



How Can I Recognize God's Signs?



Session Objective

Participants will recognize God's signs in the ordinary means of grace. One of God's signs is God's gift of the Christian community gathered around the Word, praying, breaking bread, and sharing with the poor.

Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and discuss:

- What is a sign?
- When have you wondered about recognizing God's signs?
- Do you think God sends signs to show us how to live and what to do with our lives?
- Have you experienced extraordinary signs? Like what?
- What about ordinary signs?



Explore

Read Acts 2:37-47. Encourage youth to name the activities of the Jerusalem community and parallel details from their own lives, such as specific ways to enjoy Christian fellowship, persons for whom they need to pray, what they need to learn to become more faithful disciples, and so on. Discuss why the Jerusalem church thought these activities were so important.

Comment that the everyday, ordinary activities of the early church functioned as signs of God's grace in the world. Wonder how the practice of the early church made a difference in the church's outreach to others.

Ask youth to remember the way God uses signs to remind us of things that are important in our faith, such as bread reminding us of the body of Christ and the cross reminding us of the sacrifice of Christ.



Express

Help the youth name ways the Spirit transforms them into signs of God's grace through active participation in the church. Invite the youth to examine their church. Ask:

- What sights, sounds, smells, and emotions do you associate with your church?
- What do you participate in at church? Bible study? Fellowship? Shared meals? Prayer?
- How has your participation in these actions and gatherings affected your life?

Invite the group members to name one action or gathering that helps them recognize the signs of God's grace in their lives. Then, invite the group members to name an action or gathering they could begin in order to open their hearts and lives to being signs of God's grace in the world.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





What Does My Church Believe About Baptism?



Session Objective

Participants will consider God's gift of baptism as a sign of the grace between God and us. As God claims us in baptism, we live in relationship with God and live out the life God intends for us.

Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is a sign?
- If baptism is a sign from God, what does it signify?
- How does baptism tell us who we are and who we belong to?

Invite the youth to reflect on baptism as a sign of God's grace. Read the Faith Statement above. In line 62 of A Brief Statement of Faith, we say that we believe the Spirit of God "claims us in the waters of baptism." Baptism is both gift—a sign of God's grace—and responsibility—a pledge of believers to renounce evil and affirm Christ. Baptism is the ceremony of initiation into the faith. Through the outward act of baptism, the church remembers and is renewed and assured of (or "sealed" by) God's salvation. In baptism, we remember God's love and care for us. With assurance of God's care for us, we make commitments for the future. Baptism has consequences that affect every part of our daily lives.

Use specific examples from your life to talk about the consequences of baptism that have been signs of God's grace to you.



Explore

Ask the youth to name all the ways that people use water in their daily lives (drinking, cooking, washing, transportation, and so on). Then suggest to the group that baptism does everything that water does. Ask the youth to consider the things that water does and see if they can come up with a way in which baptism does the same thing.

If there are some items for which youth see no parallel between what water does in daily life and what baptism does, encourage them to ask their parents or the pastor to help them think about that specific area.

Read Mark 1:1-11 and explore these questions:

- What role does water play in the story?
- What signs did you notice in the story? What did they signify?
- Have you ever thought of yourself as God's beloved?
- What does it feel like to know that God is pleased with you?
- Based on Mark 1:1-11, what does God's grace look like? How do we receive this grace?



Express

Invite youth to pair up to create poses or brief pantomimes modeling relationships of power. They should do them twice: the first time should show how they are typically enacted; the second time should show how they may be transformed if our baptismal promises are taken seriously.

The relationships of power:

- parent/child
- teacher/student
- popular student/awkward student
- gifted athlete/not-so-gifted athlete
- sibling/sibling
- coach/player
- educated student/not-so-educated
- boss/worker

After youth have done their pantomimes, ask questions like the following:

- What might it take to exchange the old forms of relationship for the new? (new ways of imagining, changing old habits, risk of being challenged, misunderstood, or mocked)
- How are transformed relationships a sign of God's grace promised in baptism?



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time you have had together talking about God's gift of baptism.



Why Do We Say That We Eat Jesus' Body And Blood?



Session Objective

Participants will explore another sign of God's grace—God's gift of communion at the Lord's Table. As we are fed at the table, we live in relationship with God and live out the life God intends for us.

Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Question 61. What does it mean to share in the Lord's Supper?

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, pouring out his Spirit upon us. By his Spirit, the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in his body and blood. As I receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving. His life becomes mine, and my life becomes his, to all eternity.

—The Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- If communion is a sign from God, what does it signify?
- How does communion tell us who we are and to whom we belong?
- How does the way our church celebrates the Lord's Supper convey the grace and love of God? How does it not?



Explore

Invite youth to find Luke in their Bibles. Explain that today's story is about the night, just before he died, that Jesus ate a meal with his disciples. Hand out Bibles. Explain that this story is written down in several places in the Bible, but today we will read it from Luke.

Read Luke 22:14–20.

Invite youth to name what they think are the most important details of the story and to ask any questions they have about the passage. Use some of the following questions for discussion:

- Why do you think Jesus used bread and wine to talk about himself?
- What do you think Jesus meant by a "new covenant"?
- Why do you think the early Christians remembered and told this story about Jesus?
- Based on Luke 22:14–20, what does God's grace look like? How do we receive this grace?



Express

Introduce the following scenario:

You have some friends at school who say that communion sounds really creepy because you're pretending to eat somebody's body and blood. Ask:

- What can you say that will help them understand the signs of communion and why they are meaningful?
- What can you do to demonstrate the grace of God that the bread and cup point to?



Exit

Close with a prayer of thanks, such as the following:

God, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his stories, his healing, and his love. We thank you for all that Jesus shows us of your great grace. Amen.





How Do I Know What God Wants Me To Do?

Session 4

1 Corinthians 12:1–27; Ephesians 4:1–16



Session Objective

One of the most significant signs of God's grace and the relationship between God and us is God's gift of ministry. As God calls us to ministry, we live in relationship with God and live out the life God intends for us.

Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What activities interest you and seem to fit your skills?
- What gifts do you have that help build other people up? What skills might you need to develop to improve your contributions to the lives of other people?
- Who is God calling you to be right now? Who is God calling you to be in the future?

Remind the youth that God sends signs through our ordinary practices of living together as church. Introduce today's session by saying that long ago, Paul wrote a letter to a church in Corinth where people were arguing a lot about spiritual gifts. He said our church is like a body—all the gifts are needed. Invite the youth to reflect on God's gifts as signs of God's grace.



Explore

Ask youth to read 1 Corinthians 12:1–27. Ask questions such as the following:

- How is the church like a body, according to Paul?
- If people in the church got along like the head and feet in Paul's metaphor, what would our church be like?
- When is our church like a whole body acting as one? When does it act like separate parts?
- How do you respond to the list of gifts and activities that are described in 1 Corinthians 12? Which of the gifts and activities do you most connect with?
- In what way would you be doing ministry if you tried to live out the gifts and activities you've identified?
- How do the spiritual gifts among the members of the church serve as signs of the grace of God?



Express

Have each person write his or her name at the top of a sheet of paper and immediately pass that paper to the person on the right. When youth receive a piece of paper, they should note the name of the person at the top. Then, they should write the name of a gift or talent they think that person has that could be used in the church. For example, "friendly smile, makes people feel welcome." Then, they pass the paper to the right. Repeat until sheets have been all the way around the circle and back to the person whose name is at the top. Note: for groups larger than ten, have two circles.

Ask youth not to repeat what the first few people wrote—try to list as many gifts as possible. When lists are back where they started, invite youth to read their list. Ask if there are any responses or anything anyone wants to say.

Doing ministry begins right at home. As a group, look at your community. Is there a hospital, or a home for older adults, or a neighborhood that would benefit from your involvement? What spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12) would your group bring to the relationship with other people? Begin taking steps to get your youth group involved in one of these areas in your community.



Exit

Close with this benediction: "Go forth with humility, gentleness, and unity to live the life God has called you to live."

