

Community of Christ

# CHRIST'S MISSION IS OUR MISSION

## Spiritual Formation

BY CAROLYN BROCK, INTEGRATED FORMATION MINISTRIES



S T U D Y   G U I D E

# Christ's Mission Is Our Mission

## Study Guide: Spiritual Formation

By Carolyn Brock, integrated formation ministries

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### About This Guide

Welcome to this resource and the opportunity for additional exploration of Christ's mission through spiritual practices. Community of Christ is called to understand the mission of Christ more deeply and embody Christ's peace more fully. We do this by engaging the call to mission from different perspectives and through diverse practices of discipleship. This resource offers a spiritual formation and practice lens for viewing and engaging in mission. It calls the church to an intentional focus on Christ's mission, particularly as expressed in Luke 4:18–19.

This spiritual reflection and practice guide connects with and supports content and themes found in *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission—An Exploration of Luke 4:16–30* by Peter Judd (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915194). Judd's text examines Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4 and calls us to deepen our responses to Christ's mission. It stands on its own as a study and reflection resource for use in diverse settings.

This spiritual formation guide processes key themes of Judd's text through spiritual reflections and practices. Its purpose is to serve as an experiential spiritual formation resource for individuals or

small groups. It is strongly recommended that participants read Judd's book prior to or in conjunction with using this companion guide.

### How to Use This Guide

This resource can be used as an *individual* or *small group* spiritual practice guide for lifelong discipleship formation. Suggested guidelines for using the resource with a group are found below:

- The ideal size for a small group is four to six people. This allows time for each person to share responses to questions and spiritual practices.
- Create a peaceful setting conducive to quiet reflection and confidential sharing. Gather in a circle to facilitate a sense of community.
- The focus is on spiritual reflection and experiential practice of spiritual disciplines. The resource is not a discussion guide for *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, although it does include opportunities for sharing. It is a guide for going deeper with God in our spiritual responses to Christ's mission.
- Schedule small group sessions outside of Christian education settings when possible. This maintains focus on spiritual formation rather than a classroom format. For study and class processing of mission themes, please use Judd's text.
- If Christian education settings are used, attempt to create a small group spiritual formation environment with experiential use of practices. More than six sessions may be required.
- For large gatherings (such as reunions or mission center conferences) the community may be divided into smaller groups with a designated guide to instruct the whole body and facilitate spiritual practices.
- Allow at least one hour for each group session (up to 90 minutes if time permits). Adjust materials and time frames to fit the needs of the group. Schedule additional sessions as necessary and feasible.
- Encourage participants to continue prayer and spiritual practice after completing the sessions.

## **Beginning Reflections on Spiritual Practice and Discernment for Mission**

Mission is about moving, going, traveling, and being sent. The God of movement, change, and continuous formation invites us to join the journey toward the Creator's vision of peace and wholeness. We are a Restoration people familiar with pilgrimage and willing to go where the call of the Spirit leads us.

To move effectively and compassionately, we must discern which way the winds of the Spirit are blowing. Discernment is intentional listening for the movements of the Spirit and the invitations and purposes of God. A life stance of discernment supported Jesus' radical availability to God's voice and vision. Discernment orients the life of a disciple toward God's presence and call through spiritual attention and prayer. It is a daily choice and practice. Session 4 provides discernment definitions and details.

It is our mission to discern as we journey with God and in the manner of the Lord Jesus. In the likeness of Jesus we commit ourselves to travel lightly, leaving behind fears, attachments, and resistance to the Spirit's transforming work. This work of shedding the ego's desires to control or be right is done in the context of spiritual practice that fosters a spirit of discernment and spiritual freedom (see session 4).

This guide offers reflections and spiritual practices that center

attention on the purposes and presence of God. It includes practices that engage our minds, hearts, spirits, and bodies. Traditional spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reflection, journal writing, life examination, silent listening, worship, and spiritual friendship are offered as tools to enhance our experiences with God and one another.

The reflections and practices of this study guide invite you to remember that the vision of God's peaceful reign lived out in the mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most in our journey together. May the spirit of Christ's peace accompany and bless you.

Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your whole-hearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a–b

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# 1

## The Spirit of the Lord Is upon Me

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

—Luke 4:18–19 NRSV

### Objectives

The learners will...

- understand the link between spiritual formation and mission in a disciple's life.
- describe the inward and outward mission of Christ and Christian discipleship.
- name several of Jesus' spiritual practices.
- reflect on Jesus' identity as God's beloved and their identities as God's beloved.
- engage in several spiritual formation practices and identify practices for further exploration.

### Materials

- Small bowls of oil or water (you may use scented oil or water if it can be determined before the session that no one has fragrance allergies)
- Prayer shawl (cloth, knitted, or crocheted wrap)—Jews wear a fringed cloth shawl for morning prayers. Some Christians make and use prayer shawls as a sign of God's comforting embrace (For an example see [www.firstccscott.com/Ministries/WeServeWithCompassion/Outreach/Ministries/PrayerShawlMinistry/tabid/22043/Default.aspx](http://www.firstccscott.com/Ministries/WeServeWithCompassion/Outreach/Ministries/PrayerShawlMinistry/tabid/22043/Default.aspx).)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- One copy for each participant of the activity sheets found at the end of this lesson

### Resources

- One copy for each participant of *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission—An Exploration of Luke 4:16–30* by Peter Judd (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915194)

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

In *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, Peter Judd says the Spirit is the essential source of all Jesus is and does. Christ announces his mission in the Luke 4 passage which begins: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Life in the Spirit is the calling of all who take on the mantle of Christ's mission.

Spirit can be both intimate reality and profound mystery. Our best ways to describe it are sometimes with metaphors and symbols like light or wind.

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection as you remember an experience with God's Spirit. What happened? What did the encounter feel like? Do any of the metaphors or images below help describe your experience?

- Light, Fire, Burning
- Breath, Wind
- Comforter, Friend, Teacher
- Wisdom, Clarity, Peace
- Healing Presence
- Anointing, Touch
- Still Small Voice
- Living Water
- Energy, Vitality, Renewal
- Loving Embrace

**Group Instructions:** Invite partner and large group sharing as follows:

- **Partners:** Briefly share your memory of spiritual encounter. Which of the symbols above have meaning in your story? If none, what images or metaphors best describe your experience?
- **Large Group:** What images of God's Spirit emerged from the partner conversations? (2–3 responses)

## ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

### Spirit and Mission

The Spirit is present throughout the Christ story. Jesus seeks and relies on God's Spirit to bless and guide his mission. The Spirit anoints Christ for mission. Judd highlights several ways the Spirit "works" in our lives. The Spirit names us beloved, enlightens our minds, fills our souls with joy, helps us discern needs, and moves us out in compassionate acts of care (see Doctrine and Covenants 10). The Spirit has power to unite, heal, restore, and make whole.

### Activity Sheet 1.1: Shaped by the Spirit in Community

Engage in reflections and responses on Activity Sheet 1.1 (below). Groups may want to share responses.

### Mission as Inward-Outward Journey

Spirituality and mission are not separate facets of discipleship. Judd tells us we see them separately because of our tendency to divide things into "either-or" categories. In Jesus we witness the seamless flow of a whole life inwardly and outwardly surrendered to God.

Early Christians understood Jesus' way was centered in his constant orientation toward God's presence and purpose. Traditional Christian spirituality calls for transformation of both inner personality and outer behavior. Holistic discipleship unites **contemplative disciplines** (receptive presence and openness to God) with **active disciplines** (compassionate service and outreach).

### Reflection Questions

Reflect on the following questions. If in a group spend a few minutes sharing your views and experiences.

- In his text, Peter Judd notes that we sometimes prioritize our spiritual lives over moving out in Christ's mission. What do you find true in your experience? Are you more

likely to neglect your prayer life and time with God or to resist reaching out in active service and mission?

### A "New" View of Mission

Judd affirms that mission can be a form of prayer. Acts of generosity and healing are prayers when spiritually grounded in God's love and spiritually directed toward embodying God's shalom. This form of mission is what marks Jesus as the wholeness of God in a human life.

Christ-consciousness and compassion cannot be created by either outer or inner works alone. *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission* invites us to expand our view of spiritual formation to include acts of service. Another shift in our definitions further dismantles false divisions between spirituality and mission. If acts of mission can be forms of prayer, can prayer be an act of mission?

**Reflect on the following questions. If you are in a group, invite brief responses.**

- How comfortable are you with including spiritual practices in your definition of mission?
- Is part of our mission to take a daily journey with God into the inner regions of our souls? If so, what kind of mission would this be and how is it connected to outer forms of mission?

**Read and reflect** on the following section. **Groups:** Members may mark statements they agree with (!), those they disagree with (x), or those they have questions about (?). If time permits discuss in groups of three.

The work of our personal psychological and spiritual transformation is a continuous and daunting mission. It includes the "going in" part of mission Jesus persistently included in his daily walk. It is essential to our ability to engage in the work of outer mission in the spirit and manner of Jesus. Yet, it is the part of mission we often would rather avoid.

While some of us do get stuck looking inward, many of us are consumed by demands and needs that pull our energy and attention constantly outward into a working, producing, or serving mode. Our prayers are rushed, "on the go" efforts to involve God in what we are already doing. Stopping to spend time with God or slowing for spiritual renewal feels like either luxury or inconvenience.

Mission involves a balanced, centered pattern of movement. Christ teaches us the integrated, interdependent rhythms of movement in and movement out. Jesus *gets up* while it is yet dark and *moves* through the sleeping city to a

place of solitude. Jesus *withdraws* from healing and teaching activities to be alone in prayer. Jesus *goes* to a garden or hilltop to pray and listen for guidance. Jesus *makes a 40-day pilgrimage* into the wilderness to do the work of confronting potential “ego demons” of power and pride—the self-aggrandizement of impressing or controlling others. Jesus *returns* from his prayer sojourns and *travels* out to continue his mission of embodying God’s vision of shalom.

“Mission in” is our daily trip to the wilderness with Jesus. He shows us the way and goes with us on this movement into the untamed places of psyche and spirit. In Christ-like trust we lay ourselves bare to the Holy Spirit. We are made ready for “mission out” and can move with the great Mission Giver into the complex brokenness and beauty of life.

How do we find the balanced wholeness of Christ? How do we open our life patterns more deeply to God’s gracious shaping and grow in the daily rhythms of Jesus? How do we walk the road of transformation that travels both inward and outward? (Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d).

### Activity Sheet 1.2: Life Examen

Explore the questions above using the spiritual practice of the Life Examen Prayer (below).

#### Christ’s Mission as the Life of the Beloved

Peter Judd explores Jesus’ identity as God’s Beloved. He believes Jesus would not have been able to live with such compassionate courage had he not experienced God naming him “beloved Son.” Our only hope of living with a fragment of Christ’s humility and grace is to open ourselves to the gift of our belovedness.

Jesus’ belovedness was powerfully confirmed at his baptism through divine touch and voice. It was deepened in his daily encounters with God in solitary places, then expressed in crowded noisy places of human need. Out of his identity of belovedness he saw the face of God’s beloved in demoniacs, beggars, and prostitutes.

We now see another reason for the holistic in-out view of Spirit-centered mission. The inner journey opens us to the possibility of transforming encounters with the Holy One who shapes our identity as God’s beloved. The work of surrendering control then waiting in trust to receive this gift is difficult if we feel unworthy or fear becoming vulnerable to God’s grace. But it is, above all, the blessing that frees us to follow Christ with rivers of living water flowing freely and generously from our grateful hearts.

### Activity Sheet 1.3: Receiving our Belovedness

Engage in one of the receptive practices from Activity Sheet 1.3 (below). **Groups:** Make a community decision about the practice that best meets the needs of all.

# DISCERN & SEND

*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

Jesus lived in constant discernment mode. His attention was turned toward looking and listening for the Spirit’s call; intuitively sensing where God wanted to send him next. Spend several minutes in silent prayer. As you consider the questions below, ask to be aware of the Spirit’s desires for you. Be still and wait for images, ideas or invitations that offer guidance.

- How do you sense God inviting you to go deeper in the mission of interior formation and spiritual practice? What next step is God calling you and your congregation to take in following Jesus more intentionally on the inward path of spiritual formation?
- Where and how is God inviting you to go deeper in the mission of compassionate action in the world? What images, names, or responses come to your awareness as you offer God your attention and willingness to act?

If you are in a group invite one-sentence responses to the question: **Where is God sending you next on the inner-outer path of discipleship?**

### Assignment for Next Session

Read or review chapter 2 of *Christ’s Mission Is Our Mission*. Experiment with one of the spiritual practices identified for personal use in the Life Examen Prayer (Activity Sheet 1.2).

# BLESS

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

Breath is a sign, symbol, and word for Spirit. In *breath prayer* we breathe God’s Spirit in and out with a prayer phrase. One pattern is to pray one of God’s names as you breathe in. And as you breathe out, use a prayer phrase that tells God your need or longing. For example: *Loving God* (as you breathe in) and *I want to serve you* (as you breathe out). Or pray, *Holy Friend* (as you breathe in) and *heal me* (as you breathe out). Breathe in and out as you repeat the prayer you have discerned in silence for five minutes or longer. Let go of the words and be still when you can. **In Groups:** Invite participants to center with quiet, regular breathing then listen for the breath prayer that best expresses their needs. Pray together in silence then close with a short sending forth statement of blessing.

# Activity Sheet 1.1: Shaped by the Spirit in Community

God calls us to live and move like Jesus in this world. Our discipleship is formed by both individual and community disciplines of prayer and spiritual attention. When we gather in small groups, congregations, mission center events, or as an international body during World Conferences, we are called to live the integrated rhythms of Christ's mission together. We are to be bound together, healed, and drawn more deeply into Christ's compassion.

God's invitation to Community of Christ is to seek and accept the anointing of the Spirit that transforms us from a culturally, politically, economically diverse body of disciples into a holistic expression of Christ's peace. Through Christ-like sharing of our voices and hearts, we are more fully formed into God's shalom community. Spirit can move like a gentle breeze or a fiery outpouring, but its movements always draw us toward wholeness in Christ.

Close your eyes and listen to this prayer by Augustine of Hippo (354–430):

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you ... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

—*The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Book 10, paragraph 27 by Saint Augustine, translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey, [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

Augustine's prayer expresses ways he was healed and changed by encounters with God's Spirit. He hears through his deafness. Light breaks through his blindness. He experiences Spirit as breath, touch, fragrance, and taste that cause him to long for deeper relationship with the Divine.

Quietly reflect on the following questions:

- Reflect on your personal invitation to spirit-centered mission. When and where will you seek encounters with the Spirit? What is your hope for the Spirit's touch, voice, light, and call? How do the words of Augustine speak to your needs or thoughts?
- Reflect on the invitation to spiritual formation in community with others. What opportunities do you perceive for small group, congregational, or larger gatherings? How might you and others prepare for the Spirit to move, "shine," or breathe in a group gathered to discern God's call? How might experiencing the Spirit in community deepen your response to Christ's mission?

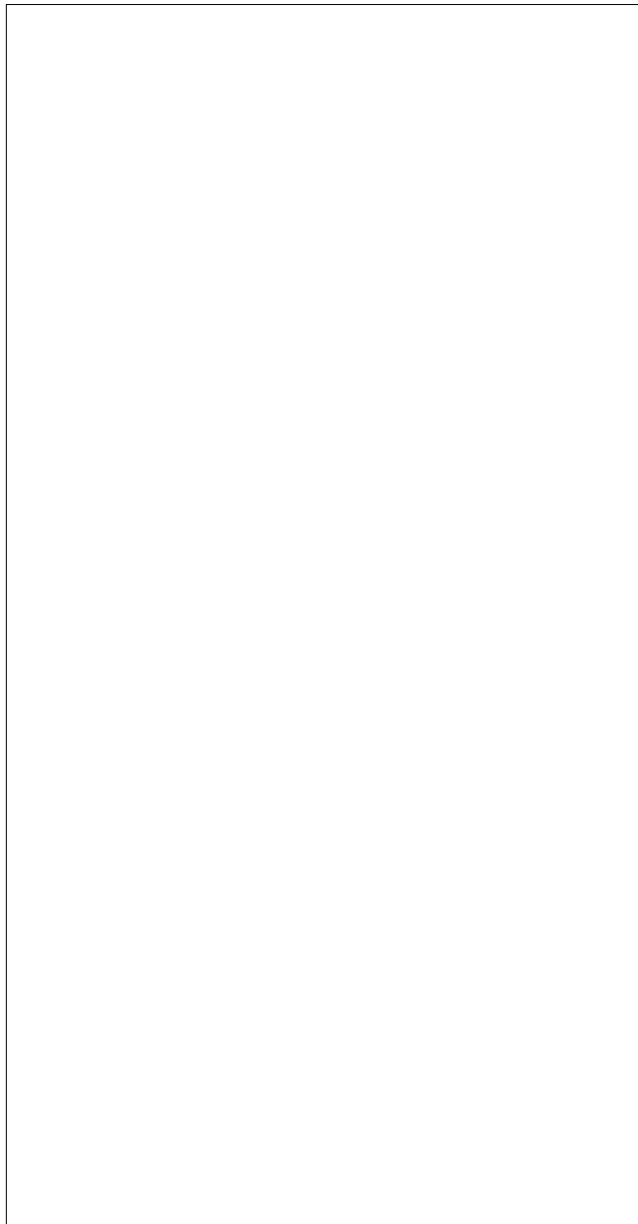
Write a prayer of blessing for communities of people who sense God's call to be more fully formed into the likeness of Christ. Ask the Spirit to anoint and shape you for mission.

# Activity Sheet 1.2: Life Examen Prayer

The daily prayer of examen\* (Ignatius of Loyola 1491–1556) invites us to notice God’s movement and presence in our lives and responses. A Life Examen Prayer invites a broader review of our spiritual journeys. **Use the blank spaces below each section for journal reflections and prayers.**

## **Begin with a Spirit of Gratitude: Reflect and Pray**

Prayerfully and compassionately reflect on your life, particularly your life with God and your journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Offer (write) a brief prayer of gratitude for your life and the way God is gradually shaping you into the likeness of Christ.

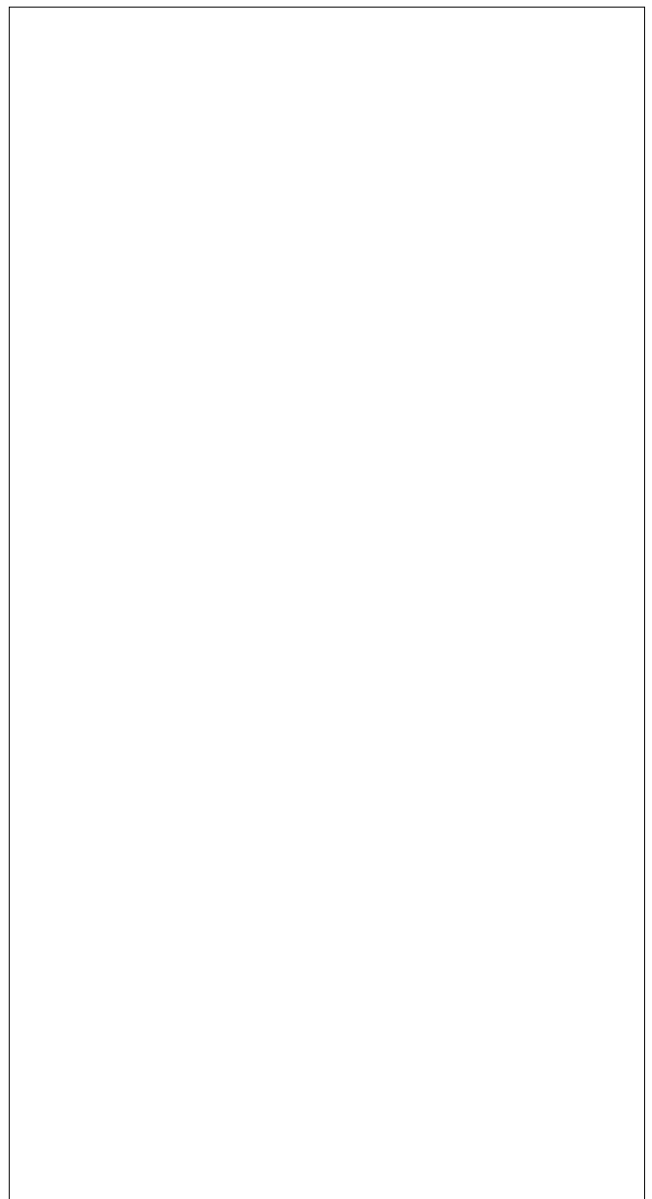


## **Notice God Encounters and Invitations: Reflect and Pray**

When have you:

- been aware of God’s presence and call; known or experienced that you are God’s beloved?
- responded to the invitation to deepen your inner life and spiritual practices?
- responded to the invitation to share, heal, help, or serve in the spirit of Christ?

Examine with God what has been happening in your journey to this point. Notice where you are and how you have been responding as God has been shaping you. Give thanks for these experiences.



\* Examen is Latin for “examination”

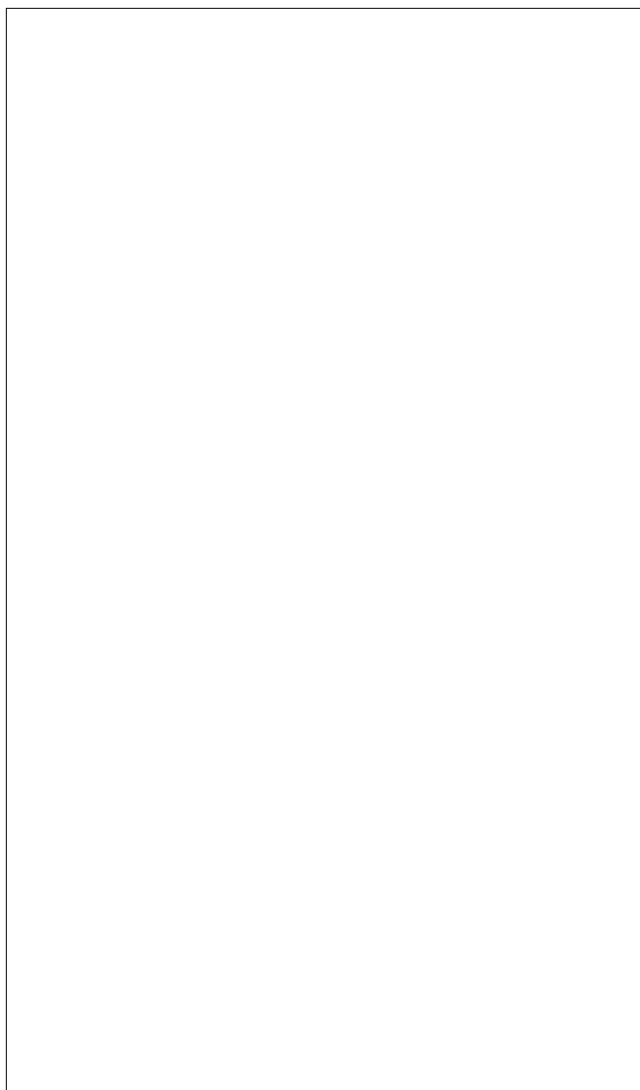


# Activity Sheet 1.2: Life Examen Prayer (cont.)

## Notice Distractions, Resistance, Unfulfilled Longings: Reflect and Pray

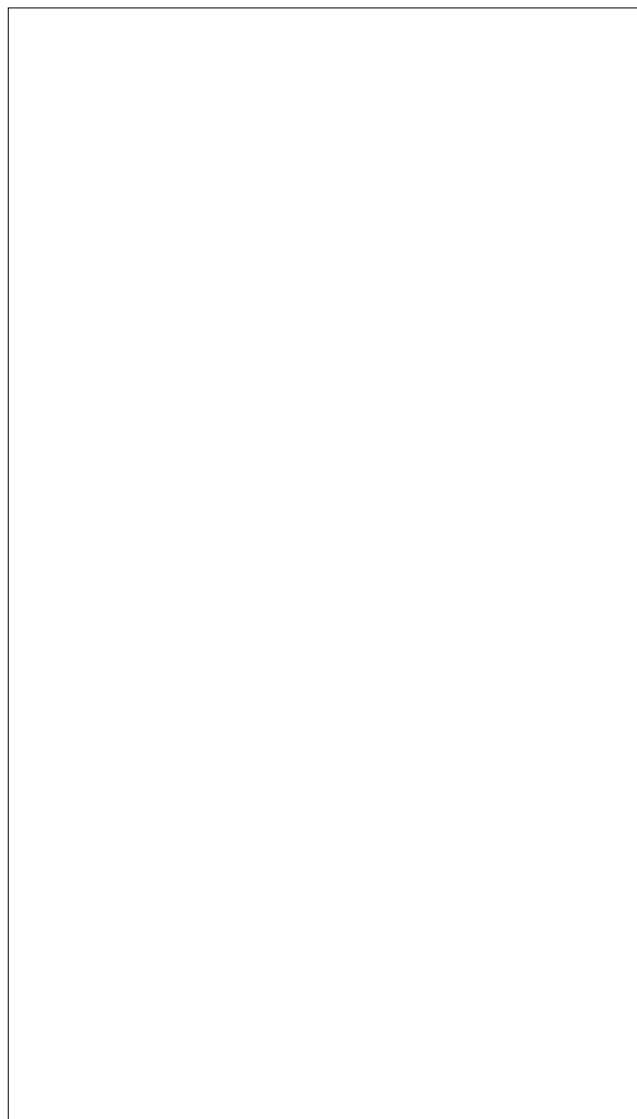
- In what ways are you aware of being out of balance, unwhole, or fragmented?
- When and how have you resisted God's invitation to deeper formation and discipleship?
- What distractions, fears, and competing interests are affecting your response to Christ's mission?
- What spiritual longings and responses still need to be fulfilled on your journey?

Hold your longing and resistance before God. Ask for healing of all that keeps you from moving more fully into Christ's pattern. Surrender regrets and fears into God's grace and let them go.



## Offer Yourself and the Future to God

Close with a brief period of silence. Listen for God's call to the next step of formation. Discern one *receptive* spiritual practice (mission in) and one *active* spiritual practice (mission out) the Spirit invites you to begin. Name the practices below. Ask God to bless you and continue to form your life in Christ.



# Activity Sheet 1.3: Receiving our Belovedness

## Individual or Group Practice: Blessed and Beloved

- Stand or sit quietly. Pray for openness to God's presence and love.
- Hold your hands up and open in front of you. Ask to sense God's desire to name you "beloved."
- Bring hands together and place them over the center of your chest at the level of your heart.
- Breathe with a prayer affirmation: "Blessed and beloved" or "I am blessed, I am beloved."
- Receive the words and breath of God's Spirit as deeply as you can in your mind, body, and heart.
- After several minutes, express your gratitude to God and close your prayer.

**Group Practices:** Choose a spiritual friendship practice to acknowledge each person as God's beloved.

## Wrapped in God's Love (Prayer Shawls—see note on the opening page of lesson)

- Gather the group in a circle. Have one or more cloth or knitted prayer shawls available.
- Invite participants to receive and share their identity as a community of God's beloved people.
- Wrap a prayer shawl around the shoulders of the first participant. Ask others to gather around.
- If the group is comfortable with touch, invite members to place hands gently and appropriately on the person wrapped in the prayer shawl. Or simply stand around the person without touching.
- Spend a short time silently praying for the person with the shawl. See them as God's beloved and surround them with the love God blesses you to feel for them.
- After one to two minutes of silent prayer, group

members are invited to make short verbal statements affirming the shawl-wearing person as God's much loved child. Examples:

"You are God's beloved one (son or daughter)."

"God delights in you and loves you eternally."

"You are wrapped forever in God's love and care."

- Close the affirmations and invite the shawl-wearer to wrap the next person in the shawl.
- Repeat the ritual until all who desire have taken part. Close with a brief prayer of thanks.

## Anointed as God's Beloved (Blessing with Water or Oil)

- Sit in a circle. Have bowls of non-scented oil, lotion, or clean water available. (You may use scented water, oil, or lotion if none of the group members have fragrance allergies.)
- Inform the group about the ancient symbolism of anointing as sign of blessing or call. Early Christians were often anointed with chrism (olive oil and balsam) after baptism to symbolize receiving the Holy Spirit. We anoint each other now as spiritual friends sharing God's blessings together.
- Invite participants into a time of anointing each other with oil (non-sacramental) or water as a symbol of God's Spirit and their identity as God's beloved children.
- The oil or water may be placed on an appropriate body area (forehead, hand, or wrist).
- Verbal affirmations of belovedness may be shared with each other as the anointing takes place.
- Let the anointing and verbal statements take place spontaneously and informally as participants feel led. Close the time of sharing with a prayer of gratitude and blessing for the group.

# 2

## Bring Good News to the Poor

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to **bring good news to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

—Luke 4:18–19 NRSV

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

### Objectives

The learners will...

- explore images and experiences related to those who are poor and the mission of good news for them.
- examine and imagine God's vision of shalom and the place of those who are poor in shalom community.
- reflect on the worth and gifts of those identified as wealthy and poor.
- experience practices of presence, proximity, and spiritual attention as principles for community formation in daily life and at gatherings of the faith community.

### Materials

- Assorted art supplies (paper, crayons, colored markers, or colored pencils)
- Paper and pens for writing activities

### Resources

- One copy for each participant of *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission—An Exploration of Luke 4:16–30* by Peter Judd (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915194)

- Choose the following video, hymnal, or print options that best meet the needs of your group:

1. "Heal the World" by Michael Jackson (YouTube video or lyrics)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWf-eARnf6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWf-eARnf6U)  
[www.elyrics.net/read/m/michael-jackson-lyrics/heal-the-world-lyrics.html](http://www.elyrics.net/read/m/michael-jackson-lyrics/heal-the-world-lyrics.html)
2. "I Want to Live" by John Denver (YouTube video posted by Margie Sindelar)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=EONVnK7JIU4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EONVnK7JIU4)
3. "Selam, Salam, Shalom, Shlomo: A Peace Song" by Karibuni (YouTube video and lyrics)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVMP3ZCPQo4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVMP3ZCPQo4)  
[www.reverbnation.com/artist/song\\_details/3123526](http://www.reverbnation.com/artist/song_details/3123526)
4. "For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table" by Shirley Erena Murray. (Search [www.hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx](http://www.hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx) for lyrics and copyright information.)
5. *Sing for Peace (SP)*—hymns 19, 22, 24, 25, 38
6. *Hymns of the Saints (HS)*—hymns 314, 315, 322
7. *Sing a New Song (NS)*—hymns 21, 34, 40

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

In *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, Peter Judd asks us to ponder both the needs and gifts of those who are poor. Judd focuses primarily on economic implications of the mission to "abolish poverty and end suffering." But he also reminds

us that we are all poor in different ways. The suffering of spiritual poverty can be experienced by those with financial wealth and those with limited material resources.

The complexities of diverse forms of poverty are beyond the scope of this resource, but we begin by recognizing the many paradoxes of wealth and poverty. Material abundance does not guarantee spiritual joy and meaning nor does it necessarily prevent us from experiencing these gifts. Financial poverty does not necessarily prevent us from finding meaning and joy in our lives. But the existence of

strength and contentment among economically deprived persons must not blind us to their suffering.

We can be poor in many ways. We can be rich in many ways. Jesus invites us to examine our attitudes and attachments related to our possessions. Spiritual freedom found in the good news of God's love is the persistent message Christ offers to all. These reflections will provide the context for our exploration of several spiritual dimensions of "good news for the poor."

Some of us may have experience with personal poverty. Others of us may have connected with those who are poor through work, family, community, or travel situations. We also have images of what it means to be wealthy. Wealth and poverty are realities of life. Our assumptions about people of different economic classes can lead to misunderstanding and separation. Our experiences with those who are poor or rich can lead to unexpected connections and community.

Spend a few minutes remembering experiences with those you consider to be poor. What images or encounters come to mind? Write down words or phrases that describe your impressions of "poor people." Be as open as possible about negative encounters, assumptions, or feelings as well as positive experiences or qualities you admire. If you have had personal experience with poverty, reflect on the difficulties and blessings of being poor. What positive or negative assumptions or experiences do you have with those you consider wealthy?

**For Groups:** Invite group members to share an image or brief experience with poverty or those who are poor. Spend time talking together about being poor or rich.

- What material or spiritual meanings do the words *poor* or *rich* have for you?
- When have you observed or experienced dividing walls between people of different economic groups?
- When have you observed or experienced dismantling of walls and development of community and healthy relationships?
- Close with one minute of silent prayer for understanding and respect between all God's people.

## ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

### The Mission as Shalom Community

In *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, Peter Judd emphasizes the need to be in community with those who are poor.

The mission Jesus announces is a new form of human community that grows out of a vision of God's shalom. Luke 4:18–19 provides core images of Christ's perception of this new reality of freedom, healing, and justice.

The universal vision of God's intent for creation is known to us as the cause of Zion, the peaceable kingdom, the reign of God, and the holistic peace of Christ. The Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) and Blessings of Community are Enduring Principles of Community of Christ. This divine hope is what claimed Jesus and sent him into Spirit-inspired mission. God's vision of wholeness includes a special concern for the place and welfare of those who are poor.

In spite of historical and cultural biases, we are called to think differently, to put on the mind of Christ, and see those who are poor with new eyes. Christ's mission to embody shalom and our mission to create communities of joy, hope, love, and peace for all God's people are birthed from a divine and joyous vision of the possible.

This expansive vision of what God longs for is so shocking, so completely whole and holy, so unimaginably just and beautiful, the human mind cannot fully take it in. Yet, for mission to take root in us, our imaginations must be fired by the vision that consumed the heart and mind of Christ.

Use **Activity Sheet 2.1: Imagining Shalom** (found at the end of this document) to explore God's vision of shalom with words, music, and images.

### The Mission as Honoring the Worth and Gifts of All

*Read the following reflections. Mark the one sentence or paragraph that speaks most clearly or strongly to you. What additional ideas and feelings do you have about the realities and gifts of the poor?*

In Jesus' justice-based economy all are welcome and valued; all bring gifts worthy of enhancing the whole. As Judd notes in *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, chapter 2, many of the planet's poor possess qualities we might not expect them to have.

During our family's five years in Africa I was often surprised by a joyful, tenacious energy running through the lives of those who have few visible reasons for it.

I have been humbled by delicious meals prepared by women who killed the chicken, carried water, cooked over open flames or a small charcoal-burning "jiko." I've been healed by the four-part harmony of a singing, swaying troupe of African youth dancing their way into a worship service. I've been gifted beyond what I deserved by open-handed

Tahitians offering me treasures I didn't feel they should part with. I've been included in Native American feasts and powwows as a friend of the community when I could have been rejected as a clueless intruder. I've had Spirit rise up beneath my hands and whisper "this one is known and beloved by me" as I confirmed African nomads as members in our faith community. I've been surrounded by laughing women as they dressed me in African cloth or an Indian sari or Tahitian garb topped off with a "crown" of fragrant flowers.

I have also been humbled by the creative genius and selfless generosity of people we call "the rich." I've had my assumptions and stereotypes disproven by the compassionate warmth and presence of wealthy friends who long for authentic community in a world that values them primarily for the resources they possess. I've heard the stories of those who are rich who have gone to be with those who are poor at great expense and risk. I've witnessed the grateful tears of those who are rich for gifts of heart and spirit they received from those who are poor.

Judd tells us that being in community with those who are poor can heal us. Their gifts of dignity, faith, humor, resourcefulness, hospitality, and generosity wash over us as an elusive form of wholeness we long for but do not quite know how to find.

Being poor can create a particular kind of grace in us—the grace of living in the present moment with gratitude and trust. A profound gift offered by many we call poor is the contentment of "enough." Deep gratitude for the simple essentials of life available to you may be a rare experience if you are one who has more than "enough." Contentment with the riches of community, family, the land, and daily cycles of existence offers a different definition of wealth than the "joy-through-consuming" message that saturates many cultures (review the story in Judd's text on page 35 for an example).

The strengths of those in poverty can be romanticized until their suffering seems almost like a noble calling. But financial scarcity can also deface bodies and disfigure souls. It can cripple people and make them cynical or dependent. It can lead people to escape into addictions or become manipulative to get their needs met. Spiritual poverty can lead us to seek meaning in possessions and power. Dependency on wealth and the addiction to acquire and own ultimately leaves the soul empty and disconnected. Poverty, in any form, is not the will or vision of God for any of God's people.

Beneath our outer wrappings—the costumes and disguises we wear as rich, poor, or in-between—there is a larger truth. The deep self we find when we are at home in God does not care whether it is materially rich or poor. The beloved

self knows the worth, dignity, and joyful compassion of Christ. Healing of the spirit allows us to wear our wealth and poverty lightly, trusting God to use our gifts no matter what our outer circumstances. The mission, as lived by Jesus, challenges the world's concepts of worth and removes false divisions of class and economic status. This is the way spiritual and materialistic poverty is abolished.

**In Groups:** Ask group members to share the one sentence or paragraph that caught their attention. What additional thoughts and feelings did the group have? Discuss responses briefly as time permits.

### The Mission as Presence and Proximity

Community can be defined as a unified body of individuals. Unity in Diversity is an Enduring Principle of Community of Christ. But in our diverse, often polarized world unity is difficult to find. Even in the context of our community of faith our multiple cultural, political, educational, and economic realities make for a wide spectrum of beliefs and worldviews. The wisdom of Jesus shows us the path to unity in the body of Christ.

Jesus got up close and personal with people, particularly those who were poor and dispossessed. Peter Judd reminds us that Jesus not only lived among those who were poor, he was poor. He went where the poor were so he could look in their faces, listen to their stories, and ask them penetrating questions. Community with those who are poor, between poor and rich, between and with all God's diverse, delightful people is supported by *Christ's example of proximity and presence*.

Proximity means getting next to one another, side by side, face to face. When we are near or with those who are poor they are real to us and we become real to them. When we eat and laugh, talk, and work together the face of the other turns into the face of a friend. Our stories get connected, our myths and assumptions get dismantled, and our hearts grow large enough to contain God's compassion for one another.

The principle of proximity works best when we practice the art of being present. Jesus is masterful at this. True presence is grounded in *the spiritual practice of holy attention*. When we are truly present to another person we receive that person with gratitude and reverence. We come near with the intent and expectation of encountering the light of God at the person's core. When we see with sacred eyes, with the eyes of Christ, cultural, political, theological, and economic barriers become secondary. We can be together in a new way. We can listen to each other and learn from our differences with the respect of spiritual companions.

Use **Activity Sheet 2.2: Practicing Spiritual Attention** found at the end of this document—to engage in this spiritual discipline.

# DISCERN & SEND

*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

Poverty overwhelms us with its sheer magnitude. It is entwined in global political and economic structures in seemingly intractable ways. Its claws tear the innocent to pieces. If we heard all the cries of those who are poor and suffering at once some say the sound would cause us to physically disintegrate. Economic, social, and political solutions offer incomplete and inadequate answers.

How do we hear God's voice amid the complexities of poverty and the suffering of those who are poor? How do we perceive the attitudes and actions that matter most? What spiritual questions are at the heart of the economic injustices in the human family? What would Jesus do and say if he were walking in mission with us today?

Sit quietly with these and other questions that have come up for you in this session. Listen prayerfully and notice images or ideas that emerge from your silent attention. **In Groups:** Offer a word, phrase, or image that answers the question: **How and where does God send me to bring good news to the poor?**

# BLESS

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

Read aloud the following scripture:

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

After a brief pause, offer a prayer of blessing on the group, the church, and all who work for justice and healing. Ask God to weave us into a worldwide network of shalom where barriers of economic and cultural diversity are dismantled. Pray for Christ's peace to unite our many diverse and delightful expressions of shalom as we journey into the future with God.

# Activity Sheet 2.1: Imagining Shalom

The dream of peace is woven into the consciousness of Earth's peoples. It appears in art, music, literature, and countless creative expressions. Part of our mission as disciples is constant discernment of God's vision of shalom.

Experience one or more of the following artistic, imaginative expressions of God's shalom. Spend time watching, listening, and reflecting. Notice as many details as possible. Pay attention to sights, sounds, colors, and other sensory expressions. What images and words connect most deeply with you and your understanding of God's shalom?

1. "Heal the World" by Michael Jackson (YouTube video or lyrics)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWf-eARnf6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWf-eARnf6U)  
[www.elyrics.net/read/m/michael-jackson-lyrics/heal-the-world-lyrics.html](http://www.elyrics.net/read/m/michael-jackson-lyrics/heal-the-world-lyrics.html)
2. "I Want to Live" by John Denver (YouTube video posted by Margie Sindelar)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=EONVnK7JIU4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EONVnK7JIU4)
3. "Selam, Salam, Shalom, Shlomo: A Peace Song" by Karibuni (YouTube video and lyrics)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVMP3ZCPQo4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVMP3ZCPQo4)  
[www.reverbnation.com/artist/song\\_details/3123526](http://www.reverbnation.com/artist/song_details/3123526)
4. "For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table" by Shirley Erena Murray. (Search [www.hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx](http://www.hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx) for lyrics and copyright information.)

5. *Sing for Peace (SP)*—sing or read one or more of hymns 19, 22, 24, 25, 38
6. *Hymns of the Saints (HS)*—sing or read one or more of hymns 314, 315, 322
7. *Sing a New Song (NS)*—sing or read one or more of hymns 21, 34, 40

After engaging the selected song, spend several minutes in silent reflection. Ask God to help you see and understand shalom in new ways. Be open to words, images, or feelings that come and write them down. You may want to imagine: What are the colors and shapes of God's shalom? Does it have a flavor, a fragrance or a sound? What will shalom feel like to us, to the poor, to the wealthy, to all of us together?

Use the art or writing supplies to create an expression of God's shalom—the peace of Christ, the peaceable kingdom, vision of Zion—whatever name speaks to you. You may want to write a peace prayer, a poem, song, or reflective paragraph. You may want to draw a picture, symbol, or colorful design. You may want to quote a scripture or hymn or even sing a song that expresses your longing for the wholeness of God's creation.

**For Groups:** Choose one of the YouTube videos or other resources and engage in it together. Allow time for group members to create shalom expressions. Share the artistic and written expressions in the group.

## Activity Sheet 2.2: Practicing Spiritual Attention

Spiritual attention, also called holy attention, is reverent receptive focus on an object, experience, or person. When the focus is on a person, we suspend our inner conversations and agendas to give the other our undivided and unconditional “positive regard.” In other words, we see, hear, and notice them as deeply and distinctly as we can. We do this with the awareness that the person before us is an unrepeatable miracle whose life journey is unique and sacred in the eyes of God. We do this in the spirit of Christ who saw into the deep heart of people and recognized their true identity as God’s beloved.

**For Groups:** Divide the group into pairs and prayerfully share in the following spiritual attention exercise. Allow each person three to four minutes to share and remind the pairs when it is time to trade roles.

**Storyteller (Partner 1):** With a time limit of three minutes, share a spiritual story or experience. This might be a time when you felt God’s presence or experienced healing, forgiveness, deep joy, or a sense of awe. It might be a memory of compassion,

beauty, spiritual friendship, or the sacredness of creation. Share your story while the other person listens, then listen to his or her story.

**Listener (Partner 2):** Listen to your partner using the principles in the first paragraph. Ask God to bless you with compassionate curiosity and gratitude as you hear his or her story. This is a time to remain silent except for brief encouraging responses that indicate you are hearing the story (say “Yes,” “Uh huh,” “Hmmm,” or simply nod your head at appropriate points). When your partner has finished, thank him or her for sharing. Then tell your partner a spiritual story from your life.

To close, invite pairs to share briefly with each other how it felt to tell their stories to someone who was listening with spiritual attention and how it felt to listen with spiritual attention.

**For Individuals:** Use the principles of spiritual attention in a conversation with a family member, classmate, friend, member of your congregation, or work colleague.



# 3

## Release to the Captives

### Focus Scriptures:

Luke 4:18–19

Mark 5:25–34

Doctrine and Covenants 161–164 (selected verses)

### Objectives

The learners will...

- explore the mission of releasing captives through the story of the woman touching Christ's garment.
- experience several spiritual practices incorporating scripture, journal writing, and imaging.
- engage in prayerful reflection related to the worth of all persons and the blessings of community.

### Materials

- Six to eight strips of paper (6 in/15 cm x 2 in/5 cm) per person
- Pens, pencils, and either glue, tape, or a stapler
- Small pieces of soft cotton cloth representing Jesus' garment (one per person)

### Resources

- One copy for each participant of *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission—An Exploration of Luke 4:16–30* by Peter Judd (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915194)

political-religious-cultural oppression meant domination of the many by the few, this was a bold and dangerous statement.

Captivity can include the physical bondage of prisoners of war or people who are otherwise confined, enslaved, or subjugated. Physical restraint and control is one form of captivity. Some find their lives restrained by family or social circumstances that limit or prevent free choice. But we can also be dominated by fear or held captive by strong emotions or beliefs. Hidden and internal forms of captivity are particularly powerful, yet hard to recognize.

Engage in the following activity as a way of opening to God's call to the mission of releasing captives.

- Prayerfully reflect on diverse forms of captivity. You may want to refer to *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, chapter 3 and your awareness of emotional, physical, social, political, and religious forms of captivity.
- Use the strips of paper (see "Materials" above) to list as many forms of captivity as possible.
- Write one form of captivity on each strip of paper. Or write the name of a person or group of people who are captives on each strip. Include personal captivities if you are comfortable doing so.
- Staple, glue, or tape the paper strips together in connected rings as the forms of captivity are read. Create a paper chain representing the forms of captivity that keep people in bondage.
- Silently reflect on the suffering of the captives identified in the chain. What images of specific people and groups come to mind? Which people, groups, or forms of captivity concern you most? What do you realize about the forces holding you captive?

**In a Group:** After creating the chain of captivity, spend several minutes in group conversation about the meaning and experience of captivity. What personal need for release can group members identify? Close with a brief prayer for release of the captives and any needs expressed in the group.

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

Each phrase of Jesus' mission announcement, as recorded in Luke 4, enlarges our vision of God's agenda for humanity and creation. The Spirit anoints us with passion and promise for a new reality. Those who are poor hear good news and are welcomed into God's beloved community. Peter Judd's third chapter lifts up Christ's proclamation of release for the captives. In a time and culture when

# ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

## A Story of Captivity and Release

In *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, chapter 3, Judd names multiple forms of human captivity. The spiritual practices in this session are based on Jesus' liberation of a woman held captive by many of these forces. The text of this story provides a living example of Jesus releasing the captives just as he proclaims he will in Luke 4:18–19.

A helpful spiritual practice related to this story is scripture reflection through *lectio divina* or sacred reading. This practice is becoming more familiar to people in Community of Christ. It invites us to experience a text several times in several ways. We allow the text to speak to us on many levels as we listen attentively and prayerfully.

Go to **Activity Sheet 3.1: Group Lectio Divina on Touching the Hem** (below) and engage in this spiritual practice as a group. **Individuals** may engage by reading and reflecting, then responding to the questions with journal entries.

## Going Deeper: Further Meditation on Mark 5:25–34

When we explore a scripture text we are invited to notice details; consider issues and questions; look for personal and societal applications; and engage in prayer, meditation, journal writing, or other disciplines. The following section provides material for personal meditation and journal writing focused on Mark 5:25–34, mission, and releasing captives. **In Groups:** Ask group members to work quietly on personal responses. If time permits, invite them at the end of the exercise to talk about their experiences.

The unnamed woman who audaciously touched a rabbi's cloak took huge risks. Captive to the physical and financial burdens of her health condition, she put herself in further jeopardy by breaking Hebrew purity laws. Leviticus 15 places this woman in the permanently "contaminated" category. The law says that bleeding women are unclean and all who touch them are unclean for at least seven days.

Captive to a religious system with numerous class and cleanliness regulations, the anonymous woman is held hostage through imposed isolation and the mandate to "not touch" others. We're not told details of her daily life and suffering. It's possible her husband, family, or friends abandoned her because it was too difficult to remain ritually clean in her presence. Loneliness, shame, emotional and sensory deprivation, depression, the embarrassing stress of constantly avoiding contact with others—these were perhaps the burdens she carried as she moved carefully and quietly on the outskirts of community life.

## Mission Reflection Moment

What might a story like that of the woman with the hemorrhage look or sound like in a present-day setting? Imagine your thoughts and feelings about this woman if she were part of your community. **How would the scripture verses below invite you to live out the mission of Christ in real life encounters with a person like this woman?** Read, prayerfully reflect, then write a phrase or sentence about your mission response to this woman's needs.

From the earliest days you have been given a sacred principle that declares the inestimable worth of all persons. Do not forget. The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. ... You hold precious lives in your hands. Be gentle and gracious with one another. ... Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:6, selected phrases

Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a

## Your Response

Women in the historical-cultural circumstances of Jesus' time had few rights of expression in religious or political life. Female gender oppression was the cultural norm. Women could be viewed as possessions or at best subservient to the men who managed and dominated government, cultural, religious, and family affairs. In this context the woman's act of reaching for Jesus is indeed astounding.

Most twenty-first-century societies reject the harsh gender restrictions found in this story, but some do not. Millions of women do not enjoy the right to move freely, publicly express opinions, marry the person of their choice, own

property, or hold leadership roles.

A host of cultural and religious traditions allow women to be purchased for “bride price,” disfigured by acid for refusing a marriage offer or leaving an abusive marriage, forced into arranged marriages at early ages, forced to marry a relative after a husband’s death, forced into prostitution or slavery through human trafficking, or coerced to endure female circumcision and genital mutilation. This partial list reveals the many ways females can be forced to submit to cultural and religious rules that limit freedom and cause physical or emotional harm. Even in developed nations gender inequalities and limitations still exist.

### Mission Reflection Moment

Imagine the experiences of women held captive by circumstances described in the previous three paragraphs. **What call to mission do you hear or feel in the following words of scripture? Listen deeply. Write a phrase or sentence expressing your response to God’s concern for women in captivity.**

By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 164:5

Your Response

Captivity based on gender has been lifted up as one example of control and restriction. As with all forms of oppression women are treated in inhumane, repressive ways because of false cultural or religious beliefs that suggest they are less valuable than males. When any person or group is unjustly limited in expression and participation, the sacred “worth of all persons” is not the guiding principle at work. The mission of Christ to create a community of wholeness, dignity, and freedom for all people is the deepest call shaping our personhood and relationships. We are bound together in the covenant to see and be, live and love like Jesus. Our ultimate allegiance is to the vision of God’s peaceable reign in all human cultures, systems, and relationships.

Healthy spiritual traditions and practices center our lives in God and the transformative purposes of God in creation. Christian spiritual formation shapes us into the likeness of Christ, offers us sacred identity as God’s beloved, and frees us to express the full potential of our humanity in communities of respect and wholeness. Religious systems that cause personhood to shrink rather than shine; that ask persons to hide, become invisible, or fear being a positive expression of their true self, are forms of spiritual abuse. Jesus’ liberation of the “unclean” woman identifies such systems as the antithesis of God’s shalom.

### Mission Reflection Moment

Ponder and pray with these questions: When have you experienced spiritual abuse or witnessed the spiritual abuse of others? How do you feel about the idea that our deepest call and allegiance is to God’s vision of the holistic peace for all creation? **What mission response to religious or spiritual abuse comes to you from the following scriptures? Write a phrase or sentence to express your response.**

...the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ’s peace, where people from all nations, ethnicities, and life circumstances can be gathered into a spiritual home without dividing walls, as a fulfillment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8c

You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness. ...Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a–b

Your Response

**Mission Reflection Moment**

What do you find to be true or not true for you from the ideas in the three paragraphs above? To what personal mission of inner healing do you feel called as you reflect on the following scripture passages? Write a phrase or sentence that summarizes your response.

Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened. Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the One who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your Eternal Creator with open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. Be vulnerable to divine grace.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 163:10a–b

God is calling for a prophetic community to emerge, drawn from the nations of the world, that is characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 163:11a

The freedom to follow Christ in the mission of setting captives free is found in our willingness to be unbound from beliefs, addictions, wounds, attachments, and attitudes that prevent our spiritual transformation. Many of us live on the surface through the thinking processes of the ego or outer personality. The complexities of our inner life are often unrecognized and unconscious. But it is in this inner life where we may encounter pieces of fear, sadness, anger, or by contrast, pieces of creativity, love, or longing we have cut off and stored because they have been shamed or rejected as unacceptable.

The human psyche (Greek for soul) is the whole personality including the mysterious parts that house our most powerful urges, fears, and conflicts. When we are unaware of this inner world we tend to project and displace its shadows and shame outside of ourselves onto others. The unhealed human psyche can be the source of fear, pain, or anger leading us to reject or control others.

Part of our calling as disciples of Jesus is to be attentive to our inner lives and seek God’s help in confessing and integrating our disowned positive and negative aspects of personality, memory, and experience. The wholeness offered by Christ releases us from the tyranny of inner compulsions, wounds, and fears that prevent our inner peace. This deep form of healing frees us to stop projecting our flaws, shadows, and repressed shame onto those we fear or find threatening and unacceptably different. The courageous compassion of Christ is released in us as we bring the whole gloriously flawed, fearfully wonderful “mess” of who we are before God whose perfect love casts out fear.

Your Response

**DISCERN & SEND**  
*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

Center yourself in God’s presence. Invite the Spirit to accompany you as you take a few minutes to review the experiences of this session. Where and when was your attention and energy most powerfully engaged? At what

point did you feel most deeply challenged to respond to Christ's mission of releasing the captives? **Where is the Spirit sending you to answer this challenge?**

**In a Group:** Spend several minutes in silence with the questions above. Notice images or words that come to mind as you listen for insight and invitation from God. Go around the circle and share one image or sentence from your discernment time.

## BLESS

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

**In a Group:** Give each participant a piece of cloth. Invite them to view the picture (below) then engage in a brief personal encounter with Jesus as they hold the pieces of cloth. Read the paragraphs below as they imagine and

reflect. Close with a prayer of blessing for the touch of Christ in the lives of group members and those they are called to release.

Silently view the picture below. This woman is reaching out for Jesus. She might be the woman from our scripture story and Jesus is inviting her to stand after she confesses to touching his cloak. She might be a different woman reaching for healing and release in Christ. She might be you or me reaching out to touch the One who releases the tightly bound places of our hearts, minds, or bodies.

Hold the cloth representing Jesus' garment. Close your eyes and imagine following Jesus in the crowd, knowing your desire for healing has become so intense you are compelled to reach for it in spite of the risk. You touch the fringe of his robe with your fingers. He feels the connection and turns to look at you. Allow this imagined, yet very real, encounter with Jesus to bring you joy, healing, and release.



Artist: Courtney Parker (used with permission)

# Activity Sheet 3.1: Group Lectio Divina on Touching the Hem

(allow at least 30 minutes)

*Lectio divina* is Latin for divine or sacred reading, a form of prayerful scripture reflection. The scripture text is read or heard several times interspersed with silent pauses for prayer and meditation. **Group lectio divina** is similar but includes time for group members to share responses to focused questions. The group process works best with approximately four people in each group. When possible, create small groups of this size and ask members of each small group to sit in a circle. **Individuals** using this resource may follow the process by reading, prayerfully reflecting, and writing journal responses to the questions.

## Facilitator Script for Group Lectio Divina

Briefly explain the flow of the activity. The text will be read four times. After each reading there will be a two-minute period of silence during which participants will meditate on a question given to them by the facilitator. The facilitator will then invite group members to respond to the reflection question and the process will be repeated.

**Centering:** Ask group members to take a moment to connect with God and prepare to receive the scripture text with open hearts, minds, and senses. Be still and ask for God's peace.

**Reading 1:** Invite group members to close their eyes and listen prayerfully.

The first reading allows us to become familiar with the text as found in The Message version of the Bible. Listen to the story as fully and attentively as possible. We will not have group interaction following the first reading. Hear the text then sit in silence with thoughts, feelings, or images that may come to you.

*Read the scripture slowly with appropriate expression then honor two minutes of silence.*

A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?” His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you’re asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!”

But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story. Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”

—Mark 5:25–34 The Message

# Activity Sheet 3.1: Group Lectio Divina on Touching the Hem

(cont.)

**Reading 2:** Draw the group back from its silent reflection.

We have heard the story read once. As you hear the text again, listen for a word or phrase that particularly captures your attention. What one word or phrase seems to be speaking to you or connecting with you? Let's hear the second reading and sit in silence together.

*Read the story from Mark 5 again and maintain two minutes of group silence.*

Draw the group back from silent reflection and invite each person to share one-sentence responses to the question: **“What one word or phrase from the story stood out for you or captured your attention?”** Go around the circle and share just the word or phrase. You will have a chance to share more details after the next reading but for now share only the word or phrase that spoke most directly to you. If anyone prefers to remain silent he or she can say, “I pass.”

*Allow several minutes for sharing. Remind groups to share only one word or phrase. Bring the group back together and invite the group to hear the third reading of the text.*

**Reading 3:** As you hear the story of Jesus and the woman a third time, pay particular attention to the word or phrase that you have identified that is speaking to you or capturing your attention. How or why is this phrase or word connecting with you at this time? Listen in silence after the third reading.

*Read the story from Mark 5 again and maintain two minutes of group silence.*

Draw the group back from silent reflection and invite sharing in response to the question: **“How or why is the word or phrase capturing your attention and speaking to you?”**

*Allow several minutes for sharing. Bring the group together and prepare for the last reading of the text.*

**Reading 4:** This time as you hear the scripture passage, listen for a particular response to the word, phrase, or entire text. **What invitation from God do you sense from your reflections on this scripture?**

*Read the story from Mark 5 again and maintain two minutes of group silence.*

Draw the group back from silent reflection and invite members to share responses to the question: **“What is God's invitation to you from this scripture text?”** As you listen to the sense of invitation shared by the person on your right, pay particular attention. After all have shared responses, sit together while group members pray silently and simultaneously for the person on the right. Focus the silent prayers on the person's response to God's invitation. Following the silent prayers, invite one person to offer a brief prayer of blessing on the needs and invitations of all in the group.

Close the Group Lectio Divina after the prayers of blessing. Invite all to take a short break before coming back to the larger circle for the next part of session 3.

# 4

## Recovery of Sight to the Blind

### Focus Scriptures:

Luke 4:18–19

Mark 10:46–52

### Objectives

The learners will...

- explore Christ's mission to heal physical and spiritual blindness.
- understand the role of discernment in expanding their vision of God's shalom.
- experience reflection and spiritual practices related to seeing and discerning.

### Materials

- Copies of Activity Sheet 4.1 for all participants
- Pen or pencil for each participant

### Resources

- One copy for each participant of *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission—An Exploration of Luke 4:16–30* by Peter Judd (Herald Publishing House, 2012, ISBN 9780830915194)

leaders who fail to see God's vision. Jesus comes to reveal a deeper "law" of justice and compassion. His particular aim is "enlarging the vision of all whose views were narrow and restricted" (Judd, 61–62).

Recall a time when vision or eye problems affected your sight. If this has not been your experience, imagine what this might be like or reflect on the experience of a friend or loved one. **In Groups:** Share responses to the following questions.

- What is it like to lose the ability to see clearly either temporarily or permanently? What feelings did, or do, you have?
- What would you most miss seeing if your vision was damaged or lost?
- When have you experienced looking at something or someone without really seeing? Or perhaps seeing a familiar object or person clearly and deeply, as though for the first time?

## ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

Recovery of sight has both physical and spiritual implications. In God's peaceable community we are called to compassion and spiritual insight through "prayer, listening to the Spirit, and alert attention" (Judd, 70–71). Seeking clear vision through spiritual attention and prayer is a good way to describe the practice of discernment that is increasingly part of discipleship in Community of Christ.

The remainder of this session focuses on discernment, spiritual practice, and the mission of seeing and restoring God's vision of wholeness in creation. We will look at principles from Community of Christ discernment guides

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

Chapter 4 in *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission* addresses Jesus' proclamation that the blind will recover their sight in God's new community of peace and wholeness. Peter Judd affirms Jesus' concern for healing the eyes of those without physical sight and lifting the burden of society's judgment of the blind (and all sick and disabled persons) as sinners. Christ also confronts the blind hypocrisy of Jewish religious



and discuss our experiences with discernment as a spiritual practice that supports mission. We continue to grow in our understanding and use of discernment. Yet each time we revisit its meaning, the Spirit invites us to move deeper into the open, obedient heart of Jesus. We see the vision and go forth with the clear-eyed joy of Christ.

In a spirit of gratitude engage in **The Joy of Seeing** (Activity Sheet 4.1) at the end of this session.

Vision is precious and highly valued, but we may take for granted the delicate, complex process that allows us to see. We may also take for granted the complicated interaction of sensory, cultural, emotional, and spiritual forces that shape the way we understand the world and interpret reality. Our view of God and what matters most to God is formed by multiple factors and experiences. Jesus infused a new vision of God into the cultural and religious milieu of his day. He told religious leaders that they just didn't get it and were, in fact, so blind they were leading others away from God.

What would Jesus say to us and what would he think of our view of God and the peaceable kingdom? Do we see God's vision so clearly that it claims our lives like it did Jesus' life? Judd says we too suffer from tunnel vision and fail to see the Christ in people right next to us. We too are held captive by stagnant habits and traditions that keep us from seeing possibilities God yearns for us to embrace.

We yearn for peace when God's yearning breaks open our capacity to see, to "suffer with," and love. The deepest discernment question in our hearts needs to be: "What does God yearn for?"  
—*Yearning for God: Discernment and Spiritual Practice, 2*  
[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp)

After years of searching for identity and clarity, Judd notes the spirit of new vision that has been taking place in the church in recent years. Prayerful listening has led to Community of Christ's current mission statement and church name. The recent publication of statements of basic beliefs, Enduring Principles, and Mission Initiatives help to expand our vision and center us on what matters most.

The Enduring Principles of Community of Christ state it clearly: "God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, wellbeing, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation." The larger goal of discernment is to recognize and join God's redemptive activity of restoring creation to wholeness and joy.  
—*Yearning for God: Discernment and Spiritual Practice, 2*  
[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp)

This renewed vision has taken place in the context of a renewed and intentional focus on the spiritual practice of discernment. Church leaders have engaged in discernment. Church members and World Conference attendees have engaged in discernment. We are still growing in our understanding of this discipline but it is beginning to take root in our journey as a prophetic people. Discernment is a key spiritual practice that helps us overcome our blind spots and expand our vision of Christ's peace.

### Pause for Reflection

- What is discernment? What is your understanding or definition?
- What has been your experience with discernment processes and practices?
- Spend a few minutes with these questions. Write notes if it is helpful. Compare your responses with information on discernment from the Community of Christ website (see sections below)

**In Groups:** Share brief comments and experiences then review website definitions.

Discernment is an intentional process of opening to God's will, utilizing reason, faith, and prayerful reflection, so that our choices are aligned more closely with God's purposes. Discernment flourishes in a context of regular spiritual practices, a suspension of personal agendas, and a desire to join in God's creative action in the world.  
—[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/discernment.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/discernment.asp)

From Jesus we learn that discernment is a life orientation toward God... Discernment is a way of life for disciples because it is the way Jesus lived. This understanding of discernment as a lifelong pursuit of God and God's purpose is the basis for all other definitions and approaches to discernment.  
—*Yearning for God: Discernment and Spiritual Practice, 2*  
[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp)

Discernment involves the whole person: body, mind, spirit, heart, and emotions. Using the body as an instrument of spiritual attention can be helpful. How might some of the following body postures or movements be helpful in creating a spirit of discernment? **In Groups:** Try several body postures and talk about how they may or may not make our connection with God more intentional or effective.

- Sitting with head bowed or sitting with hands open receptively in your lap
- Standing with head bowed or with hands open in front of you or with hands raised
- Walking, kneeling, or lying down

- Engaging in a simple household or outdoor task as you watch and listen for God
- Other postures you have used or would like to try

Discernment is both a daily spiritual discipline and a specific process of listening for God’s direction as we make personal and corporate decisions. Authentic discernment uses spiritual disciplines that prepare us to “be vulnerable to divine grace” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:10b).

Jesus’ redemptive ministry was discerned and empowered by a pattern of letting the Spirit breathe through him, shaping his identity and being. Jesus took time to listen to the Voice; to be fed and informed by Spirit’s wisdom through prayer, solitude, silence, and scripture reflection.  
—[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp)

Discerning disciples orient their lives to God through spiritual practices. Discernment cannot be separated from spiritual formation. ...Spiritual practices are ways of becoming vulnerable to God and uncovering the deeper, beloved self Jesus sees in us.  
—*Yearning for God: Discernment and Spiritual Practice*, 2  
[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/yearning.asp)

A discerning disciple has the attitude or intention to seek the presence, wisdom, and compassion of the Spirit at all times and in all dimensions of life. ... Discernment fits within a broader pattern of ongoing spiritual formation and discipleship development.  
—[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp)

Discernment is a process of staying open to transformation through inner and outer rhythms of the Christian spiritual life.  
—[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp)

**Pause and Reflect:** What personalities from the scriptures (in addition to Jesus) come to mind as people who intentionally discerned God’s call to engage in Christ’s mission? Who in your congregation or mission center faithfully engages in discernment as part of their spiritual lives and ministry? **In Groups:** Share responses.

Spiritual practices are not tasks to complete on a discipleship checklist. They are conscious connecting points with the Creator of the universe, transcendent in glory yet intimately and graciously present. The invitation to have transformative encounters with this “Divine Being” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a) should fill us with wonder and joy. When we respond by giving God the attention of our hearts, we begin to taste fragments of the unifying love experienced by Christ. The consciousness of Christ begins to slowly grow in us transforming our way of thinking, seeing, and being. We want to discern God moving, inviting, weeping, singing, calling; shaping us and the world into holy beauty and peace. This is why we pray. This is what motivates us to disconnect from constant stimulation and move into a silent space where we can hear. This is what draws us to follow Jesus to an open uncluttered place where we can see what God might want us to see.

**Pause and Reflect:** What spiritual practices do you find most helpful as you listen for the impulses and invitations of the Spirit in your life? **In Groups:** Invite a conversation on the effects of spiritual practices.

Numerous spiritual practices help us pay attention to God and discern God’s call in our lives. Holistic spiritual formation includes head, heart, contemplative, and active dimensions that integrate the inner and outer movements of mission (see session 1). A range of spiritual practices have been lifted up in Community of Christ resources, most recently in *Yearning for God: Discernment and Spiritual Practice* ([www.CofChrist.org/discernment/YearningForGod.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/YearningForGod.pdf)).

Spiritual practices to support disciple formation and discernment are available on the Spirituality and Wholeness web page at [www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/practices.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/practices.asp) and in the Disciple Formation Guide practices section ([www.CofChrist.org/dfg/practices.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/dfg/practices.asp)). The church’s long-standing devotional guide, *Daily Bread*, is now available in both print ([www.HeraldHouse.org](http://www.HeraldHouse.org)) and online versions ([CofChristdailybread.wordpress.com](http://CofChristdailybread.wordpress.com)) as a devotional that focuses on peacemaking and spiritual practices.

President Stephen M. Veazey offers Community of Christ extensive guidance on discernment in his video and listening guide resource, “Ways of Discovering God’s Will” (see [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/default.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/default.asp) and [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/waysofDiscovering-ListeningGuide-web.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/waysofDiscovering-ListeningGuide-web.pdf)).

**Pause and Reflect:** What is your awareness of discernment and spiritual practice resources provided by Community of Christ? Which resources have you used personally or in a small group or congregation? What was your experience? **In Groups:** Share experiences with resources. Invite group members with Internet connections to explore several of the online resources and report to the group during the next meeting. **Individuals:** Explore resources as able.

Discernment is especially important when the church gathers for worship, fellowship, and decision making during World Conferences. Spiritual reflection and preparation is our tradition. The church engaged in specific discernment

processes before and during several recent World Conferences. Input from 2007 World Conference discernment groups on “what matters most” contributed to development of the Enduring Principles. Language from those groups and the discernment work of church leaders affirm the Spirit’s unifying presence in the wording of Enduring Principles that define and bind us. (See [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/articles/transformative.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/articles/transformative.asp) for details.)

Spirit-centered discernment makes a difference in our journey and supports our transformation into a body characterized by peace, unity, and the blessings of community.

Tensions and diverse perspectives will always exist in the gathered body of Christ. It cannot be otherwise in a multicultural, multilingual global community. We often understand scripture, Jesus, revelation, spirituality, justice, peace, and human relationships in different ways. Our hope for hearing God’s word together is found through the inner changes we experience during discernment.

Discernment requires an internal shift that allows God’s desires to take precedence over our own. This may sound logical, natural, and desirable. But it is extremely difficult for us to realize and confess that our thoughts about an issue may not be God’s thoughts, no matter how culturally or scripturally or personally right they may seem to us. None of us can profess to know the mind of God or truly understand God’s “will” even though our egos are very skilled at convincing us that we have “seen the light.”

Discernment is not a matter of thinking through an issue to confirm that we still agree with our former opinion. Even if we are certain there is no way we can be wrong in our interpretation of God’s will, we are called upon to look and listen again. Are we quite certain that what we see and hear through the limitations of our human reasoning and ego personality reflects all the truth possible for us to receive in order for the Spirit’s wisest, most compassionately unifying outcome to emerge?

Each of us has a lens through which we view the world. ...When we are not conscious of this lens, it can present challenges for discernment. Debra Farrington in her book *Hearing with the Heart: A Gentle Guide to Discerning God’s Will for Your Life* writes: “When we are unconscious of that lens—when we think that the way we see and understand is Reality—we limit our ability to discern well. We will end up forcing God into our systems of thinking rather than expanding the mind of our heart to accommodate God” (Jossey-Bass, 2003, p. 96).  
—[www.CofChrist.org/discernment/discernment.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/discernment.asp)

The willingness to give up our perceived truth, cultural perspectives, and certainty of rightness on an issue is called spiritual freedom. We are free to receive more light and truth when we open space for the Spirit to offer new, surprising, or healing possibilities we have not yet conceived. Spiritual freedom is also called “holy indifference” which is another way of saying we are spiritually free enough to become indifferent to what we want and care more about what God may want.

The shift to spiritual freedom or holy indifference is one of surrender. We usually resist because it requires us to dismantle the ego’s defenses so the Spirit can pour light into the blind, closed off, or heavily guarded regions of our hearts and minds. The transforming touch of God’s Spirit offers us the courage and clarity we need to see in new ways.

As we close this reflection and review of discernment, what principles and practices seem most important to prioritize in your personal life? How will you and your congregation choose to deepen your understanding of Christ’s mission through spiritual practices and discernment activities?

## DISCERN & SEND

*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

The practice of entering a scripture text with our imagination and senses is a helpful way to bring the whole self into a receptive stance for discernment. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), one of the great Christian teachers of discernment, developed this practice as an interactive way of encountering a scripture passage. As we consider the mission of recovering sight for ourselves and others, we will use the story of Jesus healing Blind Bartimaeus with this Ignatian form of scripture meditation (see meditation instructions below scripture passage).

As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

—Mark 10:46–52

- **Individuals:** Read the story and instructions several times. When you feel ready, engage the passage as described for groups.
- **Facilitator Instructions for Groups:** Sit in a comfortable posture and close your eyes. Connect with God as you breathe quietly. Offer a silent prayer. As the story is read, allow it to unfold in your mind as though seeing it in real life or on a screen. Imagine sounds, fragrances, temperatures, colors; the appearance, movements, and emotions of the characters. If you do not see images, listen deeply and focus on other senses and impressions from the story.
- **Facilitator Notes:** Read the story slowly with brief pauses between sentences. Allow a short period of silence after the reading then invite participants to continue reflecting on the story with eyes closed. Invite them to stay with a possible continuation of the story as you read the following postscript:

Bartimaeus has recovered his sight. You watch him joyfully moving down the road with the crowd. Jesus is still nearby, lingering with a quiet smile on his face as he too watches the jostling exuberant throng surrounding Bartimaeus. To your surprise he turns to look at you, the hint of a smile still in his eyes. He takes several steps toward you, stops, and asks quietly: "And what do you want me to do for you?" Spend a few minutes with Jesus, listening to his question and discerning your answer. What healing do you seek? What do you want and need to see? Share your response with Jesus. What does he do and say?

Allow the interaction with Jesus to close and offer him your thanks. Let the images of the meditation begin to fade as you become aware of your surroundings. Open your eyes and rejoin the group.

- **Invite group members to share a one sentence response to either of the following questions:** "What do you see about Jesus and yourself that you did not see before?" Or, "How does this experience deepen your desire to follow Jesus in his mission of healing blind eyes and souls?"

## BLESS

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

Close with a prayer for the needs of the group, for healing of all forms of human blindness, and for the willingness to see and hear more clearly through individual and community discernment of God's call.

# Activity Sheet 4.1: The Joy of Seeing

Spend several minutes with four or more of the following quotes. Use a “scan and stop” method to identify several quotes on each page that capture your attention. Read and reflect then write a one- or two-sentence prayer of gratitude for the gifts of both physical and spiritual sight.

Your Prayer

**In Groups:** Invite participants to read prayer statements as a collective prayer of thanksgiving for the wonder of “seeing.” A facilitator may begin and end the prayer or assign group members to assist.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light...

—Matthew 6:22 NRSV

*Throughout my life, by means of my life, the world has little by little caught fire in my sight until, aflame all around me, it has become almost completely luminous from within.... God is as pervasive and perceptible as the atmosphere in which we are bathed. What prevents you from enfolding him in your arms? Only one thing—your inability to see him.*

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (HarperCollins, 2001, ISBN 9780060937256) 8–9

The complexity of perceptual cells beggars the imagination. In humans, 127,000,000 cells called rods and cones line up in rows as the “seeing” elements that receive light and transmit messages to the brain. ...These rod cells are so sensitive that the smallest measurable unit of light, one photon, can excite them. Under optimum conditions the human eye can detect a candle at a distance of fifteen miles.

Although cones are one thousand times less sensitive to light, they make possible all perception of colors and fine details. ...Our assortment of rods and cones lets us see objects at the ends of our noses and also stars light-years away.

...some of the 127,000,000 rods and cones get “excited” by light waves and fire off messages into the 1,000,000 fibers of the optic nerve, which coils like a thick television cable back into the recesses of the brain. Impulses from the retina race along the fibers of the optic nerve, fan out in the brain, and finally slam into the visual cortex, stimulating the miracle of sight.

—Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Zondervan, 1987, ISBN 9780310355014)

Look. This is your world! You can't not look. There is no other world. This is your world; it is your feast. You inherited this; you inherited these eyeballs; you inherited this world of color. Look at the greatness of the whole thing. Look! Don't hesitate—look! Open your eyes. Don't blink, and look, look—look further.

—Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Ocean of Dharma*, Carolyn Rose Gimian, ed. (Shambhala Publications, 2008, ISBN 9781590305362) 147

Last night I watched joy pass over a woman's eyeball when she saw the moon for the first time in a telescope. ...She loved the view, and I swear her eyeball was smiling.

—Bob King, *Duluth News Tribune* photographer, [astrobob.areavoices.com/2011/03/09/the-joy-of-seeing](http://astrobob.areavoices.com/2011/03/09/the-joy-of-seeing)

## Activity Sheet 4.1: The Joy of Seeing (cont.)

I was aware of a radiance emanating from a place I knew nothing about...

Since it was not I who was making the light, since it came to me from outside, it would never leave me. ... Still there were times when the light faded, almost to the point of disappearing. It happened every time I was afraid. What the loss of my eyes had not accomplished was brought about by fear. It made me blind.

Playing the cello Jacques experienced: "pictures, curves, lines, shapes, landscapes, and most of all colors. Whenever I made the A string sound by itself with the bow, such a burst of light appeared before my eyes and lasted so long that often I had to stop playing."

The world of violins and flutes, of horns and cellos... obeyed laws which were so beautiful and so clear that all music seemed to speak of God. My body was not listening, it was praying.

Light is in us, even if we have no eyes.

Light is an element that we carry inside us and which can grow.

—Jacques Lusseyran [blind from age 8; gifted with experiences of internal light], *And There Was Light: Autobiography of Jacques Lusseyran, Blind Hero of the French Resistance* (Morning Light Press, 1998, ISBN 9780930407407) 15–17, 19, 92–94, 312

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

—I Corinthians 2:9–10 NRSV

Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting—a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every flower, and thank God for it as a cup of blessing.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, as quoted by Karen and Mike Garofalo, [www.gardendigest.com/see.htm](http://www.gardendigest.com/see.htm)

The common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that, but the seeing eye pierces through and reads the heart and the soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn't indicate or promise, and which the other kind couldn't detect.

—Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (Nabu Press, 2012, ISBN 9781279699645) 139

There is a quiet light that shines in every heart. ...It is what illuminates our minds to see beauty...and our hearts to love life. ...This shy inner light is what enables us to recognize and receive our very presence here as blessing.

...When we look into the heart, may our eyes have the kindness and reverence of candlelight.

—John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2008, ISBN 9780385522274) xiii, 15

Joy shows from the eyes, it appears when one speaks and walks. It cannot be kept closed inside us... When people find in your eyes that habitual happiness, they will understand that they are the beloved children of God.

—Mother Teresa, *Everything Starts from Prayer* (ReadHowYouWant, 2012, ISBN 9781458778956) 38

# 5

## Let the Oppressed Go Free

### Focus Scriptures:

Luke 4:18–19

Psalms 139

### Objectives

The learners will...

- celebrate human diversity and lament oppression based on diversity.
- understand spiritual dimensions of human oppression.
- engage in spiritual practices related to liberating ourselves and others from oppression.

### Materials

- Copies of Activity Sheet 5.1
- Paper and pens for journal writing

### Resources

- *Sing a New Song* (NS) hymnals

We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what the color.

—Maya Angelou,  
[www.joyofquotes.com/diversity\\_quotes.html](http://www.joyofquotes.com/diversity_quotes.html)

Uncountable billions of life forms grace our planet. Unimaginable varieties of color, shape, size, sound, fragrance, and texture distinguish the beings that crawl, slither, swim, and wing their way through Earth's ecosystems. They share breath and space with billions more human bodies carrying unrepeatable genetic codes making up the once in a lifetime aggregate of who they are. We scarce can take it in, this endless variety of forms brought into being through the creative action of God. The constant diversification and complexity in creation seems to say that God likes all this colorful variety and rich intermingling of flora and fauna, forms and faces.

Diversity is both delightful and difficult. We celebrate and are enriched by it. In our humanness, we also can be bewildered, threatened, or separated by expressions of human diversity. The vision of holistic peace invites both joyful embracing of diversity and honest confession of fears and barriers based on differences in the human family. Reflect on the following:

- What is your experience with diversity in nature or the human family?
- When have you learned something about Christ's peace through an encounter with diverse geographies, creatures, people, cultures, or religious views?
- What forms of diversity seem to create the most difficulty in human relationships and communities? What expressions of diversity are you least comfortable with or do you find disturbing?

**In Groups:** Spend a few minutes in private reflection on the questions then spend five minutes sharing insights and comments.

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

I do not claim any ability to read God's mind. I am sure of only one thing. When we look at the glory of stars and galaxies in the sky and the glory of forests and flowers in the living world around us, it is evident that God loves diversity. Perhaps the universe is constructed according to a principle of maximum diversity.

—Freeman Dyson, "Progress in Religion: A Talk by Freeman Dyson," acceptance speech for the Templeton Prize, Washington National Cathedral, May 9, 2000

# ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

What is it about diversity that can both delight and terrify us? Sadly, many forms of oppression are related to diversity. Chapter 5 examines forms of oppression rooted in our apparent need to control, suppress, and devalue people based on differences in race, ethnicity, tribe, gender, religion, wealth, poverty, physical and mental disabilities, illness, limited education, sexual orientation, age (children and the elderly), political preference, and a long list of other characteristics. The tendency to degrade and disempower others is most prevalent in systems built on fear, control, or competition (survival of the fittest). We control, oppress, and exclude out of fear. We release, empower, and include out of love.

## Confronting the Reality of Oppression

Oppression is prolonged unjust, cruel, or harsh treatment. It is unjust and excessive control or use of power over others. It is burden, weight, heaviness, being pressed upon, put down, suppressed, and crushed. Bodies can be oppressed. Minds and spirits can be oppressed. Oppression in all of its subtle and blatant forms creates human suffering.

The mission of Christ calls us to end oppression and to value all people equally. We join Jesus in this work when we rejoice in God's vision of human freedom. In the spirit of Christ, we are also called to the spiritual work of grieving over the ongoing agony of God's world. A prophetic people, a people on mission with Christ, are a people with wet eyes and fractured hearts.

Suffering is never the intent or desire of the Creator. Yet, we cannot help but ask "Why?" when confronted with the mystery and misery of human pain. At times we cry out to God over personal and planetary suffering. "Hear us, God. Where are you, God?" Prayers of groaning and tears are known as laments. They pour out our pain and our pleas for God's help in times when it seems God is silent, absent, or blind to how bad things are. Yet, we pray, trusting that God weeps with us. And from our shared laments the seeds of compassionate action are watered and begin to grow.

Share **Prayers of Lament** (Activity Sheet 5.1) found at the end of this session.

Lament reminds us that we are not alone in the mission of freeing the oppressed. Transforming oppressive systems is an immense and overwhelming call, but our hope lies in God's presence and persistence. Progress may be slow as God's

Spirit weaves its way through the hard-hearted resistance. God allows us the freedom to choose. But when we turn to God in hope, we are claimed again by the promise that the river of God's justice will continue to flow. We lament and then continue the journey with the courage of Christ.

Sing or read the lyrics to "Let Justice Roll like a River" NS 28 as a prayer of hope and renewal.

As we respond to the mission to let the oppressed go free, how do we need God to come and take us, move and shake us; to come and make us anew? It takes courage and compassion to confront oppression. It takes the transforming presence and movement of God. In recent counsel to the church we see and hear God slowly shaping a particular identity, personality, and character in us. We are invited to live as a new form of community defined by a particular set of principles and ethics, attitudes and behaviors rooted deep in the spirit and nature of Christ. This is the signal community God is calling forth in and through us.

Read the following paragraph as though listening for God's invitation to "become." What do you feel God is wanting us to hear? How have you experienced or witnessed the qualities and principles on this list being formed in your life and the life of the church? When have these callings and characteristics become tangibly expressed in letting the oppressed go free?

Peace, reconciliation, healing of the spirit, sacred community, inestimable worth and giftedness of all persons, unity in diversity, healing and redeeming agents, abolish poverty, end suffering, protecting the sacredness of creation, prophetic community, uncommon devotion to the peace of God in Jesus Christ, rivers of living water, hope of Zion, embodiment of God's shalom, ethics of Christ's peace, mutual respect, Christ-like love, protect the most vulnerable, relieving physical and spiritual suffering, a spiritual home without dividing walls, poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church...

## Oppression as a Body and Spirit Issue

*Invite group members to read and reflect on the following section. Pause and share responses as you go.*

Many forms of oppression involve judgments or abusive treatment of people based on distinctive characteristics of their bodies (such as race, skin color, size, gender, age). Complex historical, cultural, and religious factors are behind our fears and rejection of those with bodies different from our own. The spiritual issue feeding some of the harsh attitudes and oppressive behavior in Western culture may be our disconnection of body and spirit. Our failure to recognize all physical forms as delightfully diverse vehicles



for the spirits they house leads us to the tragic mistake of hating and oppressing those God fiercely and tenderly loves.

Our unconscious and unexamined beliefs, cultural myths, and ways of interpreting scripture also have a powerful but often unrecognized influence on our views of the body and human sexuality. The human body with its powerful urges has been seen as impure, sinful and carnal, an enemy of spirit and spirituality. Past practices have included harsh control and punishment, rigid denial of bodily comfort or enjoyment, deprivation, and at times self-inflicted pain or harm to bring the body into submission.

Rigid, shaming, and repressive attitudes and practices have made some vulnerable to domination or spiritual abuse. In some Western cultures many suffer from hidden conflict and guilt, negative body images, and other unhealthy attitudes that lead to obsession with appearance, physical prowess, or health status. Others may react to rigid body image standards and expectations by showing opposite behaviors of disconnecting from the body or ignoring body care and stewardship as a sacred trust. The body becomes an escape route for easing anxiety and stress by using unhealthy substances and behaviors. These patterns can become addictive internal forms of oppression that keep our spirits in bondage to unhealed insecurity and hidden fears.

Many current societal and cultural attitudes related to the human body and sexuality do not express the wholeness God intends. Restoration scripture prophetically affirms the inseparable connection between matter and spirit (see Doctrine and Covenants 90:5e) and therefore the sacramental nature of the human body and the entire creation. These principles are foundational to our call to protect the sacred worth of persons and confront forces that crush the dignity of any human being. We are called to be a people who look upon the human body as a temple; a dwelling place for God's presence.

### **Spiritual Practice: Psalm 139 “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”**

Read portions of Psalm 139 (below) slowly and prayerfully. Hear it as a prayer of praise for the wonder of your body and God's intimate involvement in your formation. After a brief pause, review the questions below. Read the psalm again and spend several minutes reflecting or journal writing.

- What images, thoughts, or emotions do you have as you hear the psalm? What is God's invitation to you through these words?
- What attitudes, needs, and patterns related to the care and stewardship of your body may be in need of attention or healing?

**In Groups:** Engage in the psalm reading and reflections together then share responses as desired. Invite a brief

discussion of how this psalm might promote reverence and respect toward the human body and its diversity. What are the applications to the various forms of oppression?

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away  
Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written all the days that were  
formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

—Psalm 139:1, 2, 7, 13–18 NRSV

### **Healing for Our Oppression**

*Invite reading, reflection, and discussion of the following section.*

As we consider the profound grace toward the human body expressed in Psalm 139, we become more aware of our deep need for healing. The tendency of Western cultures to suppress and even despise or feel burdened by the body is one of the complex reasons why distorted images of body and sexuality are so common. Casual sexual encounters are pervasive in Western media. Many people barely notice the exploitation of sexuality and body image used to sell everything from alcohol to cars, food, and cosmetics. Think of how many broadcast or print advertisements we see in which it has become “normal” to have a seductively clad man or woman as the main point of interest. What cultural messages about men and women are still at work?

The seeming rise in sexual dysfunction, addiction, sexual abuse, domestic violence, child molestation, incest, promiscuity, and adultery are symptoms of a deep and tragic soul sickness related to an unhealthy understanding of human sexuality. Sexuality and the human body have become secularized, trivialized, and commercialized. At times we scarcely notice how contrary these trends are to God's intent.

Specific issues related to sexual orientation are being discussed in Community of Christ today. Questions related to these issues will not be decided through legislative action. We are, however, invited to engage in ongoing discussion and discernment as we ask God to guide our responses

to many aspects of human diversity. It is not the intent of this resource to suggest specific outcomes to issues related to sexual orientation. But as part of our larger call to justice and healing we are invited to engage in deep prayerful work concerning our attitudes toward the body and human sexuality. Examining and healing all forms of oppression is a spiritual calling of the church.

This is difficult spiritual and relational work that begins by confessing our own fears and forms of internal bondage. Perhaps God's invitation is for us to examine and heal the relationship between our bodies and spirits as a beginning point for understanding the divine intent for human relationships and sexual intimacy. Perhaps we have singled out one issue when the larger picture tells us there is much need for healing many forms of oppression in the dimension of sexuality and the human body.

Section 164 of the Doctrine and Covenants tell us that the values guiding our behaviors and decisions must be centered in the love and peace of Christ and the sacred worth of

As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a

persons.

The 1992 World Conference "Affirmation of Human

The gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the unqualified love of God and the inestimable worth of all persons. ...we celebrate the rich diversity of human life. However, human beings often fear, hate, and abuse each other because of ignorance about such factors as socioeconomic status, culture, race, gender, age, size, sexual orientation, and mental or physical disability. Such prejudicial behavior undermines the personal and spiritual development of both the abuser and the abused, and denies the mutual benefit of shared giftedness. ...We declare our belief that "all are called according to the gifts of God to them." We therefore acknowledge and affirm human diversity by creating a spirit of openness and peace within our congregations where all persons may find acceptance and the opportunity to share their giftedness.

—[www.CofChrist.org/peaceteam/wc-leg1992.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/peaceteam/wc-leg1992.asp)

Diversity" statement offers this guidance.

As we continue the work of dismantling oppression related to the human body we will need the continued outpouring

of God's grace and compassion. In the difficult work of healing attitudes and behaviors related to the human body and sexuality, we are called to seek divine wisdom and discern divine "will." We are called to profound unity in Christ's Spirit. We are invited to see ourselves and others as beloved in our diversity; to see Christ in each unique physical form and face. If we will journey together in love and in openness to the Spirit, God will draw us to new depths of spiritual freedom and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

## DISCERN & SEND

*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

### Praying the Jesus Prayer

Sit quietly for several minutes and reflect on the ideas and experiences of this session. What images, insights, or questions about oppression come to your attention? Offer these thoughts and feelings to God, then release them as you engage in the Jesus Prayer (below). This is a form of listening prayer that invites us to surrender our attention to the presence of Christ. It is a prayer of petition known also as "the prayer of the heart." The invitation is to become deeply aware of Jesus as we move the prayer from our heads to the open space of our hearts. (For more detail on the Jesus Prayer see [www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/jesusprayer.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/jesusprayer.asp).)

This prayer is an ancient spiritual practice from Orthodox Christianity. It is a way of connecting with the gracious spirit of Christ as we ask to receive his mercy. The prayer comes from the story of the blind man calling Jesus to heal him. Silently enter prayer and let your breath become slow and even.

Greet God and then take up the prayer phrase: *Lord, Jesus Christ* (as you breathe in)...*have mercy on me* (as you breathe out).

Prayerfully repeat these words for five to 10 minutes. Breathe the presence of Christ into your mind, heart, and body. Be transformed as you receive the compassionate, peaceful heart of Jesus. Close the time of prayer with "Amen."

**In Groups:** Draw the group back from prayer with a chime or by gently inviting group members to close their prayer and return their attention to the group.

After closing the Jesus Prayer, invite brief reflections on the following:

- What was your experience of connecting with Christ in this prayer?
- How does this prayer invite you to an active response of liberating the oppressed?
- What is your prayer for Community of Christ as it responds to the mission of releasing the oppressed? How would it feel to pray: “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us” as we ask for an outpouring of God’s mercy on the church’s ministry to those who are oppressed?

# BLESS

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

Bring the thoughts, prayers, and invitations of this session before God. Be aware of your call to become a liberator of the oppressed as you open yourself to God through this prayer.

On tiptoe we stand, Lord Jesus  
eagerly awaiting  
your full revelation...

Our hands and hearts  
are open to your grace.  
Our lives still waiting for  
the fullness of your presence.  
We are those who have been promised  
a Kingdom, and we can never forget  
Yet we have a foot in both worlds  
and so we stumble.

But still we stand  
on tiptoe  
Owning our kingdom-loving hearts  
and our earth-eyes  
We lean forward  
and hope.

—Macrina Wiederkehr, “A Prayer for Standing on Tiptoe,”  
*Seasons of Your Heart* (Harper Collins, 1991,  
ISBN 9780060693008), 69

## Activity Sheet 5.1: Prayers of Lament

**Preparation:** Place a collection of small stones in a bowl of clear water. Be sure you have enough for each group member to take one stone. If available, use clear glass decorating stones but any small, smooth stones will do. The stones represent the tears of God's people for those who are oppressed and suffering. The container of water may represent the tears of God that surround and share our grief. Place the bowl of tears and tear stones within reach. Have paper and pen available. **In Groups:** Place the bowl of tears and stones in the center of the group circle, perhaps on a small table or stool. Provide pens and paper for all. Have paper or cloth towels nearby.

### Group Instructions:

- Invite the group into a time of shared grief for oppressed people in our families, communities, nations, and world. Explain that the bowl of tears and tear stones represent our vulnerability to God and God's promise to weep with us.
- Invite each person to take a tear stone and hold it. Make towels available as needed.
- Refer to the ideas shared about laments as an outpouring of grief through prayers of tears and deep sighs or groans of the spirit. Invite the group members to share in reading and hearing several prayers of lament as they hold their tear stones.
- As you listen to the laments, what people, situations, places, or needs do you become aware of that cause you grief, distress, and hopelessness? Be aware that the third reading is a lament spoken in the more modern voice of The Message translation.
- Assign group members to read sections of the following scriptural laments. Pause for brief silent reflection between each scripture passage.
- Following the reading of the laments sit in silence and ask participants to identify one or more examples of oppression that cause them to lament.
- Encourage group members to write a short prayer of lament in which they share honest expressions of sorrow and despair with God. Allow several minutes for writing prayers of lament.
- Invite group members to share portions of their prayers as they feel comfortable.

### Lament Prayers for Reading and Meditation:

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. ...For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin. I am like an owl of the wilderness like a little owl of the waste places. I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. ...For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink... My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

—Psalm 102 NRSV, selected verses

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

—Jeremiah 8:18, 20–22; 9:1 NRSV

There are people out there getting by with murder—stealing and lying and cheating. They rip off the poor and exploit the unfortunate, Push the helpless into the ditch, bully the weak so that they fear for their lives. The poor, like stray dogs and cats, scavenge for food in back alleys. They sort through the garbage of the rich, eke out survival on handouts. Homeless, they shiver through cold nights on the street; they've no place to lay their heads. Exposed to the weather, wet and frozen, they huddle in makeshift shelters. Nursing mothers have their babies snatched from them; the infants of the poor are kidnapped and sold. They go about patched and threadbare; even the hard workers go hungry.

No matter how backbreaking their labor, they can never make ends meet. People are dying right and left, groaning in torment. The wretched cry out for help and God does nothing, acts like nothing's wrong!

—Job 24:2–13 The Message

# 6

## Proclaim the Year of the Lord's Favor

### Focus Scriptures:

Luke 4:18–19

John 20:19–22, excerpts

Psalm 65, Psalm 98

### Objectives

The learners will...

- celebrate with words and music of jubilee.
- engage in two practices of intercessory prayer.
- discern the invitation to continuing spiritual formation and mission.

### Materials and Resources

- Small table or stool
- Earth globe or photograph of Earth from space (if not available use a candle, cross, or other worship symbol)
- Paper and pen for each participant
- *Sing for Peace (SP)* hymnal

## GATHER

*Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson*

Jubilee! Celebration! Praise and thanksgiving for God's vision of peace! Jubilation and joy for Christ's proclamation of wholeness and worth. Gratitude and wonder for the Spirit's invitation to join God in healing the Earth and its people. Thanks be to God that we are a people, much loved and generously blessed, called to embody shalom, restore integrity, plant justice, and sow seeds of healing in places of hurt. Wonder and hope for the sacred beauty of creation released, unbound, unfolding as God intends.

Read the following psalms as prayers of thanksgiving for God's vision of beauty and joy. **In Groups:** Take turns reading sections of the psalms aloud.

Sing to God a brand-new song.  
He's made a world of wonders!  
He rolled up his sleeves,  
He set things right.

God made history with salvation,  
He showed the world what he could do.

He remembered to love us, a bonus  
to his dear family, Israel—undefatigable love.

The whole earth comes to attention  
Look—God's work of salvation!

Shout your praises to God, everybody!  
Let loose and sing! Strike up the band!

Round up an orchestra to play for God,  
Add on a hundred-voice choir.

Feature trumpets and big trombones,  
Fill the air with praises to King God.

Let the sea and its fish give a round of applause,  
With everything living on earth joining in.

Let ocean breakers call out, "Encore!"  
And mountains harmonize the finale—

A tribute to God when he comes,  
When he comes to set the earth right.  
He'll straighten out the whole world,  
He'll put the world right, and everyone in it.

—Psalm 98 The Message

Silence is praise to you,  
Zion-dwelling God,  
And also obedience.  
You hear the prayer in it all.

...All your salvation wonders  
are on display in your trophy room.  
Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,  
Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,  
Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash,  
of mobs in noisy riot—  
Far and wide they'll come to a stop,  
they'll stare in awe, in wonder.  
Dawn and dusk take turns  
calling, "Come and worship."

Oh, visit the earth,  
ask her to join the dance!  
Deck her out in spring showers,  
fill the God-River with living water.  
Paint the wheat fields golden.  
Creation was made for this!  
Drench the plowed fields,  
soak the dirt clods  
With rainfall as harrow and rake  
bring her to blossom and fruit.  
Snow-crown the peaks with splendor,  
scatter rose petals down your paths,  
All through the wild meadows, rose petals.  
Set the hills to dancing,  
Dress the canyon walls with live sheep,  
a drape of flax across the valleys.  
Let them shout, and shout, and shout!  
Oh, oh, let them sing!

—Psalm 65 (selected verses) The Message

What image of jubilee from Psalm 98 or 65 was most joyful and hopeful for you? **In Groups:** Invite each person to share one image.

Sing one of the following hymns as joyful confirmation of your commitment to God's coming reign of peace: *SP 10*, *SP 19*, or *SP 45*. If singing is not an option, meditate with the hymn text.

Reflect on an experience of worship and singing in community or of listening to a large group of persons singing joyfully. If this has not been your experience, what other experience of jubilation has been yours? How do such experiences renew your hope of Zion or the peaceable reign of God?

## ENGAGE & RESPOND

*Invites exploration and interaction; takes the learners from hearing to doing*

We rejoice for the good hope of God's jubilee but live in the "not yet" of a creation groaning to fully bring God's kingdom

to birth. In *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission*, Peter Judd lifts up the many ways in which slavery, sexual and physical abuse, oppression of the marginalized and powerless continue in spite of our hunger for sacred community.

The "year of the Lord's favor" is very likely a reference to the ancient Hebrew practice of declaring a year of jubilee every 50 years in which slaves were to be liberated, debts cancelled, and the land allowed to rest from cultivation. Jesus' Luke 4 proclamation calls for jubilee to become the permanent state of things. The peaceable kingdom Jesus ushers in is the just and joyful freedom God intends for creation. It is the vision of God's shalom expressed as the "way things are supposed to be."

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. In English we call it peace, but it means far more than just peace of mind or ceasefire between enemies. In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as the creator and savior opens doors and speaks welcome to the creatures in whom he delights. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be.

—Cornelius Plantinga Jr.,  
*Sin: Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*,  
[www.henrycenter.org/media/other/PlantingaSin.pdf](http://www.henrycenter.org/media/other/PlantingaSin.pdf)

Jubilee in the peaceful community of God becomes permanent reality through work and prayer. A daily discipline of praying for peace and justice is transformative for us and the world. Prayers for others are prayers of intercession. When we pray for ourselves we offer prayers of petition.

Intercessory prayer is hard work and not for the faint of heart. We cry out to God constantly to end the violence, to bring justice to all people, to lift up the fallen, to heal the sick and the brokenhearted. We are asking for no less than to see the reign of God become a reality.

—Jane Vennard, *Embracing the World:  
Praying for Justice and Peace*  
(John Wiley and Sons, 2002, ISBN 9780787958879) 28

Spiritual author and teacher, Jane Vennard, tells us that our prayers of intercession can be silent as we hold people in our hearts or they can become bold, insistent knocking-on-the-door type prayers. "Supplications are not quiet prayers offered in poetic form. They are not offered in subdued voices. Rather, they are loud and raucous....Walter Wink says, 'Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, indecorous. It is more like haggling in an outdoor bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches'" (Vennard, 29).

# Spiritual Practices: Intercessory Prayers

## **Verbal Intercessory Prayer**

Consider your longing for peace and the healing of creation. What is your loud raucous prayer of intercession? What words would you use to knock on God's door asking for help, healing, peace, and justice in a particular place or situation of need? Take several minutes to form your prayer either in writing or in your mind. Then read or speak your prayer to God. **In Groups:** Invite persons to share verbal prayers of intercession. Invite silent reflection or brief sharing on the following:

- How does your prayer move you to action?
- What new insight do you have about the subject of your intercession as you pray?
- How is your perspective or response changed?

## **Silent Intercessory Prayer: Holding in the Light**

*(Allow 20–25 minutes)*

“Another way to understand intercessory prayer is to imagine taking people and concerns into our hearts and then taking our hearts into the heart of God through meditation and silent prayer” (Vennard, 21).

## **Holding in the Light Preparation**

**Facilitator or Individual:** Create a simple worship focus (prior to the session if possible) with a globe of the planet or a picture of Earth from space. If Earth images are not available use a candle, cross, or other meaningful symbol. **In Groups:** Place the Earth globe or photo (or optional symbol) on a small table or stool in the center of the group circle.

## **Holding in the Light Instructions**

Invite group members to follow this sequence:

1. Spend time listening to your desire for God's peace as you focus on the worship center. Become aware of specific hopes, needs, and concerns to take into prayer with the practice of Holding in the Light (a traditional form of Quaker prayer). Ponder these questions as we begin.
2. What is your deep, silent prayer of intercession? What is your wordless yearning for the healing of Earth's wounds, the mending of broken relationships, the restoration of wholeness to all people? What people and places on the planet do you want to hold up in prayer?
3. Turn your attention to the church community and its mission as a unified body of peacemakers and justice restorers. What needs and callings of the church do you want to offer to God?

4. We will now offer these concerns and desires into God's gracious care by holding them in the light of God's Spirit. We will focus on several dimensions of peace and healing during our prayer time but you may pray for whatever concern captures your attention at any point.
5. We will move through the following focus areas as we hold concerns in the light: Earth; cultures and people; family members, friends, and enemies; and the church.
6. As we begin, sit quietly, close your eyes, and breathe calmly. Be aware of God's presence and the light of God's Spirit that is in and with us at all times. Feel or sense God's healing light if you do not have an image of it. Trust that words are not necessary because God already knows the need.

## **Holding the Earth in the Light**

See, sense, or think about the Earth as a blue and green sphere viewed from space. As you focus your attention become aware of the planet's landscapes, ecosystems, farmlands, mountains, deserts, seas and rivers, plants and forests, animals and species. Be aware of Earth's abundance, beauty, and generosity. Be aware of Earth's distress and groaning. See or sense the Earth and its creatures surrounded by God's light. Hold the Earth in God's light in wordless trust and love. *Pause for one to two minutes of silent intercession.*

## **Holding Earth's Cultures and Peoples in the Light**

Continue holding the Earth in the light as you focus your attention closer. See or sense the countries and people of the world in their distinct landscapes and ways of living. Be aware of the rich mixture of facial features, skin tones, languages, cultural traditions, cities, and villages around the planet. Be aware of conflicts, war, violence, hunger, poverty, addictions, loneliness, wounded spirits, despair, and tears of people oppressed on the basis of gender, age, sexual orientation, social class, religion, tribe, or other characteristics.

Let your attention be drawn to a particular person or group of people on the planet. See or sense the person or group being surrounded by God's light. Open your heart to God's love for the person or group and silently hold them in the light. *Pause for one to two minutes of silent intercession.*

## **Holding Family, Friends, and Enemies in the Light**

Envision, sense, or think about family members, friends, and loved ones who need healing, liberation, and peace. Let God's light embrace and fill them as you hold them in silent prayer. (Allow one to two minutes for silent intercession.) Spend another minute bringing to mind a person from whom you are separated because of conflicts, disagreements, or past hurts. Ask for God's grace to hold this person in the light without words or agendas. Be aware of your own part in creating the separation. Trust God's light to surround the person and bring healing to the pain and separation you

have both experienced. *Pause for one to two minutes of silent intercession.*

### **Holding Community of Christ in the Light**

Become aware of the church community in the diverse cultures and many countries in the world. See or sense congregations in worship, song, study, and prayer. See people and congregations engaged in acts of justice, healing, generosity, and witness. Sense the energy and love of God's Spirit moving through the people and congregations of the church. Be aware of congregations that are dwindling in numbers, discouraged, experiencing conflicts over issues or personal hurts and differences. *Pause for one to two minutes of silent intercession.*

### **Holding Members, Congregations, Pastors, Local and International Leaders of the Church in the Light**

Be open to specific people and leaders of the church as they come to mind. Trust that God knows and loves the people of the church and longs to surround and fill the church with an outpouring of light that will heal wounds, renew hope, unify hearts, and ignite the compassionate grace and fiery passion of Christ's mission in us. *Pause for five minutes of silent intercession.*

**Invite the group to close their prayers and offer a brief verbal prayer of thanks and blessing.**

## **DISCERN & SEND**

*Explores how the lesson might be lived out*

Spend time reviewing and remembering key themes of *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission* and the discussions and practices from the previous sessions of this resource. As we draw these experiences to a close, consider the questions below. Choose several of the questions for prayerful reflection. Write brief statements of response to the questions that have most impact for you.

- What has had most meaning for you and your discipleship? What ideas and invitations have increased your commitment to engaging fully in the mission Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4:18–19?
- What have you realized about the relationship between spiritual practices and the mission of Christ?
- What specific spiritual practices have been most effective in connecting you with a sense of God's presence and invitation in your life? What spiritual practices do you

feel called to continue in your personal life and with others in your congregation?

- What invitation have you discerned to a specific act or ministry related to Christ's mission of bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, offering sight to the blind, liberating the oppressed, and proclaiming jubilee?
- What action steps will you take in response to the invitation to a specific ministry related to Christ's mission?
- Identify at least one other person you would like to serve as your spiritual and mission partner. Offer an invitation to that person.

Engage in discussion and sharing based on the group's experiences and responses to the questions above. As the experiences of the spiritual formation sessions end, invite group members to each share a word or phrase that expresses a call to the mission of Christ.

## **BLESS**

*Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope*

Invite the group to stand and gather in a close-knit circle with arms around one another's shoulders. If this level of physical contact is uncomfortable in particular cultures or for any in the group, have the group stand in a circle without touching. Engage the group in prayer as follows:

- Become prayerful and quiet as we open ourselves to God for a blessing.
- Ask Jesus to be present with us and see or sense Christ standing in the center of the circle.
- Be aware of Christ's desire to bless us as we hear these words of scripture, "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you. ...As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:19–22 NRSV, excerpts).
- Be aware of your own breathing, the shared breathing of those in the group, and the breath of Christ coming to you as a holy wind moving on and among the group.
- Remain still as you breathe the breath of Christ together and receive the peace Christ offers.
- After several minutes invite group members to offer silent thanks to Jesus and say a personal "Amen." Close the experience with a short blessing prayer on group members and their continuing awareness of Christ's peace in their journeys of spiritual formation and mission response.