



Session Objective

What is repentance and why is it important? In this session, participants will discover the meaning of repentance and explore the ways that sin permeates everyone's life.

Faith Statement

Question 87. What is repentance unto life?

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it to God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

—The Shorter Catechism, 7.087



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation that engages the question for this session, "What is repentance?" Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to this question or discuss:

- When you hear the word *repentance*, what do you think of?
- Have you ever said you were sorry but did not mean it? Do you think that counts as repentance? Why or why not?
- Have you ever said you were sorry and really meant it? What makes that repentance?
- If God forgives us our sins, why would we need repentance?
- How does repentance help us prepare ourselves to know God better?



Explore

Read Matthew 3:1-12, exploring the following questions:

- What does it mean to repent? (*To turn around and go in a different direction.*)
- John says he baptizes with water for repentance. How do you think John's baptism is symbolic of repentance?
- What do you think is the difference between baptism of water and baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- How could a baptism of water help us prepare to be baptized by the Holy Spirit?
- How does repentance play a role in the preparation?



Express

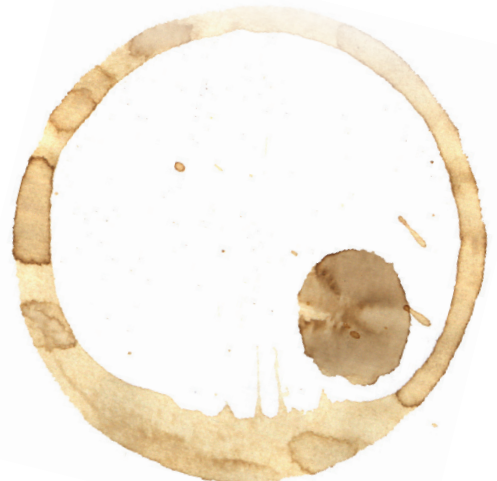
Invite the participants to think of three judges from a reality TV show. Discuss the different personality traits of each. Ask:

- Do you think these people are really qualified to judge others? Why or why not?
- Was there ever a time when you disagreed with their rulings? Why did you disagree?
- Why is it so tempting to be our own judge?
- How can that lead to more judgment?
- Is it easier to believe that you are a sinner or that you are forgiven by God?



Exit

Invite participants to name things they would like to change in their lives. Close in a prayer that includes these requests.





Does Baptism Really Change Anything?



Session Objective

Participants will explore the significance of Jesus' baptism and learn what it means to our belief that we too are beloved children of God.

Faith Statement

Question 56. What does it mean to be baptized?

My baptism means that I am joined to Jesus Christ forever. As I am baptized with water, he baptizes me with his Spirit, washing away all my sins and freeing me from their control. My baptism is a sign that one day I will rise with him in glory, and may walk with him even now in newness of life.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open your time together with prayer. Invite the participants to share different bumper sticker slogans they have seen lately. Ask them to think of a slogan about baptism they could put on a bumper sticker. Ask:

- How difficult was it to come up with your meaning of baptism?
- Do you think baptism is easy to explain? Why or why not?
- If we try to explain it like a bumper sticker, what meanings are missing?
- Most people use bumper stickers to share something they believe is important. How is baptism important?
- Are there ways in which you think baptism no longer matters?



Explore

Read Matthew 3:13-17. Ask:

- What kinds of things will water wash off of us? (*Dirt, dust, pollen, etc.*)
- Why don't we remain clean after washing with water?
- Does baptism by water keep us from sinning again? Why not?
- What do you think is needed to help us change?

Read Matthew 3:11 and ask:

- Who is John referring to?
- What do you think it means to be baptized with the Spirit?
- How would that be different from baptism with water?
- Do you think it's possible that a person could experience both?
- How could the baptism Jesus received be both?
- How could baptism of the Spirit change one's life?



Express

Invite participants to think of a place that feels like "home." This could be a room in their house, a special place outdoors or in another building. Ask:

- What makes this place feel like home to you?
- What emotional needs are met when you feel at home?
- Have you ever felt that way when you've thought about God? If so, what happened?
- What does it mean that we have received every spiritual blessing because in Christ we are brought home to God?



Exit

Invite participants to think of one spiritual blessing they have received through baptism. (Be aware that some of the group may not be baptized; ask them to think of one spiritual blessing they would like to receive.) Close with a prayer of thanks.





What's the Big Deal with Turning Stones into Bread?



Session Objective

In this session, the participants will learn about the different kinds of things we can hunger for, how that hunger tempts us to fill it with things other than God, and how that hunger can actually lead us closer to God.

Faith Statement

Question 102. What is meant by the fourth petition, "Give us today our daily bread"?

We ask God to supply all our needs, for we know that God, who cares for us in every area of our life, has promised to give us temporal as well as spiritual blessings. God commands us to pray each day for all that we need and no more, so that we will learn to rely completely on God.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open with prayer and invite participants to share five of their favorite things. Lead a conversation using the following questions:

- Are those items good or bad?
- What makes them good?
- What can make them bad?
- Are these things that will really make us happy, satisfied, "full"? What could make us feel that way?



Explore

Read Matthew 4:1-4, using the following steps for reflection:

- Read Matthew 4:1-4 slowly out loud.
- Have each person silently identify a word or phrase that catches his or her attention.
- Have each person share the word or phrase with the group. (No discussion)
- Read Matthew 4:1-4 again.
- Have each person silently identify how the passage touches his or her life today.
- Have each person share with the group. (No discussion)
- Read Matthew 4:1-4 a third time.
- Have each person silently answer this statement: *From what I've heard and shared, I believe God wants me to . . .*
- Have each person share with the group. (No discussion)



Express

Invite participants to think of one thing they feel is missing in their lives. Share that everyone is created to hunger for more. We all hunger for something! Invite volunteers to share what they thought of and reflect on what God may be calling us to do with this hunger. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- What is missing in our lives because we are hungry for more?
- Could our hunger be leading us to God?
- How could God use our hungers to serve the world?



Exit

Close with a prayer asking God to help us resist the temptation to fill our spiritual hunger with other things, and to see how our hungers can lead us to God.





Session Objective

Participants will explore the temptation of wanting proof and how our fears make us long for certainty—even when it comes to God's love.

Faith Statement

Question 9. What comfort do you receive from this truth?

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open with prayer. Invite participants to share their favorite miracle story from the Bible. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- Do you believe the story is true and if so, why?
- What would it take for you to be absolutely certain?
- What do you think faith should be based on? Facts? Feelings? Ideas?
- Do you think it is possible to be absolutely certain where faith is concerned?
- Would it still be faith?



Explore

Read Matthew 4:5-7 out loud and ask:

- Do you think that Jesus had doubts?
- Do you think it is better to be certain about God's love than to believe in it by faith?
- What do you think would have happened to Jesus' relationship with God if he had given in to the temptation?
- What do you think happens to our relationships with God when we give in to the temptation of being sure?



Express

Read the following stanza adapted from the hymn "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" out loud:

Now hear me while I pray,
Take all my fears away,
O let me from this day be wholly thine.

Together reflect on the difference between fears and doubts. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- Why would Jesus be more concerned about people's fears than doubts?
- How can fear come from things we are certain about?
- How does fear keep us stuck or trapped?
- How can doubt actually help us grow in faith?



Exit

Invite each participant to share one thing they believe about God. Close with a prayer that gives thanks to God. End with the line "Help us with our unbelief."





Shouldn't Faith Make Things Easy?



Session Objective

Participants will discuss how persuasive the temptation to give in really is, and will explore not only ways to discern what God is calling them to do, but also ways to resist choosing the easy way.

Faith Statement

Question 71. What do you learn from this commandment?

No loyalty comes before my loyalty to God. I should worship and serve only God, expect all good from God alone, and love, fear, and honor God with all my heart.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open with prayer. Invite participants to think of impossible dreams—things they would like to see come about, or new ways of living, and so on. Encourage them to dream big. Ask:

- If nothing was impossible, what would you want to do?
- Could this be something God would want done?
- If so, how could you be part of making it a reality?



Explore

Read Matthew 4:8–10 and ask:

- What do you think is at the heart of this temptation?
- What is the tempter asking Jesus to do?
- How would the tempter's offer "help" Jesus in his ministry? What would it make easy?
- Why would Jesus be tempted to take the easy way out?
- Why was Jesus able to resist this temptation?



Express

Share the following statement with your group: "Try many things. When you find what you love, do that." Invite them to think of one thing they love to do and ask:

- Have you ever thought that things we love to do might be a gift from God?
- If so, what does that mean for the decisions we make?
- How can we serve God through these activities?
- What kinds of temptations do we face when it comes to using our gifts from God?
- How can we help each other face those temptations?



Exit

Close with a prayer that thanks God for the activities mentioned in Express and ask for God to give the participants the strength to continue when things get difficult.





Session Objective

In this session, participants will explore how God's love is expressed in the care of Jesus in the desert. They will also discover ways to look for that same care and love in their own lives, and ways they can share it with others.

Faith Statement

Question 23. What comfort do you receive by trusting in God's providence?

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ watches over me each day of my life, blessing and guiding me wherever I may be. God strengthens me when I am faithful, comforts me when I am discouraged or sorrowful, lifts me up if I fall, and brings me at last to eternal life.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open with prayer and ask participants to name one thing that happened during the week that made them feel good, loved, comforted, and so on.

Discuss:

- Could angels come to us in other forms besides people? What kinds of forms?
- Angels are messengers of God. What message from God did you hear or feel in your experience?
- What was your reaction to the event?
- If it was an "angel," how would you like to have changed your reaction, if at all?



Explore

Read Matthew 4:8-11 and ask:

- What kind of care do you think the angels provided Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus would have been in need of care?
- How do angels share good news from God?
- Does that mean angels can only be supernatural beings?
- Can you think of examples from the Bible where people acted as "angels," providing care, sharing good news, and so on?
- What is at the heart of every message or act an angel does?



Express

Invite the group to think of different ways they can act as messengers of God in their lives. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- What gifts or skills do you have that you can use to comfort others?
- What are some of the ways that we can show people they are loved?
- What expressions of care have you received that you would like to share with someone else?
- How can we let people know that God loves and cares for them?



Exit

Read Matthew 4:1-11. Have participants choose one of the temptations they struggle with in their lives. Invite them to share the temptation they chose without giving details as to why they chose it. End with a closing prayer asking God to help strengthen the participants to resist the temptations. Thank God for the many ways we know God's love and care.

