



Give Thanks

EXODUS 12:14-18



GOAL

Youth consider gratitude within the tradition of Passover and make connections between Passover and their experience of communion.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Thank you, O God, for those who have nourished me in my faith journey. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Before the communion elements are shared, we say a prayer of Great Thanksgiving, giving thanks for: God’s faithfulness to us, the salvation God offers, and the community of faith we are invited into. Giving thanks prepares our hearts to receive physical and spiritual nourishment in the shared meal. Gratitude empties us of our burdens so that we can be refilled with grace and hope when we gather around the table. Giving thanks is an integral part of the sacrament of communion.

THE BIBLE STORY

As Exodus begins, the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt, are physically and emotionally mistreated. God sends Moses to secure their freedom. When the Egyptian Pharaoh refuses, God sends ten plagues that the Egyptians and Israelites endure. God instructs the Israelites in what to do during the tenth and final plague, the Passover. God tells the Israelites how to commemorate what they have endured and to anticipate the freedom they are about to gain. To mark their release from slavery, the Jewish people continue to give thanks for the salvific actions of God each year during the Passover festival.

Jesus established a new ritual while eating a commemorative Passover meal with his disciples. After giving thanks, Jesus broke the bread and shared the cup, giving new meaning to elements of the Passover tradition. Our practice of communion is tied to Passover through the act of giving thanks and the common elements from the meal.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Some young people grow up in homes where giving thanks before meals and writing thank-you notes are common actions. For these youth, connecting giving thanks to sacramental action will feel natural and logical. For youth who have grown up in families that do not practice acts of gratitude, this session may seem new and a little uncomfortable. Be gentle with youth, allowing them to find their own path through the exercise of giving thanks.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Graffiti Sheets” (p. 6): List questions on individual newsprint sheets.
- Depending on the options you choose:
- “Opening Litany” (p. 6): Write the opening litany on newsprint for use in all four sessions.
- “Imagining the Story” (p. 7): Invite an adult or youth volunteer to enact Moses in telling the story and read the script in advance. Gather supplies for enacting the story.
- “Unleavened Bread” (p. 7): Obtain unleavened bread.

GETTING STARTED

□ Newsprint and markers

GRAFFITI SHEETS

QC CT

Display graffiti sheets around the room with one of the following questions on each sheet.

- ➔ What are you thankful for at home?
- ➔ What are you thankful for at school?
- ➔ What are you thankful for at church?

As youth enter, give each a marker. Have them move around and answer the questions on newsprint. Gather the group and review responses, drawing connections about similar answers. Ask youth to elaborate on unique answers. Note how much we have to be thankful for. Explain that this session will be about giving thanks and communion.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

□ Prepared newsprint

✱ Go to www.signingsavvy.com and enter the key words, taste, see, God, and good, in the search bar to watch a video of each sign.

✱ Write the litany included below on newsprint and display it. Save the prepared newsprint to use throughout the practice.

OPENING LITANY

AM QC

Invite youth to join you in the litany below using the response: “Taste and see that God is good.” Teach the American Sign Language signs described below to use for each key word in the response. Practice the response so that it flows with the signs.

- Taste—(*touch the tip of middle finger to lips*)
- See—(*“V”-hand moving pointer and middle finger from eyes outward*)
- God—(*move right palm facing left from slightly above head down toward center of face*)
- Good—(*touch fingers of right hand to mouth and then move right hand to palm of left hand*)

L: Receive God’s good gifts.

Y: Taste and see that God is good.

L: Give thanks for all things.

Y: Taste and see that God is good.

L: Be fed by the bread of life.

Y: Taste and see that God is good.

L: Share God’s love with all.

Y: Taste and see that God is good.

TABLE BLESSINGS

C

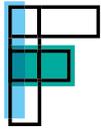
Select from these questions for group discussion:

- ➔ Does your family say a blessing before a meal? Do you pray before each meal? Only certain meals? Only when certain people are around?
- ➔ If your family prays before meals, what are some of their favorite prayers?
- ➔ Are there prayers that everyone in the group knows? What are some of these?
- ➔ What feelings or thoughts do you have during these prayers?

✱ If you have a youth whose family does not pray, acknowledge that all families are different and it is OK for families to have different meaningful traditions.

TABLE GATHERINGS

Invite youth to name examples of when people gather around tables and share food. Invite them to tell their most memorable or meaningful table gathering and describe how they participate. Ask what they learn about themselves and what they learn about others when they gather around a table together.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

IMAGINING THE STORY

D **AM** **X**

Set up a prop table and place all supplies on the table (consider optional coloring agents such as beet powder, cranberry juice, or pomegranat juice to make the blood-red water). The leader serves as prop table leader and stands beside table with the script, ready to follow instructions with the props. A volunteer dresses as Moses using costume props.

Introduce *experiential* storytelling where the experience will be—at least partially—up to the youth. Moses reads and reenacts the story on Resource Pages 1 and 2, giving instructions to the group about their participation.

After acting out the story (and before cleaning up), have a youth read Exodus 12:14–18. Ask the group why remembering these instructions would be important. What, in particular, should be remembered and shared?

Following discussion, have youth assist with clean up.

- Bibles
- Two copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2
- Costume pieces for Moses (optional) such as a bathrobe and beard
- Bottles of red-colored water
- Plastic frogs
- Plastic flies
- Washable red marker(s)
- Fist-sized wadded-up papers
- Toy locusts (grasshoppers)
- Stuffed lamb
- Red streamers
- Tape

UNLEAVENED BREAD

C **CT**

Use information from “The Bible Story” on page 5 to give background about the story leading up to Exodus 12:14–18. Have youth follow along as someone reads aloud the Bible passage. Ask the following questions:

- ➔ Why was the Passover something crucial to remember?
- ➔ What is a “perpetual ordinance”? What are other perpetual ordinances of your church? (be sure someone mentions communion)

Pass around the unleavened bread and encourage the youth to taste it.

Ask:

- ➔ How might tasting the bread help the Israelites remember?
- ➔ How is this passage similar to what we do and remember during communion?

- Bibles
- Unleavened bread (matzo)

 Recipes for making unleavened bread are available online. Matzo can also be purchased at most grocery stores.

 Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

ART CONNECT

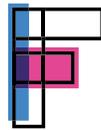
A **QC**

Distribute paper and colored pencils. Have youth spread out in the room in space that allows them to sit comfortably. Invite youth to think of an event that was difficult to go through. This may include moving, entering a new school, being hurt by a friend, or experiencing a divorce or death in the family. As they think about their event, have them draw the event on their paper, either realistically or abstractly.

- Bibles
- Paper
- Colored pencils

Once the drawings are completed, ask youth to think about how they felt during the event they drew. Give the group a period of silence to recall their feelings. Have them look at their drawings and write the names of things, people, or activities that helped them through the difficult time. Set drawings aside while the group explores the Bible text.

If needed, give youth background to this Scripture passage. Emphasize how the Israelites had been through a hard time before God gave them the Passover. Read Exodus 12:14–18. Explain that God wanted the Israelites to remember the difficulty of their experience but also celebrate their salvation from Egypt. Have youth look at their drawings again and give thanks to God for the things, people, and activities that helped them get through that difficult time.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

Internet-connected device

SISTER ACT BLESSING

T

Set up the short clip from the film *Sister Act*. Explain that Sister Mary Clarence is not a real nun. She has witnessed a crime and is in a witness protection program, pretending to be a nun. She has no experience or training for it. This clip shows her first meal in the convent when she is trying to blend in.

Show “Sister Act—Blessing the Food (1992)” (bit.ly/FMSABlessing, 2:26). Encourage laughter (this movie is a comedy) rather than judgmental remarks while watching. Use these questions for discussion.

- ➔ Why was Mary Clarence asked to pray? How do you think she did?
- ➔ Why does this pre-meal prayer seem to be an important ritual for the nuns?
- ➔ Do you think there is a right or proper way to give thanks before a meal?
- ➔ When you create prayers before meals, what are some things you are thankful for?

Point out that some people have prayer traditions; others do not. God loves and cherishes everyone regardless of their pre-meal routine.

Internet-connected device (optional)

THE LORD’S SUPPER

C T

If your church broadcasts or records your worship service, find a video of a recent service that included the Lord’s Supper. If your church does not, describe what happens during communion in your worshipping community. Discuss these questions:

- ➔ What do you like about celebrating communion at our church?
- ➔ What stands out to you as important when we celebrate communion?
- ➔ How do you think it feels to serve communion to another person? (*If someone has served communion, ask them how it feels to do this.*)
- ➔ Our Scripture passage for today talks about the importance of remembering. What do we remember during communion?

Encourage youth to discuss their experiences of communion at other churches, retreats, or camps. Explore differences between those experiences and communion as it is regularly served at your church.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

C CT

Explain that the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving is a prayer that is offered by the pastor (and sometimes the congregation) before worshipers share in communion. It has a specific structure, but there is freedom within each section. Youth will have an opportunity to write and share a Great Thanksgiving Prayer. Encourage them not to worry about using fancy or churchy language but to use words that feel most comfortable to them in talking with God.

Form groups of three or four youth. Give each group a copy of Resource Page 3. Read through the Resource Page while youth follow along. Explain the structure of the prayer and point out where there is flexibility for what is said within each section.

Youth work within their groups to write the prayer. After prayers are completed, encourage each group to share with the larger group.

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- Copies of Resource Page 3
 - Pens



Check with your pastoral staff to see if they will consider using the prayers in worship.

THANK-YOU NOTES

QC M

Remind youth that this session began with discussing who and what they are thankful for. Take an opportunity to practice expressing gratitude to people for whom they give thanks. Encourage youth to think of a person who helped them grow in their faith or who has encouraged them.

Distribute paper and pens. Have youth write a thank-you note to the person they identified.

As youth write their letters, play “Give Thanks (Lyric Video) India Arie” (bit.ly/FMGiveThx, 3:56). It is available on common streaming services. After the letters are written, encourage youth to mail or give the recipient their letter. If they are members of the church community, you may volunteer to deliver them.

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- Paper and pens
 - Internet-connected device



Alternative 1: Youth brainstorm a list of people in your church and community. Have each youth volunteer to write a thank-you note to a different person on the list.

Alternative 2: For a group that is especially close to one another, have them draw from a container the name of another person in the group. Write a thank-you note to that person.

TABLE GRACES

CT

Invite youth to name and say table graces they have heard or prayed. Identify the common elements included in the table graces. Work as a group to create a table grace that is unique to your group. They may build their table grace on the pattern or rhythm of one they already know. They may change the words to a common childhood song, jingle, or nursery rhyme. Write their unique grace on newsprint and display it to use before sharing snacks in the group.

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- Newsprint and marker
 - Snacks



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING PRAYER

Close using this prayer or one you write yourself:

Holy God, today we have given thanks for so many good things. As we leave, I give you thanks for each person here, for _____ (*insert names of participants*). Nourish them as they go into the world to serve and glorify you with their words and actions. Amen.

Moses' Story

Hi! I am Moses . . . and I am worried about you (*points to youth*). Yes—you are the Israelites—the children of God. God loves you so much . . . but you need help! You let those mean, mad Egyptians enslave you! They boss you around! They are mean to your families! You have to build a gazillion bricks. Don't you want to be free? Don't you want to escape Egypt and go back to your homeland? Of course, you do! Follow me and we can do it!

God told me that, before we escape, there will be plagues. Terrible things will happen. God will use the plagues to convince the pharaoh to let you go. These plagues will be exhausting. We'll have to pull together to get through them! Can you help me? (*Moses encourages affirmation from the group. If they are hesitant, repeat the question until youth give an enthusiastic response.*)

OK. The first plague is when God turns all of the water to blood. Think about it. ALL of the water. Everywhere—what we drink, what we clean with, what we cook with—all the water is now blood. Well, Israelites, go get your very own water . . . uh . . . blood. (*The prop table leader passes out bottles of blood.*) You all may drink it . . . if you dare!

The second plague is frogs! (*The prop table leader begins throwing frogs at the group.*) Frogs will cover the land. They will be in your beds and in your clothes. They will irritate you and keep you awake at night.

These two plagues didn't change Pharaoh's mind, so the third plague God sent is the gnats. (*The prop table leader throws half of the flies at the group.*) They fly in your eye! They fly up your nose! They fly in your mouth and make you gag! Why did God even create gnats? Probably only for plagues.

Plague 4 is flies. (*Prop table leader throws the remaining flies at the group.*) I'm not sure how these are different from gnats, but they are equally annoying! Shoo away those flies, friends! Send them to Pharaoh!

The fifth plague is the livestock. Suddenly they all died! The cows, the donkeys, the camels, the sheep, they fell over dead. Do you hear it, friends? Can you see it? Show me! (*Encourage youth to make sounds of animals dying and to act like dying livestock. The more dramatic, the better!*)

That was scary but still ineffective, and so we await the sixth plague . . . boils . . . Ewwwww! (*Prop table leader takes red markers and quickly draws dots on the back of youths' hands and arms.*) Show me your skin. The boils, they itch! They irritate your skin. They make you uncomfortable. When will they go away?

Whew! They're done. It'll take months for our skin to recover, but we don't have months because the seventh plague is thunder and hail. (*Prop table leader starts beating prop table.*) Help me make the thunder! (*Moses encourages youth to stomp and clap.*) The thunder is loud and scary and rolls across the land. Then the hail begins. (*Prop table leader throws wadded paper at youth.*) The hail rains down day and night as we wait for the Egyptian pharaoh to let us go.

You may think that what we've gone through would be enough. But no, seven plagues are not enough! The eighth plague brings locusts. (*Prop table leader throws locusts at the youth.*) More bugs. The locusts jump and fly and get in your hair. Why did God create so many different types of bugs?

After the locusts, the ninth plague comes as darkness. *(Prop table leader turns off lights.)* No one can see their hand in front of their face. No one can see the dead animals before they step on them. No one knows when the sun will rise again. *(Moses encourages youth to act scared.)*

But the last plague, the tenth plague, is the plague that will finally turn Pharaoh's heart. We must prepare for it. God has given instructions. First, go out and find a lamb. *(Prop table leader gives Moses the toy lamb.)* Make sure it is a perfect lamb with no blemishes. When you cut it open, put some of its blood on the doorposts of your houses. *(Prop table leader gives out red streamers and tape. Youth tape streamers above the door.)*

When the angel of death comes through, it will see the blood and pass over your house. No one in your house will die, but the firstborn of all the Egyptians shall die. Quickly, pack your bags, gather everything you need, and follow me. Pharaoh will let us go. Leave nothing behind. *(Moses encourages youth to pretend to pack quickly and follow Moses to another area of the room or out into the hallway.)*

I declare to you, Israelites, you are free of Pharaoh! Never again will you break your backs to make bricks for someone else. You are free to love and serve God and to work for yourselves and your families! Celebrate! For each year on this day, you will always remember your freedom!

(Take youth back into the room, but don't clean up just yet. Let the youth experience what a mess the room has become. Use the questions on page 7 to debrief the story.)

Writing a Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

Holy God, we give you thanks and praise for:

(The first part of the prayer focuses on God. In this space, list five things you praise God for. These things may be universal or specific to this time and space.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

We also give you thanks and praise for Jesus Christ.

(The second part of the prayer focuses specifically on Jesus. List five things you thank Jesus for. These are things he did in his life. Most prayers also usually tell the story of the Last Supper and give thanks for Jesus' death and resurrection.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ.

(The third section focuses on how the Holy Spirit is with us here and how. In this section, pray for ways that you wish for the Holy Spirit's inspiration in your church as well as people or situations in the church or the world that need healing, justice, or reconciliation.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, Almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

To this basic outline, pastors may add transitions between sections (including music). Also, the pastor will speak the words of institution in the second part or following this prayer.

