

1

We Gather

LUKE 24:13–35



GOAL

Children recognize the power of gathering with others who share a common purpose and see themselves as part of a worshipping community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Gracious God, I give thanks for the faith community that surrounds me and pray that the children I teach will find comfort and encouragement as we gather over your Word and are sent out to be your people. Amen.

THIS SESSION

We do not follow Jesus alone. We are part of a community of people who are following Jesus together. We share our joy and praise as well as our lament and petitions with one another. Gathering around Word and sacrament, we find comfort, support, nurture, and grace. Gathering in community empowers us to go and be Christ's body in the world. In the weekly rhythm of worship, we gather and are sent out to be gathered and sent out again and again.

THE BIBLE STORY

After Jesus' death, his distraught friends are walking on the road to the town of Emmaus when they meet a stranger. They share their sad news with the stranger, who then teaches them from the Scriptures and breaks bread with them. Through these familiar acts, Jesus' friends recognize the stranger to be the risen Christ, and they share that good news with others.

Although the grieving disciples have not gathered for the purpose of worship, what happens mirrors what happens in worship. People gather in lament or in joy over Word and sacrament and discover that the risen Christ is in their midst. They then go out from that gathering to share the good news with the world.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children enjoy gathering with friends and family. They belong to many groups and are learning what it means to be part of a community.

There may be children in your group who do not feel a strong connection to your faith community. The welcome that they receive in your midst will enable them to see that they are part of a loving church family.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Friends Gather” (p. 9): Obtain *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Flyaway Books, 2018) or use Resource Page 2.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “The Worship Path” (p. 10): Obtain the *Worship God* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 3 Set) and current and/or past worship bulletins.
- “Gathering in Protest” (p. 11): Obtain *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World* by Michael W. Waters (Flyaway Books, 2020) or use the YouTube video “TFAA—For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World by Michael W. Waters” (bit.ly/FMBlackBoys, 7:01).



GETTING STARTED

- Paper
- Crayons, markers

CAN I GET AN AMEN?



Greet the children as they arrive. Provide paper, markers, and crayons. Invite each child to make a sign with the word *AMEN!* written in large letters on it, suggesting that they use outline or bubble letters and color in the letters as they choose.

Tell the children that they will be exploring the practice of worship and a word often heard in worship is *Amen*. Wonder when *Amen* is said and what it means. Explain, if necessary, that the word *Amen* means “so be it” or “truth,” and is an affirmation of certainty or agreement. Suggest that to say “Amen” is to say an emphatic *Yes!* Comment that some worship leaders invite worshippers to show their agreement with what is being said by asking, “Can I get an Amen?” Invite the children randomly to hold up their sign, and when they do, have the rest of the children say some enthusiastic “Amen.”

Invite the children to play a game taking turns introducing themselves with the phrase “My name is [*Name*] and I’m happy when . . .,” finishing the sentence with something that makes them happy. Tell the group that if anyone agrees with what they hear, they should hold up their sign and say an enthusiastic “Amen!” Then repeat the game with a second round, completing the sentence “I am sad when . . .” and an appropriate response of a solidarity “Amen” when they agree with the statement.

After the game, ask the following questions:

- ✦ How often did you find yourself saying “Amen” or agreeing that you would feel the same way in that situation?
- ✦ How does it feel to hear others say “Amen” and know that they would feel the same way as you?
- ✦ The Bible says in Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.” How can we do that?
- ✦ What difference does it make when other people share your happiness?
- ✦ What difference does it make when other people share your sadness?

Tell the children that one reason we gather to worship God is that we find comfort and support in communities of trust and compassion. Display the *Amen* signs in your space so the children may see them in the following sessions of this unit.

- Resource Page 1, or copies of it
- Rhythm instruments (optional)

PRAISE GOD!



Choose one of the following ways to use the adapted version of Psalm 150, found on Resource Page 1, with your group. Use a different way of reading the psalm for each session of this unit if you choose. You can lead the children or invite volunteers to lead. You can provide copies of Resource Page 1 and have the children read together in unison or form two groups and alternate reading each line.

- Read each line aloud, inviting the children to repeat your words after you.
- Read each line aloud and do the actions in the parentheses, inviting the children to repeat your words and actions.
- Read each line aloud and do the actions in the parentheses, but when you get to the instruments mentioned, make the sounds of the instruments, inviting the children to repeat your words, actions, and sounds.

- Provide rhythm instruments. Ask the children to keep their instruments quiet unless you point to them. Read each line aloud, inviting the children to repeat after you. Like a conductor of an orchestra, point to one or more children at a time to play their instrument(s) following a line, with all instruments playing after the last line.



Keep Resource Page 1, or copies of it, for sessions 2, 3, and 4.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

COME, ALL YOU PEOPLE



Tell the children that worship services often begin with music that calls people to worship. Comment that “Come, All You People” is a gathering song that comes from Zimbabwe. It has been known to be sung over and over as people walk from their villages and gather for worship. Ask if anyone knows where Zimbabwe is, and invite children to find it on a map. A digital map can be found at www.mapsofworld.com. Click on the country of Zimbabwe, north of South Africa.

Use hymnals (*Glory to God*, #388) or show the YouTube video “Come All You People” (bit.ly/FMComeAll, 1:30) to teach the song. Encourage the children to sing also in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. Once the children are familiar with the words and music, distribute rhythm instruments. Invite the children to sing, play, and dance with the music.

After some singing, playing, and dancing, ask the following questions:

- ➔ How does that song make you feel?
- ➔ Who are “all you people”?
- ➔ What would you expect to happen in the rest of the worship service if this song were sung as the opening?

- Map showing Zimbabwe or internet-connected device
- Rhythm instruments
- Glory to God* hymnals or a hymnal with “Come, All You People” (Tune: UYAI MOSE) or internet-connected device



Tell the children that in the Shona language each syllable is pronounced. Explain that the letter “e” sounds like a long “a” as in “play” and the letter “i” sounds like a long “e” as “free.”



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

FRIENDS GATHER



Tell the children that you will share a story about something surprising that happened when Jesus’ friends were together not long after Jesus was killed. Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Luke 24:13–35 using “Memory and Surprise” from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (p. 280) or Resource Page 2.

After the story, ask the following questions:

- ➔ Who is gathered in the story?
- ➔ If you were acting out this story and were cast as one of the disciples, how would you portray your character in the opening scene? Demonstrate your character’s posture and facial expression. How does your character feel?
- ➔ Demonstrate your character’s posture and facial expression when Jesus shares bread. How does your character feel?
- ➔ Demonstrate your character’s posture and facial expression as you return to Jerusalem and tell others what happened. How does your character feel?
- ➔ What happens in this story that is similar to what happens in worship?

- Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Flyaway Books, 2018) or Resource Page 2

Tell the children that this story, often referred to as the Emmaus story or the Road to Emmaus story, is scriptural witness to the fourfold pattern of worship practiced across the centuries, around the globe: gathering together, hearing the Word proclaimed, responding (often sharing communion), and being sent out to serve and share the story.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or more options.

-
- Newsprint
 - Paper
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils

GATHERING IN COMMUNITY



Write the word *Community* at the top of a sheet of newsprint. Explore the meaning of *community* and the ways in which the children experience it with the following questions:

- ✦ What does the word *community* mean to you?
- ✦ *Community* comes from the Latin *com*, meaning “together,” and *unus*, meaning “one.” What does that suggest about its meaning?

Comment that we can belong to many different communities. Invite the children to go to the newsprint two at a time, choose a marker, and write one or two of the communities that they belong to. Continue with the questions for exploring community.

- ✦ Which communities do any of you share in common?
- ✦ The dictionary says that a community is a group that has a common purpose. What are the common purposes of the groups you listed?
- ✦ How does being part of a group help you to achieve your purpose?
- ✦ What is your favorite thing about being in a community?
- ✦ What is challenging about being in a community?
- ✦ What is the common purpose of our worshiping community?
- ✦ How do we work together to achieve that purpose?
- ✦ What is your favorite part of belonging to this worshiping community?
- ✦ What is challenging about belonging to this worshiping community?

Tell the children that gathering for worship forms us as people with a shared purpose. Comment that we gather to worship with others who are seeking to shine God’s light and do God’s work in the world. To help children identify the worshiping community and their place in it, invite them to draw a picture titled “We Gather to Worship” and ask them to show where they gather and who they gather with. Remind the children to put themselves in the pictures. When all have finished, invite them to share their pictures with one another. Display them in a place where others might see them.

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- Worship God* infographic poster
 - Worship bulletins, past and/or current

THE WORSHIP PATH



Tell the children that *corporate worship* is when people in a congregation gather together to worship God. Explain that, in many congregations, corporate worship follows a four-part pattern. Invite the children to recall the four actions or movements of worship: gathering, hearing, responding, and being sent out.

Display the *Worship God* infographic poster. Have the children locate steps on the path that make up “Gathering.” Discuss the words spoken, people’s actions, music used, and prayers prayed.

Distribute worship bulletins. Have the children identify the gathering elements in the order of worship and compare them to the poster. Discuss words or actions that help the children prepare and gather for worship.

Suggest that the children pay attention to the ways they and others welcome and gather with others and notice how it makes them and others feel. Encourage the children to attend worship, particularly during this unit on worship, so that they can practice what they are learning about worship.

GATHERING IN WORSHIP



Internet-connected device

Tell the children there is a church song titled “Gather Us In.” Show the YouTube video “Gather Us In” (bit.ly/FMGatherUsIn, 3:05), inviting the children to pay attention to the images in the video. After the video, ask them what images they saw of who was gathering and who was being gathered. Wonder what images they would want to include in this video. Play the video again, inviting the children to sing along with the song.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

COME! GATHER! WELCOME!



Ask the children to think about the last place they went (that was not their home) to gather with two or more people. Tell them that you would like them to think about three questions about the place. Ask the questions one at a time, inviting them to share their responses:

- Who greeted you, and what did they say?
- Was anything special said, done, or given to you when you arrived? If so, what was it?
- How did you feel you were welcomed?

Then ask the children to think about the last time they were in a worship service at your church. Note that some children may have no experience of being in a worship service. Ask the above questions again in regard to when they entered the church or sanctuary for worship, including the welcome and gathering time of the worship service itself: any words of welcome, the Call to Worship, a first hymn, or other portions that help to welcome the congregation as they gather. As the children respond, make any connections between the church community and worship and the other places they described earlier. Wonder together how they might be part of welcoming people as they gather for worship. Encourage them to say a word of welcome to someone at church.

GATHERING IN PROTEST



To help children consider the power of gathering with others for a common purpose, read aloud *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World* by Michael Waters or show the YouTube video “TFAA—For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World by Michael W. Waters” (bit.ly/FMBlackBoys, 7:01). After the story, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

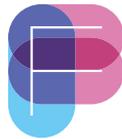
- Why does Jeremiah’s family protest?
- Have you participated in a protest? If so, tell us a bit about that.

- For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World* by Michael W. Waters (Flyaway Books, 2020) or internet-connected device
- Paper, markers

- ✦ What issues or common goals have caused people to gather in protest?
- ✦ What does protesting accomplish?
- ✦ When the disciples were walking on the Emmaus Road, they were lamenting Jesus' death. What does it mean to *lament*? How are protests acts of lament?

Point out, if necessary, that *protest* means to declare something publicly; people who protest are not just saying what they are against but that they are for, in this case, justice. Tell the children that, in Christian worship, we speak out for God's justice by publicly declaring that Christ is risen, and that life and love win over death. By changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, Jesus' followers ensured that even the day on which Christians gather proclaims the resurrection. Each Sunday's worship service can be thought of as a "little Easter." Wonder together how gathering each week to proclaim the resurrection is an act of protest.

Distribute paper and markers, and invite the children to make protest signs that proclaim what they wish to publicly declare. Invite the children to share their protest signs.



FOLLOWING JESUS

- *Glory to God* hymnal, hymnal with "Lord, Prepare Me (Sanctuary)," or internet-connected device

GO, BE A LIVING SANCTUARY



The closing song for each session of this unit is "Lord, Prepare Me (Sanctuary)." Singing this song as the children prepare to leave will help them remember that worship extends beyond the Sunday service into daily life. Use a hymnal (*Glory to God*, #701) or show the YouTube video "Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary (Maranatha Music) Lyric Video" (bit.ly/FMSanctuarySongLyrics, 1:47) to teach the song.

Ask the children:

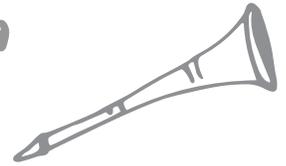
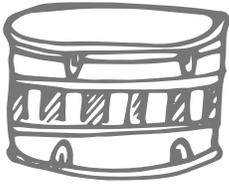
- ✦ When you hear the word *sanctuary*, what comes to mind?
- ✦ What do you think is a "living sanctuary"?
- ✦ According to the song, what attitude motivates a follower to be a living sanctuary?
- ✦ If worship comes from an attitude of thanksgiving rather than duty, what difference does that make?
- ✦ How can you be a living sanctuary this week?

Sing the song together one more time, showing the previous video or the YouTube video "Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary—Sam & Easter" (bit.ly/FMSanctuarySong, 1:07), which has a family singing the song.

Close with the following prayer:

Awesome God, we thank you for the support and comfort that we receive when we gather with other Christ-followers who share our joys and sorrows. Whatever roads we are on this week, may we know your presence and show our thanks in what we do and say. Amen.

Psalm 150, adapted



Praise God everyone!
(point to people)

Praise God everywhere!
(move arms open wide)

Praise God's mighty deeds!
(make strong right arm)

Praise God's incredible greatness!
(raise both hands shoulder height up and down, palms out)

Praise God with trumpet sound!
(pretend to play a trumpet)

Praise God with lute and harp!
(pretend to play guitar, then harp)

Praise God with tambourine!
(pretend to shake a tambourine)

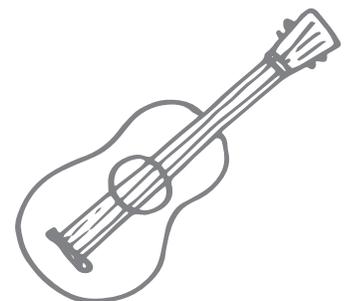
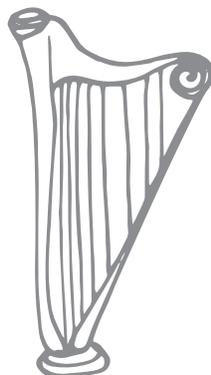
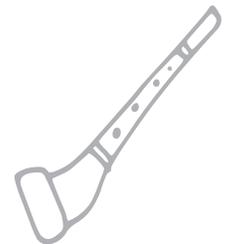
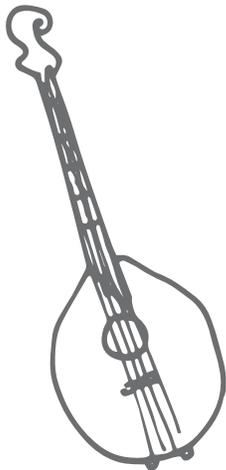
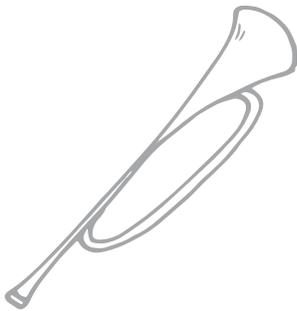
Praise God with drum and dance!
(pretend to play a drum, then dance)

Praise God with strings and pipe!
(pretend to play a violin, then recorder)

Praise God with clanging bells!
(pretend to ring bells, swinging arms in large motions)

Praise God with loud clashing cymbals!
(pretend to clash cymbals)

Let every living thing praise God!
(take a deep breath, raise your hands upward)





BIBLE STORY

BASED ON LUKE 24:13–35

How do you recognize a friend? By hair color, clothes, or voice? We have many ways to remember people who are important to us. In this story, Jesus' friends recognize him when he does something.

Cleopas and his friend had gone to Jerusalem with Jesus. Now they were leaving. Jesus was dead, and they were going home. They were walking on the road to Emmaus, talking about all that had happened. A stranger caught up with them and asked, "What are you talking about?"

"You're coming from Jerusalem. Don't you know what happened there?" they said. "Haven't you heard the news about the prophet killed in Jerusalem?"

"What news?" the stranger asked.

Cleopas explained, "Jesus was our friend. He talked about loving others. He was God's prophet. Many people followed him. We thought he would be the one to save us from Roman rulers. But some leaders in the government thought he was dangerous. They killed him three days ago. Today women went to his tomb. They said the tomb was empty! They saw angels who said that Jesus is alive. Now we don't know what to believe. We are sad and confused."

"I know you're sad. Listen to me," said the stranger. "Do you remember what the prophets wrote about the One sent from God?" Then he told them some old stories about the One whom God promised to send. This One would show them how to live together peacefully.

They continued walking together. As the sun set, they arrived in Emmaus. The stranger kept on walking.

"Wait! It's almost night time," said the two disciples. "Please stay with us."

The stranger agreed. When the food was ready, the stranger took the bread. He broke the bread into pieces and gave it to them. Then Cleopas and his friend saw it was Jesus who was sitting at the table with them!

Then Jesus disappeared.

Cleopas said, "It was Jesus who walked with us when we were sad! I felt my heart shine inside me when he told us the old stories."

They were so surprised that they didn't finish eating. They left Emmaus and hurried back to Jerusalem. There the disciples were talking about Peter having seen Jesus. Cleopas and his friend told the disciples what had happened to them. "Jesus is alive! We knew it was him when he gave us the bread."

"Memory and Surprise," excerpted from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim. © 2018 Flyaway Books. Used by permission.

