

**Step 4:** In verses 30–31, Paul gets to his main point: It’s time for people to turn around (“repent”) and open their eyes and ears because God has come to earth in human form, as Jesus Christ. But because Jesus was not only human but also God, Jesus represents the perfect revelation of God! We no longer need to “grope for God” (v. 27), because in Jesus, and later in the words of Paul and the other biblical authors, God has revealed God’s self to us.

- Now what do you think? Has Paul convinced you that he has the truth about God? Why or why not?
- What do Paul’s words tell you about how we find God? (Or do we?)

**Step 5:** Read the following statement from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* silently. Then have a group member read the statement out loud to the group.

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave humans inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of God’s will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal God’s self, and to declare that God’s will unto God’s Church; and . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary . . . .

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*Divers* = “various” or “more than one”

- According to this statement, there are two ways that people come to know God; what are they? Are they equal in value? If not, which is more important?
- How would you put this statement in your own words?



# WE KNOW GOD NATURALLY

*Directions:* Use this page to help your team prepare for a debate on how people discover and come to know God.

## Your team's position:

People can know God simply by looking at themselves and the world around them.

(You personally may not agree, but for the sake of the debate your job is to convince the other team of this proposition.)

### Step 1: Read Psalm 19:1.

- What is the writer of the psalm saying about how we know that God exists?
- What do you picture in your mind when you read, "The heavens are telling the glory of God"? What does this picture tell you about God?

*Remember, your team's task is to argue that we can know God naturally—meaning, from what we observe of ourselves, others, and the world around us!*

### Step 2: Consider the following statement from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

"... the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave [humans] inexcusable . . ."

—*Westminster Confession of Faith* (6.001)

The language probably seems a bit old-school, doesn't it? (What do you expect—it's over three hundred years old!) But we can clear up a few things to make it easier to figure out:

*Providence* is God's care for God's creation

*Manifest* simply means "show"

- What do you make of the word *inexcusable*? What do we have no excuse for?
- How would you put this faith statement in your own words?

**Step 3:** Think about how nature "works": The earth orbits the sun, the atmosphere provides the necessary ingredients for life, plants and animals adapt to the changing earth in order to survive, and we humans have the intelligence and capacity to survive by growing food, building shelter, and creating a life-sustaining civilization.

- Surely all of these things are proof that there is a God and that this God cares for the world and for us, right?
- How might you argue this point?

**Step 4:** Think about a time when you were faced with a choice to do right or wrong.

- Whether you actually did the right or wrong thing, what did your conscience tell you?
- How might you argue the point that conscience is proof of God's existence and influence in your life?

*Note:* During the debate, the moderator will ask a series of questions (not necessarily the questions on this page), and each team will have forty-five seconds per question to respond.





# WE KNOW GOD BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO

*Directions:* Use this page to help your team prepare for a debate on how people discover and come to know God.

## **Your team's position:**

People can know God only because God has chosen to reveal God's self in the person of Jesus Christ, in the Bible, and in the church.

(You personally may not agree, but for the sake of the debate your job is to convince the other team of this proposition.)

### **Step 1:** Read Acts 17:22–31.

This is a speech by the apostle Paul (who can be a bit long-winded!) to a group of pagans in Athens, Greece. It's a complicated passage, so use the following information to break it down into parts.

- "What . . . you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (v. 23). This is a key statement: Before, the Athenians were stumbling around, looking for the gods in the world around them; now God, through Paul's voice, is coming to the Athenians and saying, "Here I am!"
- In verses 24–29, Paul summarizes the biblical version of how the world and human society came to be: God created the world and then the first human being, and God planned out the growth of nations and peoples. Then Paul proclaims that "we are God's offspring" (v. 29), made in God's image—so what makes us think that God can be found in an idol of metal or stone?
- In verses 30–31, Paul gets to his main point: It's time for people to turn around ("repent") and open their eyes and ears, because God has come to earth in human form, as Jesus Christ. But because Jesus was not only human but also God, Jesus represents the perfect revelation of God! We no longer need to "grope for God" (v. 27), because in Jesus, and later in the words of Paul and the other biblical authors, God has revealed God's self to us.

### **Step 2:** Consider the following statement from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

"Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave humans inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of God's will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord . . . to reveal God's self, . . . and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary . . ."

— *Westminster Confession of Faith* (6.001)

The language probably seems a bit old-school, doesn't it? (What do you expect—it's over three hundred years old!) But we can clear up a few things to make it easier to figure out:

*Providence* is God's care for God's creation

*Manifest* simply means "show"

*Propagating* means "spreading"

- According to this statement, there are two ways that people come to know God; what are they? Are they equal in value? If not, which is more important?
- How would you put this statement in your own words?

*Note:* During the debate, the moderator will ask a series of questions (not necessarily the questions on this page), and each team will have forty-five seconds per question to respond.



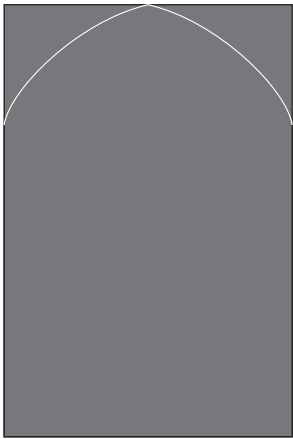
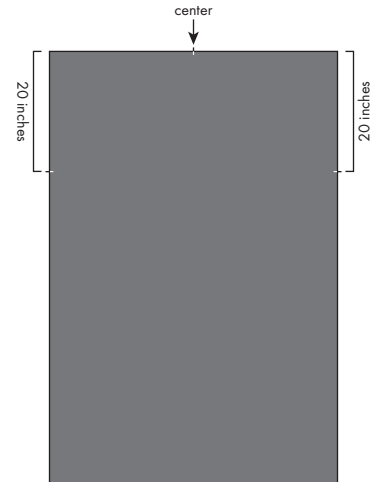
# STAINED-GLASS ART

*Note to leaders:* If you decide to do the stained-glass art project in all six sessions, you may use these instructions to create a stained-glass window frame on which to mount and display the individual panes that your group will make in each session.

*Supplies needed:* One 4' x 6' sheet of black foam-core board, yardstick, pencil, newspapers, cutting tool, craft glue for paper, completed stained-glass art projects

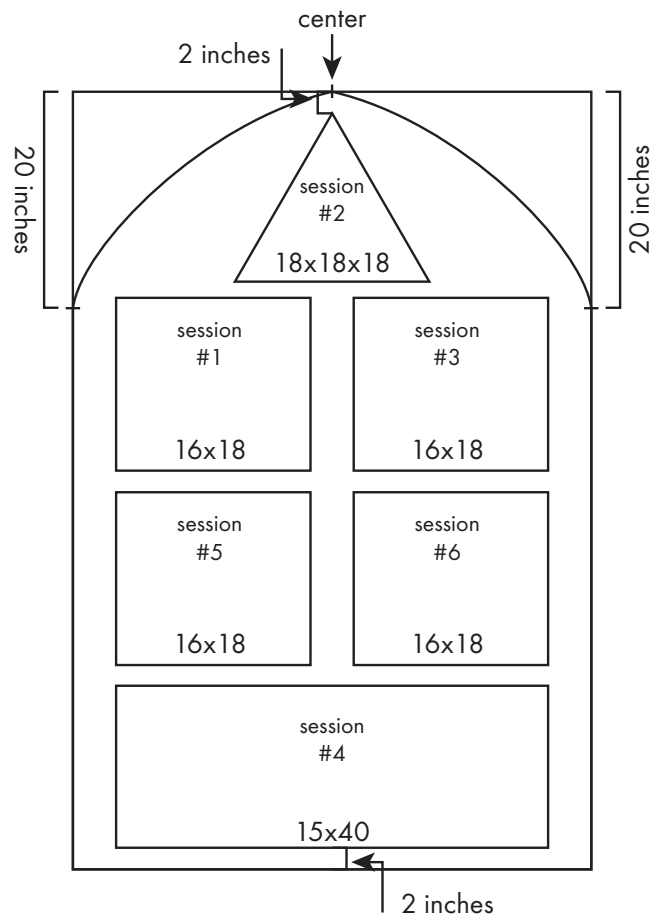
## Creating a Gothic Arch

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2. Use the diagram to guide you in connecting each side mark with the mark in the center, creating a Gothic arch shape. Place the foam core on a stack of newspapers to protect the table or floor. Cut on the connecting lines to cut out the arch.

3. Mount the individual stained-glass panes that your group has created in each session on this foam-core board frame with craft glue.



# Lectio Divina Guidelines

*Lectio divina* ("divine reading") is an intentional, contemplative way to connect with God's Word. This ancient spiritual practice involves listening to multiple readings of the same Scripture passage interspersed with short periods of silence. If possible, invite different types of voices to be readers (e.g., young and old, male and female).

## **Relax in God's Presence**

Dim the lights. Light a candle or oil lamp. Play contemplative music. Take a few minutes to relax in God's presence.

## **Listen for God's Word**

### **First Reading**

Have a group member slowly read the Scripture passage out loud while the rest of the group members listen for a word that "jumps out" to each of them. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her word (without comment or explanation) with the rest of the group. Allow a time of silence before the next reading.

### **Second Reading**

Invite each group member to think about his or her word during the next reading, exploring the question "How does this word and this Scripture passage connect with my life?" Have a second reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and allow for a time of silence after the reading. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her response to the question.

### **Third Reading**

Invite each group member to think about the question "What is this passage calling me to do?" or "Who is this passage calling me to be?" during the next reading. Have a third reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and end with a time of silence. Give each person an opportunity to respond to the question "What have you heard from God in this Scripture passage?"





**Write the meaning of your  
name on an index card.**

**Then write five adjectives  
that describe you and tell  
who you really are!**



# WHO ARE YOU, GOD?

*Based on Genesis 1:1–3; Matthew 28:16–20*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** Who is this God who meets us as the light that shines in the darkness?

**Females:** Who is this true light that enlightens us all?

**Males:** Who is this light of the world?

**Leader:** We go to meet Jesus, the light, on the mountaintop.

**Males:** We bow down and worship,

**Females:** and sometimes we doubt.

**Leader:** But he sends us out to serve, and we go. Let us pray:

**All:** O God, three in one, you’re a mystery. We climb the mountain to meet you, and we want to know you, but we get bogged down in trying to figure you out. And yet you send us out anyway, to be your hands and feet in the world. Help us to trust that you are the Creator who loves us, your creation; you are the Redeemer who saves us, your lost sheep; you are the Sustainer who strengthens us, your church. Amen and amen and amen.





# THE GREAT COMMISSION

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Matthew 28:16–20. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Matthew 28:16–20 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud to the rest of the group.

**Step 2:** Note that these are the last five verses in Matthew’s Gospel, so they come *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection.

- Why does verse 16 mention only eleven disciples? (If you’re not sure, see Matthew 27:3–5.)

**Step 3:** Look closely at verse 17: “they worshiped him; but some doubted.”

- What do you think of the doubters?
- Do you have doubts about your faith, either occasionally or all the time? How do you feel when doubts creep in?
- It’s not totally clear in this verse whether those who doubted were also among those who were worshiping. Is it possible to worship and doubt at the same time? Why or why not?

**Step 4:** Verses 19–20 are often called the “Great Commission”; that is, Jesus commissions his followers to go out into the world and serve him in two particular ways.

- What are those two things Jesus calls us to do?

**Step 5:** In this passage, Jesus makes one of the Bible’s few references to the Trinity: God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Does thinking about God as a Trinity help you understand God better, or does it make God more confusing? Please explain your answer.

# THE NICENE CREED

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring the Nicene Creed. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. . . . We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. . . . We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. . . .

—The Nicene Creed (1.1, 1.2, and 1.3)

**Step 1:** Read the excerpt above silently. Then have a group member read the statement out loud to the group.

**Step 2:** This statement refers to God as a Trinity: as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Does thinking about God as a Trinity help you understand God better, or does it make God more confusing? Please explain your answer.

**Step 3:** One way of thinking about God as three “persons” but one God is to think in terms of functions:

The Father is the creator and ruler of the world.

The Son is the savior and liberator who reconciles sinful humanity with God.

The Spirit is the renewer of human life, the one who empowers the Christian community to serve God and who illuminates the words of Scripture for our understanding.

Along these lines, you may have heard the Trinity called “Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.”

- Do you find this way of thinking helpful to your understanding of God as a Trinity? Why or why not?
- What benefits can you see in thinking of God in these terms?
- What dangers can you see, if any, in thinking of God in these terms?

**Step 4:** The “Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer” model is also used by some to avoid gender-specific language. This position holds that we should not refer to God exclusively as “Father,” because God—a spiritual being rather than a human being—is neither male nor female and using this language limits our understanding of God. On the other hand, it can be argued that because Jesus referred to God as “Father,” we should do likewise.

- How do you feel about the use of gender-specific language to refer to God?

**Step 5:** Another important perspective on the issue of language in reference to the Trinity is that when we refer to God the Father and God the Son, we are speaking not of God’s *gender* but of “the *kind of relationship* that exists between the members of the Trinity and between the triune God and us human beings—a relationship that is like the intimate relationship between parents and their children.”<sup>1</sup> This closely knit community of the three persons of the Trinity is another helpful way of understanding God’s nature.

- What does this suggest about how we ought to live together as people of faith?

1. Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, revised ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 74.

# THE SCOTS CONFSSION (3.01)



We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust.

Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by God's inscrutable providence for such end as God's eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of God's own glory.







# THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (4.025)

## Question 25:

Since there is only one Divine Being, why do you speak of three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

## Answer:

Because God has thus revealed himself in his Word, that these three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God.



# THE SHORTER CATECHISM (7.005 AND 7.006)

## **Question 5: Are there more Gods than one?**

Answer:  
There is but one only, the living and true God.

## **Question 6. How many Persons are there in the Godhead?**

Answer:  
There are three Persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.



# A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH (10.1)

In life and in death we belong to God.  
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God, and the communion of the Holy  
Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One  
of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.





# WHO IS GOD?

- Deuteronomy 6:4
- Mark 12:29–30
- John 1:1, 14
- John 14:15–18
- 1 Corinthians 8:4
- Ephesians 4:4–6
- The Scots Confession (3.01)
- The Heidelberg Catechism (4.025)
- The Shorter Catechism (7.005, 7.006)
- A Brief Statement of Faith (10.1)

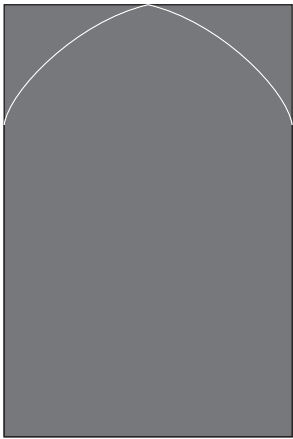
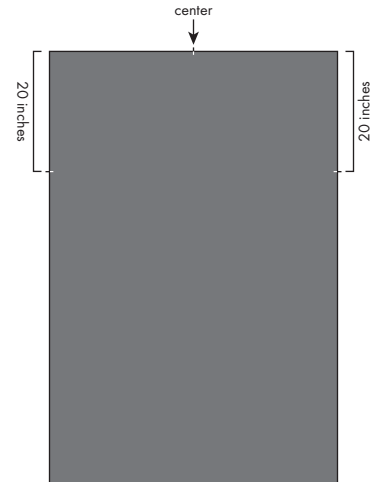
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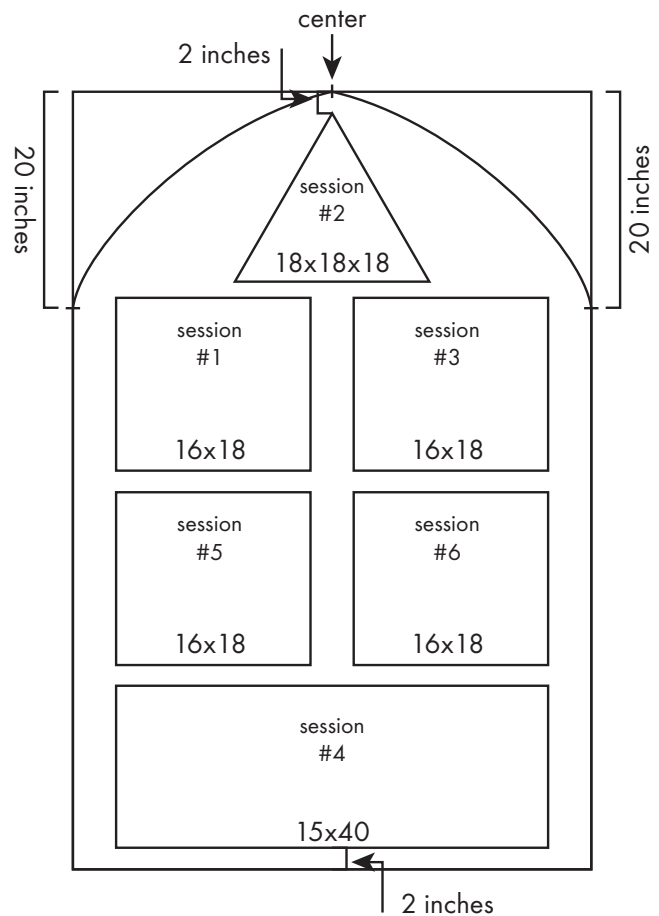
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### **Third Reading**

Invite each group member to think about the question "What is this passage calling me to do?" or "Who is this passage calling me to be?" during the next reading. Have a third reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and end with a time of silence. Give each person an opportunity to respond to the question "What have you heard from God in this Scripture passage?"



# IMAGES OF THE TRINITY



*Note to leaders:* Cut out each statement and distribute the statements to the participants.

As we worship, the triune God is the One from Whom, the One through Whom, and the One in Whom we offer our praise.

—Romans 11:36

As we grow in grace, the triune God is our Sun, Light, and Burning Ray.

—John of Damascus, *First Apology*

As we read, proclaim, hear, and live out the message of Scripture, the triune God is known to us as Speaker, Word, and Breath.

—Hebrews 1:1; John 1:1;  
John 20:22; Psalm 104:30

As we offer ourselves, our resources, and our gratitude in stewardship and Eucharist, the triune God is Giver, Gift, and Giving.

—James 1:17; John 3:16;  
2 Corinthians 9:15; 1 John 3:24

In baptism, the triune God is for us Overflowing Font, Living Water, Flowing River.

—*Book of Common Worship*, p. 412;  
John 4:10, 13–14; John 7:37

As members of the believing community, we acknowledge the triune God as our Rock, Cornerstone, and Temple.

—Psalm 28:1; Ephesians 2:20–21

As we are born anew by water and the Spirit, the triune God is Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child, and Life-giving Womb.

—Isaiah 49:15; Matthew 3:17;  
Isaiah 46:3

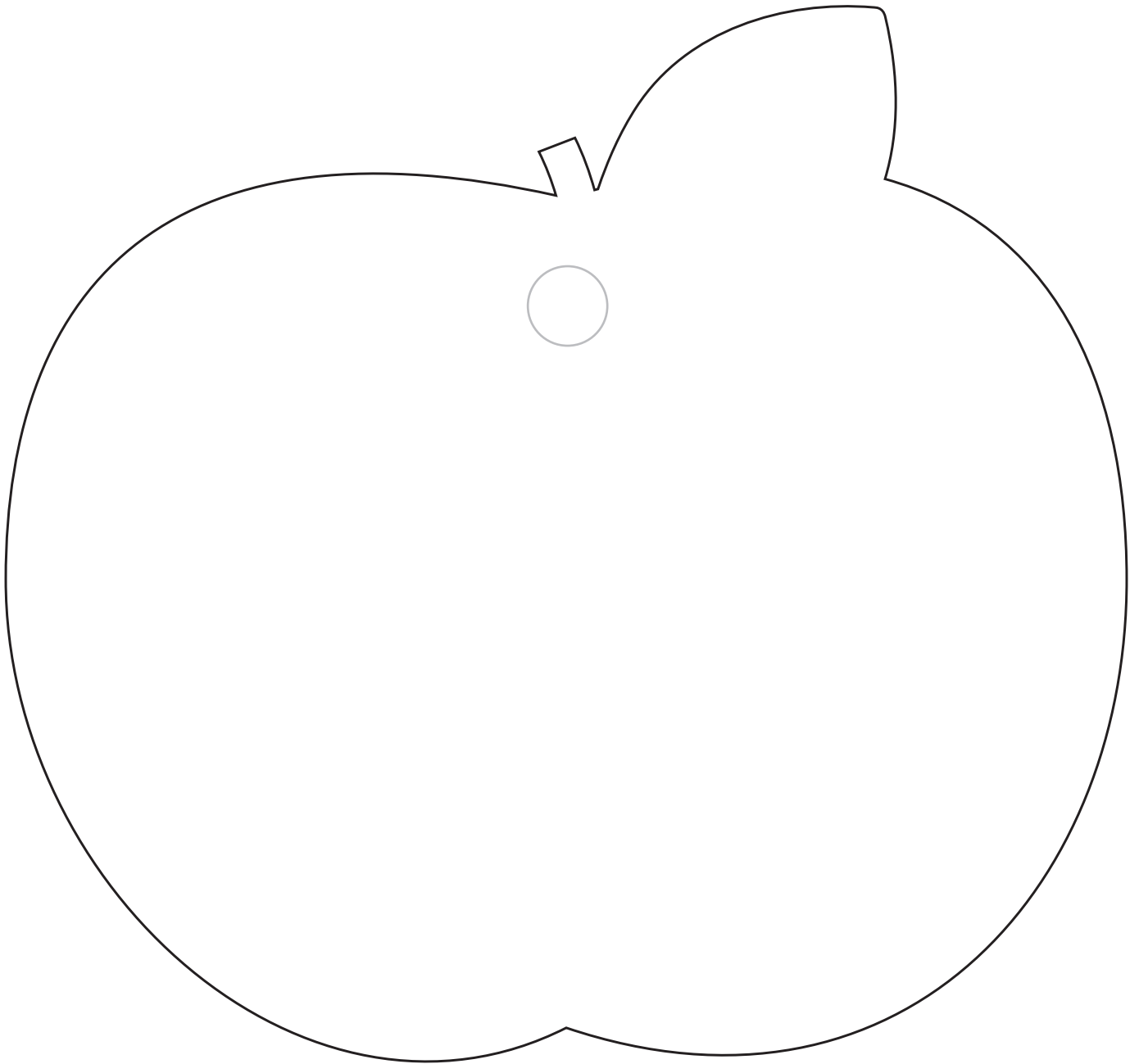
As we seek to live in faith, love, and hope, the triune God is for us the One Who Was, the One Who Is, and the One Who Is to Come.

—Revelation 4:8





# APPLE PATTERN







# WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

*Based on Genesis 1–3*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** And when there was light and sky and water and dry land;

**Females:** when there was soil and plant life and trees in the field;

**Males:** when there were fish in the sea, birds in the air, wild animals creeping and running and slithering all over the earth;

**All:** then God made us

**Males:** —male and female—in God’s image.

**Females:** God made us and put us to work and play.

**Leader:** Sometimes we play fair; sometimes we don’t. Let us pray:

**All:** Creating God, how amazing it is that you give us a part to play in the miracle of life! You raise us up out of your good earth, place us in your garden, and call us to be its caretakers. But when we look around, we see that weeds have crept in, that fruit is rotting on the vine. And then we look at ourselves, and there’s rot in our thoughts, our actions, our relationships. Where did it come from, O God? This is our prayer in Jesus’ name: Wash us clean, O God. Amen.





# IN THE GARDEN

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Genesis 3:1–13. If other groups are exploring the same passage, be prepared to report your findings to the others.

**Step 1:** Read Genesis 3:1–13 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud to the rest of the group.

**Step 2:** List the actors in this drama and then jot down several words or phrases that describe each character.

**Step 3:** The serpent has often been thought of as a personification of the devil (Satan).

- Do you agree with this idea?
- What evidence do you find in the biblical text that the serpent is Satan?
- If the serpent is Satan, what does this mean regarding the origin of sin?
- If the serpent is *not* Satan, what does this mean regarding the origin of sin?

**Step 4:** Reread verses 1–7.

- Does the serpent lie to the woman in these verses? (Compare Genesis 2:16–17.)
- If so, does this justify the woman's eating of the fruit? Why or why not?
- What is the actual sin(s) of the woman and man in this passage?

**Step 5:** Reread verses 8–13.

- In what ways can you identify with the actions of the woman and man in these verses?

**Step 6:** In your view, does God “allow” sin to enter the world in this passage?  
(In other words, is it God's will that the humans commit sins?)



# A BRIEF STATEMENT ON WHAT WENT WRONG

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Genesis 3:1–13. If other groups are exploring the same passage, be prepared to report your findings to the others.

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.3)

**Step 1:** Read the excerpt from A Brief Statement of Faith silently. Then choose a group member to read the statement out loud.

**Step 2:** Read Genesis 3:13. What phrases from this faith statement reflect the events described in Genesis 3:1–13? List them.

**Step 3:** Taking the phrases you listed one by one, discuss the ways that we are guilty of those actions in our own lives.

**Step 4:** According to the faith statement, where does sin come from?

**Step 5:** Do you agree that "We deserve God's condemnation"? Why or why not?



# FAITH STATEMENT

In sovereign love God created  
the world good and makes  
everyone equally in God's image,  
male and female, of every race and  
people, to live as one community.  
But we rebel against God; we  
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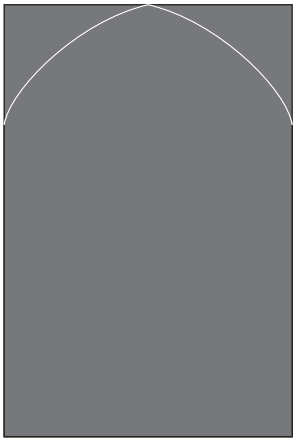
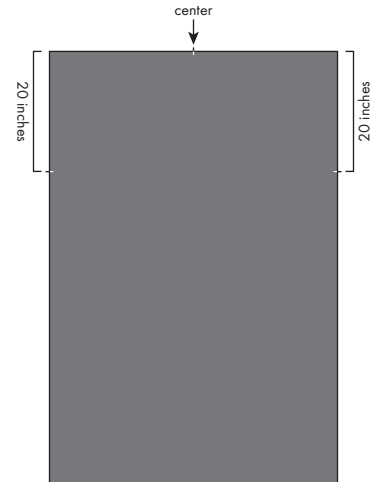
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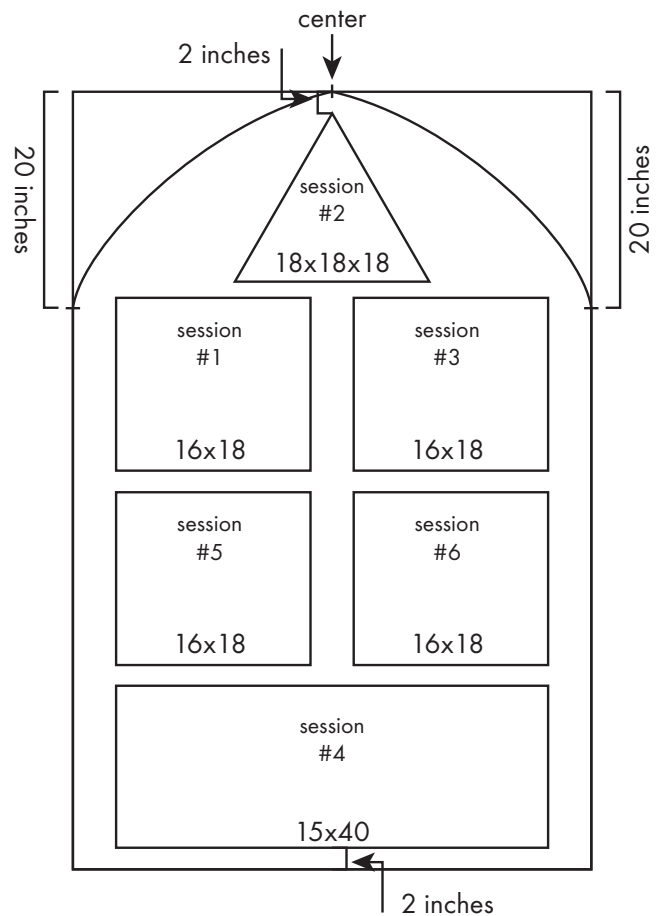
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*Lectio divina* ("divine reading") is an intentional, contemplative way to connect with God's Word. This ancient spiritual practice involves listening to multiple readings of the same Scripture passage interspersed with short periods of silence. If possible, invite different types of voices to be readers (e.g., young and old, male and female).

## **Relax in God's Presence**

Dim the lights. Light a candle or oil lamp. Play contemplative music. Take a few minutes to relax in God's presence.

## **Listen for God's Word**

### **First Reading**

Have a group member slowly read the Scripture passage out loud while the rest of the group members listen for a word that "jumps out" to each of them. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her word (without comment or explanation) with the rest of the group. Allow a time of silence before the next reading.

### **Second Reading**

Invite each group member to think about his or her word during the next reading, exploring the question "How does this word and this Scripture passage connect with my life?" Have a second reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and allow for a time of silence after the reading. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her response to the question.

### **Third Reading**

Invite each group member to think about the question "What is this passage calling me to do?" or "Who is this passage calling me to be?" during the next reading. Have a third reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and end with a time of silence. Give each person an opportunity to respond to the question "What have you heard from God in this Scripture passage?"





# DICEY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think God knows what will happen before it happens?
2. If Jesus sat down next to you on a bus, what one question would you ask him?
3. What event lately has really gotten you down?
4. In what ways can you often see God at work in the world?
5. In what ways do you not see God at work in the world?
6. Why do you think bad things happen to good people?



# SO MANY 'WHYS'



*Based on Genesis 1:1–3; Psalm 139:1–4*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** By that light God searches us out and knows us.

**Females:** God knows when we sit down and when we stand up.

**Males:** God reads our minds from far away.

**Females:** But if God made all and knows all and sees all, why are there tsunamis and hurricanes?

**Males:** Why is there starvation and disease?

**Females:** Why are there house fires and car wrecks?

**Males:** Why is there violence and crime?

**Leader:** There are too many *whys*. Let us pray:

**All:** Loving God, we believe in your power and in your care for creation. But we have a lot of questions. When a bad thing happens, does it mean that you care but aren't strong enough to stop it? Or does it mean that you could stop it but you don't care enough? Or is there another question we ought to be asking? Visit us this day, we pray; send your Spirit among us so that we might learn more about your ways, and strengthen us to deal with the evil and suffering in the world as your faithful people. Amen.



# NO ESCAPE FROM GOD

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Psalm 139. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Psalm 139 silently. Then have a group member (or several) read the psalm out loud.

**Step 2:** Focusing on verses 1–18 only . . .

- What is the writer’s understanding of God?
- What words would you use to describe God as God is pictured in these verses?

**Step 3:** Now focus on verses 19–22 . . .

- Do these verses “fit” with the rest of the psalm? Why or why not?
- In verse 19, the writer speaks of people who are “wicked” and “bloodthirsty.” Does he or she give any indication of where such people come from, or how they got that way? In your view, how do “evil” people get that way?

**Step 4:** Now focus on the final “prayer,” verses 23–24 . . .

- How would you put those verses in your own words?

**Step 5:** Read the following statement from the *Heidelberg Catechism* silently. Then choose a group member to read the statement aloud:

**Q. 28.** What advantage comes from acknowledging God’s creation and providence?

A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from God’s love, since all creatures are so completely in God’s hand that without God’s will they cannot even move.

—*Heidelberg Catechism* (4.028)

**Step 6:** Discuss the following:

- What does it mean to be *patient in adversity*?
- Think about how this statement describes God. In what ways does this description of God agree with the description of God in Psalm 139?
- Considering how God is described in Psalm 139 and in the faith statement, how do you think we are called to respond when evil or suffering strikes in the world around us?



# GOD IS WITH US

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Romans 8:31–39. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Romans 8:31–39 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud.

**Step 2:** Read the second half of verse 31.

- What is your answer to Paul's question: If God is for us, who is against us?
- What does this question mean to you?

**Step 3:** Read verse 35. Paul lists serious situations that affected people in his time and still affect people today, including persecution, famine, and sword (meaning, war). He also mentions the *love of Christ*.

- What is the relationship between these situations and Christ's love?
- Does Christ's love prevent bad things from happening, or does Christ's love serve another role?

**Step 4:** Verses 38–39 contain another list, longer and more abstract, of things that we face in life.

- What powers do these things have over us, and what powers do they not have?

**Step 5:** In your own words, what promise does Paul make in this passage as a whole?

**Step 6:** Read the following statement from the *Heidelberg Catechism* silently. Then choose a group member to read the statement aloud:

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—*Heidelberg Catechism* (4.028)

**Step 7:** How does the message of this statement agree or not agree with Paul's message in Romans 8:31–39?

**Step 8:** Considering the messages of Romans 8:31–39 and the faith statement, how do you think we are called to respond when evil or suffering strikes in the world around us?

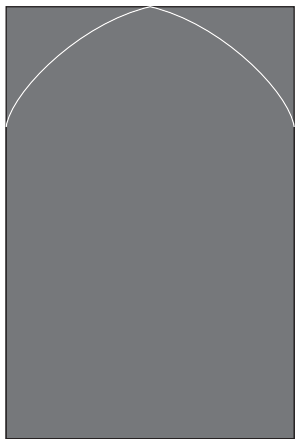
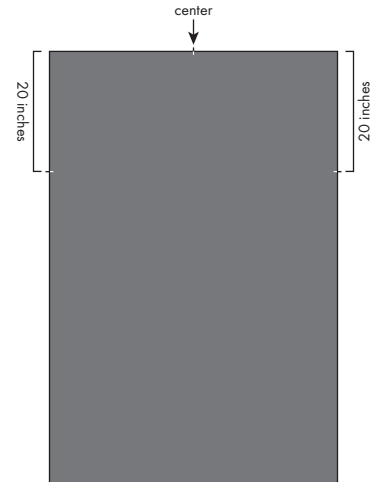
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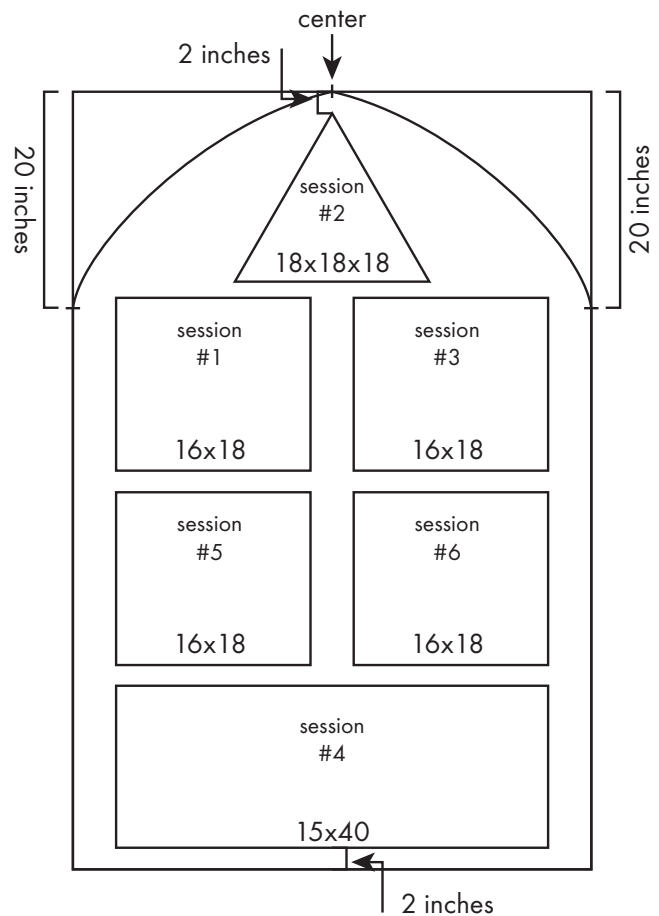
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# YES, BUT WHAT IS GOD REALLY LIKE?



*Based on Genesis 1:1–3; Exodus 33:18; John 14:8*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** Yes, yes, there was light. God is light, God is power, God is Creator.

**All:** But what is God really like?

**Females:** Does God cry when we cry?

**Males:** Does God laugh when we laugh?

**Leader:** Moses and Philip wanted to see God with their own eyes, up close, and so do we. But God had something else in mind—for them and for us. Let us pray:

**All:** O God, who walked among us, we are grateful for your creating love and your saving grace, for friends and family, and for this community of faith. But sometimes it’s all so abstract. Can’t we just see you face to face? Can’t we just know you as a father? As a mother? As a friend? As a person? Open our eyes and ears to your movement among us, we pray, and lead us into your heart. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.



# MOSES

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Exodus 33:7–23. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Exodus 33:7–23 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud.

**Step 2:** Verses 7–11 describe Moses as having a special relationship with God: Moses gets to go into the “tent of meeting” and speak with God “face to face,” while the rest of the people must wait outside the tent and must trust what Moses has to say as God’s spokesman.

- How is this like your experience of worship and participation in the church?
- How is it different?

**Step 3:** Verse 11 tells us that “the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

- Have you ever felt so close to God that it was as if you were talking with a friend?
- If so, describe this experience.

**Step 4:** Compare verse 11 with verse 20 and note that these verses do not contradict each other.

- Verse 11 uses a figurative expression (an exact translation would be “mouth to mouth”) meant to show that Moses, unlike the rest of the people, was allowed to speak with God directly.
- Verse 20, on the other hand, speaks of a human being literally seeing God’s face.
- How do you picture God’s face?

**Step 5:** In verse 18, Moses asks to see God’s “glory” and in verse 19, God promises, “I will make all my goodness pass before you.”

- What’s the difference between *glory* and *goodness*?
- Does God grant Moses’ request? Why or why not?

**Step 6:** Explore the following questions:

- Why do you think Moses was allowed to see God’s back but not God’s face?
- In your opinion, in what ways did Moses have, or not have, a “personal” relationship with God?
- In what ways do you have, or not have, a personal relationship with God?



# PHILIP

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring John 14:8–9. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read John 14:8–9 silently. Then choose a group member to read the passage out loud.

**Step 2:** Explore the following questions:

- In your own words, what is Philip asking Jesus for?
- If you were in Philip's shoes, what would you ask Jesus for?
- Jesus seems a bit impatient with Philip's lack of understanding. In your view, is Jesus being hard on Philip? Why or why not?

**Step 3:** Describe a time when you've wanted to "see" God (meaning, to know that God really is present or that God really is at work in a particular situation).

**Step 4:** Explore the following questions:

- In your opinion, in what ways did Philip and the other disciples have, or not have, a "personal" relationship with God?
- In what ways do you have, or not have, a personal relationship with God?

**Step 5:** Read the following statement from the *Confession of 1967* silently. Then have a group member read the statement out loud.

God has created human beings for a personal relation with himself that they may respond to the love of the Creator.

— *Confession of 1967* (9.17), inclusive language version

**Step 6:** Explore the following questions:

- According to this statement, why does God want human beings to be in personal relationship with God?
- What other reasons are there for human beings to be in personal relationship with God?

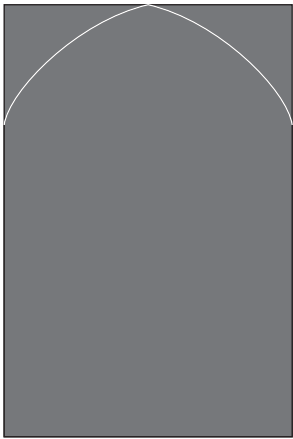
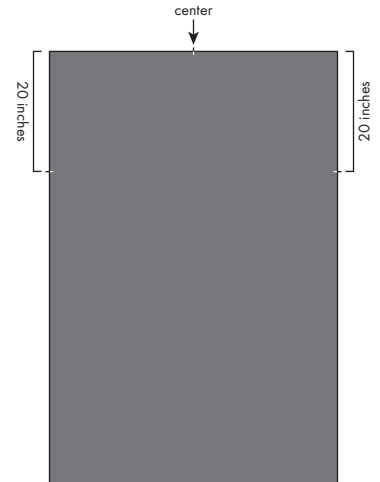
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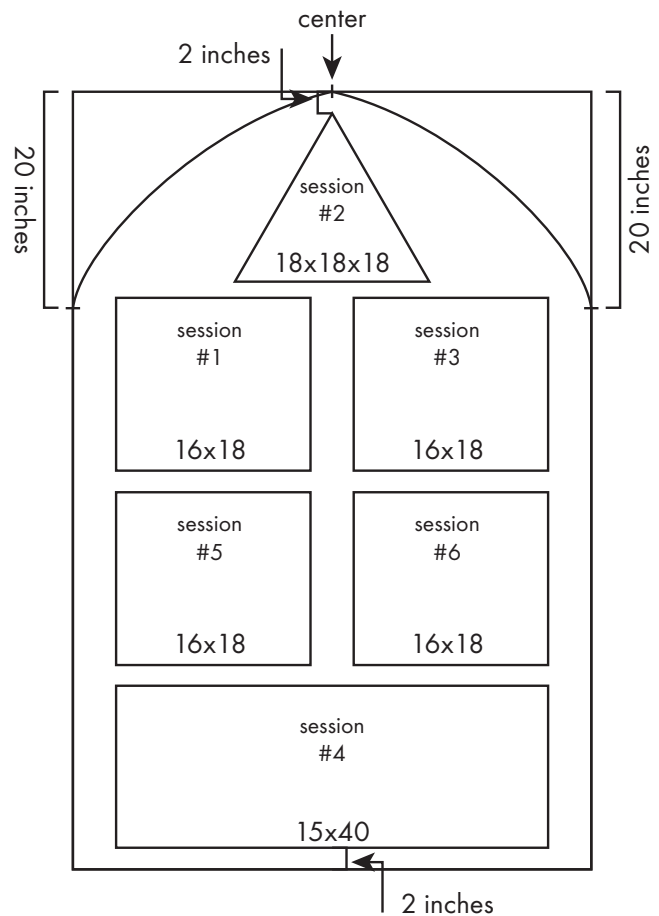
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# WESTMINSTER CONFSSION

There is but one only living and true God,  
who is infinite in being and perfection,  
a most pure spirit,  
invisible, without body, parts, or passions,  
immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty;  
most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute,  
working all things according to the counsel  
of God's own immutable and most righteous will,  
for God's own glory;  
most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering,  
abundant in goodness and truth,  
forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;  
the rewarder of them that diligently seek God;  
and withal most just and terrible in God's judgments;  
hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.<sup>1</sup>

1. From the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (6.011), in *The Book of Confessions*, Part I of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*.  
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# WHY DO WE BELIEVE?



*Based on Genesis 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Hebrews 11:1*

**Leader:** In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

**Males:** the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

**Females:** while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

**Leader:** Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

*(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)*

**All:** . . . and there was light.

**Leader:** The wind from God, God’s Spirit, is still sweeping back and forth across the face of the waters and moving in and among God’s people, leading us to believe . . .

**Females:** No one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit!

**Leader:** . . . beckoning us to follow . . .

**Males:** No one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit!

**Leader:** . . . and empowering us to serve.

**All:** No one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit!

**Leader:** In the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen, let us pray:

**All:** Spirit of truth, we gather in your presence, trusting that you hear our prayer before we speak it. Why do some believe? Why do others not believe at all? As always, we gather in your presence with questions. Help us to embrace the questions—especially the questions that you would have us ask. Blow through us, O wind from God; grant us the faith to confess that you are our Lord and our God, and empower us to share your good news with the world around us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



# WHAT FAITH IS

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Hebrews 11:1–7. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read Hebrews 11:1–7 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud.

**Step 2:** Use the space below to rewrite Hebrews 1:1 in your own words.

**Step 3:** Verse 2 says, “By faith our ancestors received approval.” Verses 4–7 then give examples of what some of those ancestors (Abel, Enoch, and Noah) did to receive “approval.”

- Look at Genesis 4:4–5. Why did God prefer Abel’s offering over Cain’s?
- Look at Genesis 5:18–24. What did Enoch do to win God’s approval?
- Look at Genesis 6:11–22. Think of a time when God gave you an outlandish command that would have completely disrupted your life and the lives of your family. How did you respond?

**Step 4:** If you find the questions in Step 3 impossible to answer, you’re not alone! What, then, do the examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah tell us about faith?

**Step 5:** Verse 6 claims that “without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach God must believe that God exists.”

- In your view, are faith and belief the same thing?
- If not, what’s the difference?

**Step 6:** Look back at your response to Step 2.

- How would you change your definition of faith now (if at all)?



# WHERE FAITH COMES FROM

*Directions:* Use this page to help guide your group in exploring 1 Corinthians 12:1-3. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

**Step 1:** Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–3 silently. Then choose a group member to read the passage out loud.

**Step 2:** These verses are the introduction to a larger discussion of spiritual gifts.

- What does Paul mean in verse 3 when he writes, “No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ ”?
- In the second part of verse 3, Paul writes, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” What does Paul mean by this?

**Step 3:** We can think of the sentence “Jesus is Lord” as a confession (or statement) of faith—perhaps as a really short version of the Apostles’ Creed!

- If, as Paul claims, we can’t say, “Jesus is Lord” without the Holy Spirit speaking through us, what does this suggest about faith—and where faith comes from?

**Step 4:** Read the following statement from the *Scots Confession*. Then have a group member read the statement out loud.

“Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost . . . .”

— *Scots Confession* (3.12)

**Step 5:** Explore the following questions:

- How is this statement similar to what Paul is asserting in 1 Corinthians 12:3? How is it different?
- Do you believe the claim of the faith statement to be true? Why or why not?

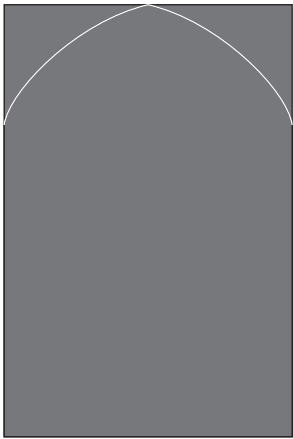
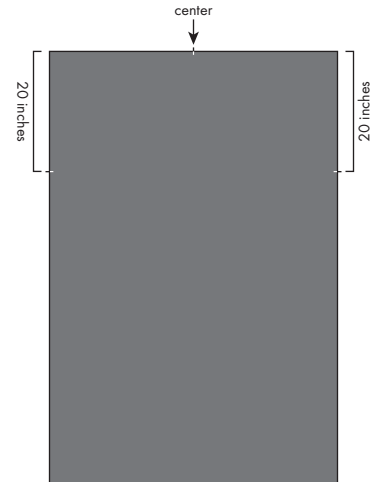
# STAINED-GLASS ART

*Note to leaders:* If you decide to do the stained-glass art project in all six sessions, you may use these instructions to create a stained-glass window frame on which to mount and display the individual panes that your group will make in each session.

*Supplies needed:* One 4' x 6' sheet of black foam-core board, yardstick, pencil, newspapers, cutting tool, craft glue for paper, completed stained-glass art projects

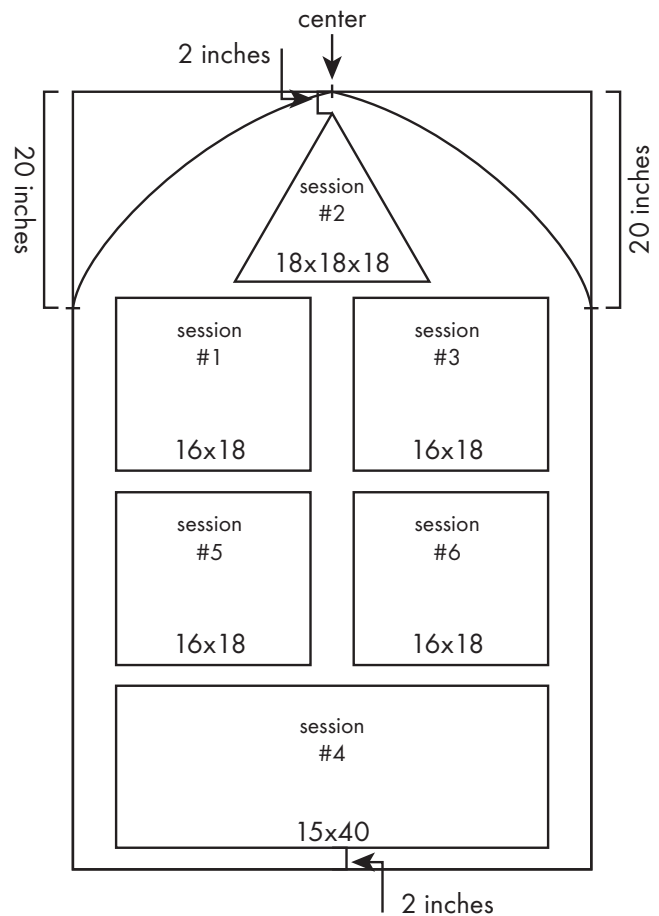
## Creating a Gothic Arch

1. Lay the foam core so the shorter sides (the 4-foot sides) are at the top and bottom. Use the yardstick and pencil to mark the center of the top of the foam core and to mark 20 inches down each side of the foam core.



2. Use the diagram to guide you in connecting each side mark with the mark in the center, creating a Gothic arch shape. Place the foam core on a stack of newspapers to protect the table or floor. Cut on the connecting lines to cut out the arch.

3. Mount the individual stained-glass panes that your group has created in each session on this foam-core board frame with craft glue.



# Lectio Divina Guidelines

*Lectio divina* ("divine reading") is an intentional, contemplative way to connect with God's Word. This ancient spiritual practice involves listening to multiple readings of the same Scripture passage interspersed with short periods of silence. If possible, invite different types of voices to be readers (e.g., young and old, male and female).

## **Relax in God's Presence**

Dim the lights. Light a candle or oil lamp. Play contemplative music. Take a few minutes to relax in God's presence.

## **Listen for God's Word**

### **First Reading**

Have a group member slowly read the Scripture passage out loud while the rest of the group members listen for a word that "jumps out" to each of them. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her word (without comment or explanation) with the rest of the group. Allow a time of silence before the next reading.

### **Second Reading**

Invite each group member to think about his or her word during the next reading, exploring the question "How does this word and this Scripture passage connect with my life?" Have a second reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and allow for a time of silence after the reading. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her response to the question.

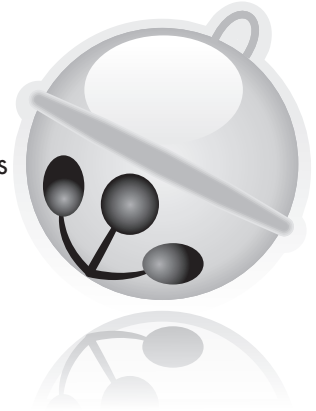
### **Third Reading**

Invite each group member to think about the question "What is this passage calling me to do?" or "Who is this passage calling me to be?" during the next reading. Have a third reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and end with a time of silence. Give each person an opportunity to respond to the question "What have you heard from God in this Scripture passage?"





# MOVIE QUESTIONS



Use the following questions to reflect on the movie *The Polar Express* (2004, G).

- What are the boy's suspicions at the beginning of the film? What suspicions do we have concerning God?
- After the boy boards the train, what place does disbelief have in his experiences?
- When does the boy start to believe again?
- When the boy picks up the bell and can finally hear its ring, what has changed—the bell or the boy? What does this tell us about our own faith?
- At the end, the boy's parents aren't able to hear the bell. Does faith divide us as a community? What can get in the way of faith inspiring more faith?

