


ScriptureWalk Junior High
People of Promise

Bible-Based Sessions for Teens

Joseph Grant

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*To my mum and dad, Anne and the children,
Ray, Shannon, Tom, Bob, and Kathy,
who are models, witnesses, and reflections
of the living Word of God.*

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Introduction

The Reason for the ScriptureWalk Series

The Bible is one of the best-selling books of all time, yet so many copies sit on the shelf collecting dust. Why is this? Perhaps because so many people misunderstand the Bible's purpose. It is more than a dictionary or encyclopedia of faith. It is more than good storytelling or a collection of historical trivia.

Vatican Council II (1962–1965) opened the doors for Catholics to read and study the Bible with renewed fervor. In the last few decades, parish Scripture study groups have sprung up across the country as Catholic adults began to enthusiastically explore the Scriptures. However, Catholic scriptural renewal has yet to fully flower among Catholic young people, partly owing to a lack of resources designed to engage Catholic young people in Bible study and reflection. The ScriptureWalk series is designed to help fill that gap.

Bringing the Scriptures to Life

God speaks to us through the Bible whoever we are and wherever we are and whatever age we might be. The Bible is a source of strength and a source of challenge. The Scriptures have an incredible power to transform our life. If we invite the Scriptures off the written page and into our life and heart, we cannot help but be changed in a radical way. The *ScriptureWalk Junior High* sessions in this book will help you make the Bible come alive for your junior high youth.

The Bible and Evangelization

When we make the Bible come alive, it is one of our primary sources of evangelization. Let's look at some of the principles of evangelization and how they help us understand how to use the Bible with young people.

Evangelization is dynamic. We cannot just hand a Bible to young people and say, "Here, read this." We must approach the Scriptures with a sense of imagination and reverence so that the young people will too.

Evangelization occurs through relationships. We need to spend time with young people so that we can understand how their experiences connect with the teachings of the Bible.

Evangelization takes place where people are. We need to take the Bible beyond the classroom and the church library and into school lockers and gym bags and rooms at home and in soup kitchens and ball

fields and fast-food restaurants, because these are the places where the word of God must be lived if it is to make sense to our young people today.

Evangelization takes time. Reading the Bible takes practice. Loving and living the Bible take a lifetime. We want young people to get into the habit of spending time with the Bible. Only if they do that can they begin to proclaim the Scriptures with their life.

The Goals of *ScriptureWalk Junior High: People of Promise*

This second volume of *ScriptureWalk Junior High* has several goals:

- To introduce the young teens to a variety of Bible people whose struggles and triumphs reflect God's action and plan for our lives
- To offer Bible-based activities that engage the minds, hearts, and hands of young adolescents
- To connect the people of the Scriptures with the current life experiences of young adolescents through symbols, games, rituals, and prayer
- To place the word of God and the lives of Bible people in a broader social context that includes the needs of the world

The Structure of *ScriptureWalk Junior High*

The *ScriptureWalk Junior High* manuals are structured on the principle of active learning. Each 90-minute session includes activities to build community, engage young people in discussion, and introduce them to creative forms of prayer and reflection.

Interactive Learning

Young people live in an interactive environment, and the Scriptures tell the story of God's interaction with us. Interactive learning uses focus objects and symbols to engage the senses; discussions and stories to make connections; and drama, ritual, and hands-on prayer activities to transform the Scriptures into memorable experiences.

Young adolescents need physical activity and movement to keep them engaged. Meaningful and constructive activities enhance their ability to learn with and from one another. With interactive learning, rather than telling young people what they have learned, we let them share experiences related to an activity and ask what they learned from it.

Team-Building Activities

Young adolescents collaborate and share at a deeper level when they are working in small groups. In each session the young people are divided into teams for hands-on activities that explore the life or message of a Bible person (or persons) of promise. At the end of these activities, the teams present the results of their work to the whole group.

In the team activities, it is important to involve everyone, including the adult leaders. Pay attention to two key tasks: (1) giving clear directions and (2) following up the activity with a group discussion or a short interactive presentation that enables the young people to share what they have learned.

Dynamic Discussions

Dynamic discussions are an important part of interactive learning. Few young adolescents will remain attentive for long during a monologue. You will find that discussion flows naturally from the thought-provoking activities in the sessions, whether you are talking about how Micah could be compared to a microphone or how Miriam was a baby-sitter for Moses.

Some of the discussions are designed for teams, others for the large group. The discussion activities usually offer specific, open-ended questions so that the young people are encouraged to answer with more than one-word responses. Discussion gets easier as your group members meet more frequently and become more comfortable sharing with one another.

Assigning and mixing the teams will help with the process of building community among young people, who at the outset can be cliquish and unwilling to share.

Powerful Prayer Services

By exposing young people to a variety of creative and hands-on experiences of prayer, we deepen their awareness of how God interacts in their life and in our world. The forms of prayer found in this book include guided meditation, symbols, music, storytelling, quiet reflection, shared prayer, and ritual action.

The prayer experiences always use objects to focus the young people's attention and appeal to their concrete imaginations. At times the focus object will have an obvious religious connection, but more often it will be an object from everyday life, such as a box of cereal, playing cards, rope, or a pair of scissors.

Pay particular attention to the setting for prayer. If possible designate a special area in or near your regular meeting space for prayer time. Invite the young people to mindfulness by engaging their senses using quiet music, dimmed lights, candles, or incense.

Scripture Connections

ScriptureWalk Junior High: People of Promise invites the young adolescents to connect with the lives and stories of some well-known and lesser-known people from the Bible. Each session offers a background section that sets the scene and places the Bible people in their own time. Gleaned from a variety of Scripture source materials,

these opening paragraphs help you make the connections between these Bible lives and the experiences of young people today.

Each session also includes Scripture passages to offer insight into the lives of Bible people. These passages are given at the beginning of most activities. Generally directions for reading a passage or passages are given within the activity. Sometimes a passage is adapted or paraphrased for some use within an activity. Additional Scripture passages relating to the lives and issues of these Bible personalities are included at the end of each session.

The Bible is our sacred history. It tells of God's promise and our response. It is a story of liberation and struggle, of human weakness and God's faithful love. As such the Bible has social relevance to our times. These sessions attempt to raise in the young people a social consciousness of the struggles of people in our times, whether they be prophets who speak up for poor people, those who face persecution, or the overlooked faithful women in our church.

Family Connections

Most sessions include a short section at the end called "Family Connection." It gives a short, family-based follow-up idea for the session. Some of the family activities include affirmation, prayer, discussion, and community service. You may wish to share these ideas in a parent meeting, send them home in a newsletter, photocopy them for the participants, or simply suggest them to the young people at the end of a session.

Optional Activities

Each session also includes an optional activity that can be used in several ways:

- as a substitute for a session activity
- as a way to make the session longer
- as a follow-up activity

Look over this optional activity in advance to see if it fits your needs.

Suggestions for Program Leaders

A Bible for Every Teen

At the first session, make sure everyone in your youth group or class has a Bible. Don't just assume that they already own one. There is a good chance they do not. Having a few Bibles to share every time your group meets is not good enough. If we want young people to spend time with the Bible and make it part of their life, they must each have their own. We want their Bible to look worn and dog-eared. That will mean that it is being read and is traveling with the young people throughout their day and week and not just being dusted off now and then.

Use a Catholic edition of the Bible, containing both the Old and New Testaments. Avoid translations that use archaic language (like the King James Version) or paraphrasing (like the Living Bible). The New

American Bible and the Catholic edition of the New Revised Standard Version are good choices.

We strongly recommend using a youth-friendly study Bible such as *The Catholic Youth Bible*, published by Saint Mary's Press. Such Bibles commonly contain helpful background articles and introductions to individual books of the Bible that can enrich the participants' knowledge and discussion.

Where and When Should I Use These Sessions?

The *ScriptureWalk Junior High* sessions will fit easily into a junior high youth group format. However, with a little creativity, you can find many other uses for the sessions or for the activities within each session. Consider these ideas:

- as part of your religious education program
- as part of a weekly Scripture study group
- as a component of a miniretreat
- as a supplement to the reflections included in *The Catholic Youth Bible*
- as part of a Scripture class
- as a homily help when you are preparing to celebrate the liturgy with junior high young people

The sessions in this *ScriptureWalk* volume are arranged chronologically, that is, the characters are presented in the order in which they appear in Bible history. The sessions can be used in any order.

What Group Size Works with These Sessions?

The time estimates for the session activities are based on a group size of ten to fifteen young people. However, by slightly adjusting the session plans, the activities can be used with groups as small as five or as large as sixty. For example, when doing a discussion exercise with a large group, invite only a limited number of participants to share their thought, or break the large group into smaller groups. Look over the session plan to determine which activities will work better with a large group and which will work better with small groups.

Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The *ScriptureWalk Junior High* sessions are designed to be used as part of a comprehensive or total youth ministry. This model acknowledges that a well-rounded youth ministry includes educational, social, outreach, and spiritual experiences. This resource aims to meet those needs as follows:

Educational. This material is catechetical, but uses an interactive teaching model. The sessions introduce and reinforce knowledge of the Scriptures, invite young people to spend more time reading the Bible, and explore issues critical to young people today.

Social. These sessions offer young people opportunities to gather, deepen friendships, and share their faith in a nonthreatening environment. Designed with variety and creativity, the activities are meant to be engaging and challenging. Many of them may also build and deepen a sense of community among the young people.

Outreach. The Scriptures, and in particular the Gospels, challenge young people to look beyond themselves, to reach out and serve God by caring for God's people. By examining the lives, times, and limitations of a few biblical people, these sessions offer young people role models of how to live up to God's calling to notice, care about, and reach out to people in need.

Spiritual. Prayer is one of the three critical components in each session, and a sense of reverence and spirituality is woven throughout the various activities. By using symbols that make prayerful connections to everyday life and participating in ritual activities and moments of reflection, the young people are challenged to take the messages they learn from the Scriptures and weave them into their own life.

Session Leaders

The sessions in this manual are designed to meet the needs of volunteer leaders with a minimal ministry background as well as professional ministers. Each session contains complete directions for an effective exploration of a Scripture person or persons. The sessions do require preparation. It is important that leaders read a session over several times and think through the particulars of their situation. To make planning easier, each session includes one overall list of materials needed for the whole session and an individual list for each activity. The sessions also include a checklist of other necessary preparations.

These sessions are also a good place to train and involve older youth as small-group leaders. If your group is large, invite high school youth to help as small-group facilitators. Be sure to provide them with appropriate training.

The Bible Is More than a Book; It Is the People

Biblia, the Greek root of the word *Bible*, means "books." It could be said that the Bible is a library filled with many different types of writing. God speaks not only in narrative but also in poetry and drama, in epic stories and letters. For us Catholic Christians, the Bible is our sacred "inspired" text, and it is important that we become familiar with its many layers, styles, and sources. If we read only the New Testament, we miss out on the richness and texture of our roots in the Old Testament.

When we pray the Bible, it becomes the breath of God. When we sing the Scriptures, they are eloquent praise. When we study the Bible's language, it enriches and deepens our self-understanding. When we live its message, it often brings as many questions as it does answers. The Bible is a gift to be sampled, studied, savored, lived, and read again and again.

There are many ways to break open the Scriptures. These sessions do not give young people a formula on how to read the Bible. Rather they offer them a new angle of approach, through the real-life, human experiences of people who are some of its main characters. In this way

young people might find in the Scriptures companions and guides for their own life journey as well as models of faithfulness and just living.

A Few Words on the Lectionary

For many Catholics—including young people—exposure to the Bible comes primarily at Mass, when the Scriptures are read from the lectionary. Each Sunday in the lectionary includes three readings and a psalm. The first reading is typically from the Old Testament and is selected to relate with the Gospel reading. The psalm usually complements the first reading and the Gospel. The second reading is from one of the letters of the Apostles. The third reading is taken from one of the four Gospels.

At the end of each session, you will find a list of lectionary references that connect with the main characters covered in the session. This may be helpful if your junior high meetings or religious education program are based on the Sunday lectionary.

Allowing the Scriptures to Come Alive for You

If we want young people to spend more time with the Bible, we must do the same.

Try to find time before your session to read and reflect on the Scripture passages you will be using. If you do so, then, when you present the Scriptures, you will be able to speak more from the heart of your life and experience. You can also make a point of reflecting on the lectionary readings before or after weekend liturgy at your parish.

Read the Scriptures.
Proclaim the Scriptures.
Struggle to live the message.
Remember that you may be the only Gospel the young people you serve ever hear.

So I pray that you, like the messengers from Moses to Prisca who have walked ahead of you, might walk the Scriptures, breathe the word of God, and become the message for the young church.

And I pray “that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through [God’s] Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:16–17).

Suggested Resources

There is an abundance of resources for studying the Bible. The following are a few titles that may be useful to the leaders and groups using *ScriptureWalk Junior High*:

General

Achtemeier, Paul J., gen. ed. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. [San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Helpful information on people, places, and concepts in the Bible.

Bergant, Dianne, and Robert J. Karris, gen. eds. *Collegeville Bible Commentary*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989. Detailed information and interpretation for each book in the Bible.

The Bible Library for Catholics. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1996. A computer CD-ROM with three complete Catholic translations of the Bible, Nave’s Topical Index, search software, and more. Available from Liguori Software, 800-325-9521.

Catucci, Thomas F. *Time with Jesus: Guided Meditations for Youth*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1993.

Ralph, Margaret Nutting. “*And God Said What?*” *An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms for Bible Lovers*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986. A wonderful introduction to interpreting the Bible from a contextualist approach.

Sanchez, Patricia Datchuk. *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary. Years A, B, and C*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1989.

Scripture from Scratch: A Popular Guide to Understanding the Bible. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press. A monthly newsletter.

From Saint Mary’s Press

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Bible Makes Sense*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1997.

Calderone-Stewart, Lisa-Marie. *In Touch with the Word: Lectionary-Based Prayer Reflections. Cycles A, B, and C*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1996.

O’Connell-Roussell, Sheila, and Terri Vorndran Nichols. *Lectionary-Based Gospel Dramas for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1997.

Singer-Towns, Brian, ed. *Bringing Catholic Youth and the Bible Together*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000.

———. *The Catholic Youth Bible*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000.

Tooma, Lynn. *Exploring the Bible. Discovering Program*. Thomas Zanzig, gen. ed. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1999.

Zanzig, Thomas. *Jesus of History, Christ of Faith*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1992.

Miriam and Moses, God's Liberators

Objectives

This session has four objectives:

- To encourage the young people to see Moses and Miriam as partners who helped release their people from bondage, and to examine the Exodus story from the perspectives of both characters
- To investigate some of the names and images of God that emerged from the Exodus experience
- To illustrate the songs of three great women prophets, Miriam, Hannah, and Mary of Nazareth
- To challenge the young people to prayerfully recognize some of the forms of oppression and slavery that exist around them



Background on Miriam and Moses

The Book of Exodus, the story of the great departure, marks the beginning of the historical saga of the people of Israel. With a colorful cast that includes a pharaoh, an enslaved people, inspired leaders, magicians, armies, and miraculous signs and wonders, this story has all the ingredients of a true epic. It is also the story of an underdog, the sprawling underclass of Jacob's descendants pitted against the most powerful empire of the known world.

Central to this liberation story is the figure of Moses, the most revered of all the prophets of Judaism. Although the story of Moses and the wandering Israelites is elaborated in the books of Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, this session deals primarily with the characters of Moses and Miriam as they are described in the Book of Exodus. Together with their brother Aaron, Moses' spokesperson, this family played a key role in uniting the Hebrew tribes and leading them to freedom. Young people may be familiar with this story, especially the classic movie images of Moses in which he is portrayed as an uncompromising leader, solid and unflinching. Yet a closer reading reveals a more complex picture.

Moses embodies the different aspects of the Israelites' struggle for freedom, nationhood, and identity and their developing relationship with Yahweh God. His Egyptian-sounding name reveals a background of privilege. His struggle for identity that led him to flee into the wilderness, becoming a nomadic shepherd, prefigures the eventual release and wanderings of the people. A multidimensional character, Moses is well known as a prince, a shepherd, a mediator, a lawgiver, and a visionary. Young adolescents may be able to identify more closely with Moses the outsider, the reluctant leader who felt unqualified to speak, who was fearful of not being listened to, and who found himself at odds even with his own family. But Moses is not the only prophet of the Exodus. In the background, watching over the hidden child and rousing the people to celebrate God's victory, is the first of the women prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, Miriam, Moses' older sister.

Exodus is a powerful human drama. Its message is much needed in our times, for it speaks of God hearing the cries of oppressed people and breaking into human history to set them free. Miriam and Moses are God's instruments. They voice the people's suffering, challenge the ruling authorities, inspire and unite the people to leave and live differently. Exodus speaks to young people who are familiar with being overlooked and undervalued. It challenges them to open their eyes and ears to notice those who are persecuted or exploited. It shows them how God works in our history through brothers and sisters, and it reminds them that in difficult times God raises up inspiring leaders.

Schedule at a Glance

Session Activities (Total session time: 90 minutes)

- Rapids (10 minutes), an opener
- Caretaker (15 minutes), a small-group activity
- Crossing the Line (15 minutes), a large-group activity
- Snack Break (5 minutes)

- E. Freedom Song—Story Wheels (15 minutes), a small-group activity
- F. Picture This (15 minutes), a large-group activity
- G. Set Free (15 minutes), a prayer experience

Materials Needed

This is a list of materials needed for all the activities in this session, except the optional activity:

- a pillar candle and matches
- Bibles
- a small basket of pebbles, with at least one pebble for each person
- small baskets, one for each small group
- a pair of scissors
- copies of resource 1–A, “The Story of Miriam, the Caretaker,” one for each small group, cut apart as scored
- pens or pencils
- glue sticks, one for each small group
- construction paper, one sheet for each small group, and three extras
- sets of colored markers, one for each small group
- masking tape
- four 11-by-14-inch sheets of poster board
- a copy of resource 1–B, “Moses Crosses the Line”
- snacks
- 22-by-28-inch sheets of poster board, one for each small group
- a tambourine
- a compact disc
- paper
- a pad of newsprint with an easel
- a watch or stopwatch to mark time
- a large crucifix
- the pebbles from activity A
- dried branches from a tree or bush
- a pair of sandals or shoes
- 5-by-36-inch strips of light-colored fabric, at least one for each participant
- fabric markers

Other Necessary Preparations

- For activity B.* Estimate the number of small groups (six to eight people in each) you will have and prepare a basket for each small group as directed in activity B.
- For activity C.* Make three signs, set up the meeting room, and create four posters as directed in activity C.
- For activity C.* Recruit a volunteer to read resource 1–B and if possible give him or her time to practice.
- For activity E.* Create circular posters as directed in activity E.
- For activity F.* Make slips of paper with descriptions of the presence of God as directed in activity F, and place them in a small basket.
- Review the optional activity at the end of this session and consider whether you would like to use it in some way, for example, in place of another activity, as a way to extend the session, or as a follow-up activity.

Session Activities

Activity A Rapids (10 minutes)

Related Scripture passages. Exodus 1:8–13,22, Matthew 18:1–5

Materials needed. a pillar candle and matches; a Bible; a small basket filled with pebbles, one pebble for each person

1. Place a pillar candle, a Bible, and a small basket of pebbles on a small table or in a prominent place in the room. Hold up the basket and invite the young people to quietly reflect on the following questions:

- Have you ever been given more responsibility, at home or school, than you could handle?
- Responsibility can be a heavy burden to carry and, like this heavy basket of rocks, it can weigh us down. Have you ever felt as though you were being singled out and treated unfairly?
- Have you ever carried the burden of being mistreated?

Light the candle and invite a leader to read Exodus 1:8–13, the story of the Israelites’ oppression in Egypt. While the passage is being read, pass the basket and direct the young people each to take a pebble as a symbol of the responsibilities they carry in life.

2. Tell the young people that they are going to play a game called Rapids. Explain that in this game they must pass their “boat” across the “rapids” they form with their arms without losing any “passengers.” Begin by dividing the large group into even-numbered teams of about six to eight individuals. If you have a large number of teams, designate leaders to help the teams. Then give the following directions:

- Everybody bring your pebble and get a chair. Then gather with your team members. Divide your team in half and form two lines of people seated knee-to-knee.
- Someone from your team needs to volunteer to let one of their shoes be used as a boat. Everyone put their pebble in the shoe. The pebbles are your passengers. Set the shoe on the floor at one end of your row.
- Cross your arms and join hands with the person seated directly in front of you. When you are ready, I or another leader will place the shoe filled with pebbles across the arms of the couple at one end of the row. Your job is to pass the shoe along the row of arms and back again without spilling any pebbles. Keep your arms crossed and hands clasped at all times unless you need to pick up a dropped shoe. If the shoe falls or some pebbles are lost, send the shoe back to the head of the row and start over. The first team to successfully pass the boat along its rapids and back wins.

3. After the race conclude with the following reflection:

- This is just a game, but what would it really be like to have the lives of people in your hands? Most of the time only adults have that responsibility, but from time to time, children and young people have it thrust upon them. This often seems true in God’s plan of

salvation. For example, when the people of Israel were slaves of the greatest power of their time, their hope for freedom rested on the shoulders of two children, a baby boy and his brave big sister. Listen to this description Jesus gave of true greatness. [Read *Matthew 18:1–5*.]

Activity B **Caretaker (15 minutes)**

Related Scripture passage. Exodus 2:1–10

Materials needed. small baskets, one for each small group; a pair of scissors; copies of page 1 of resource 1–A, “The Story of Miriam, the Caretaker,” one for each small group; pens or pencils; glue sticks, one for each small group; construction paper, one sheet for each small group; Bibles, one for each small group

Before the session. Estimate the number of small groups of six to eight people each that you will be able to form. Prepare a basket for each small group, putting in it the following items: the sentence strips and scrambled answers from resource 1–A, pens or pencils, a glue stick, and a sheet of construction paper.

1. Distribute all but one of the baskets to the teams from the previous activity. Hold up the remaining basket and ask the young people to raise their hand if they have ever been asked to look after a baby. Tell them that they will be putting together fragments of an old story about someone who was asked to do that. In the basket they will find the fragments of a story and some clues. Their task is to fill in the missing words on each clue and then glue the sentence strips on the construction paper in a sequence that makes sense.

Suggest that they start by reading aloud Exodus 2:1–10. Tell them that most of the answers can be found in that passage and in chapter 1 of Exodus. Also explain that one of the clues in their basket is a list of scrambled words that may help them.

2. Give your demonstration basket to the group that doesn’t have one yet and let everyone begin. After 10 minutes invite a reporter from each group to read the group’s version of the story. Then read the story from page 2 of resource 1–A, which has the correct answers filled in.

Activity C **Crossing the Line (15 minutes)**

Related Scripture passages. Exodus 2:11–15, Proverbs 31:8–9

Materials needed. three sheets of construction paper; markers; masking tape; four 11-by-14-inch sheets of poster board; a copy of resource 1–B, “Moses Crosses the Line”; a Bible

Before the session. Use the construction paper and markers to make three signs. On the first sign write, “Yes,” on the second, “Maybe,” and on the third, “Never.” Against one wall, in an area that is clear of furniture, tape each of the three signs at eye level, leaving some space

between them. Using masking tape, divide the floor in front of the signs into three sections, each of which is aligned with one of the posted signs.

Make four poster board signs, each with a different one of the following questions:

1. What did he see?
2. What did he do?
3. What did he say?
4. Where did he go?

Recruit a volunteer to read resource 1–B and if possible give him or her time to practice.

1. Open the activity by inviting the group to quietly reflect on the following questions:

- Have you ever noticed someone being bullied or harassed by others?
- Have you ever watched while a friend or relative was made fun of, humiliated, or hurt?
- Can you recall your feelings and thoughts, or can you imagine what that would feel like?

2. Invite the group to gather around the decision walls where the three options—yes, maybe, and never—have been marked. Explain the activity as follows:

- When we open our eyes and look around us, we notice injustice. When we see others being treated unfairly, we always have choices to make. This activity can help you understand that by presenting five scenarios. For each one you must choose which line to cross by standing next to the sign that best describes your reaction: “Yes” for “I would get involved,” “Maybe” for “Maybe I would get involved,” or “Never” for “I would never get involved.” You may be asked to explain why you made a particular choice.

Now read the following five scenarios, pausing after each to allow the young people to make their choice and move into one of the three areas. When everyone has made their move, invite some of the young people to explain their choice. Invite those who chose yes to describe what they would actually do in response to the situation. Ask those who chose maybe: “What would it take to get you involved?” and “What would prevent you from getting involved?” Invite those who chose never to share why they would not become involved.

Scene 1. You’re standing by your locker at school, and you notice that four of your classmates, including one of your friends, are bullying a younger teen. You can hear them laughing as they push and insult the other youth, who has begun to cry. Would you get involved?

Scene 2. You are going into the mall with a large group of classmates, including some of your best friends. You encounter a street person asleep on the ground outside the mall entrance. Some in the group yell insults at the homeless person. They begin to plan some pranks to humiliate this person. Would you get involved?

Scene 3. You are watching television, and you see a commercial that is asking for donations for hungry people in a Third World country. Would you get involved?

Scene 4. You are in a fast-food restaurant with friends, and you notice a family gathered around the trash can outside the restaurant. They clearly are looking for scraps in the trash. Would you get involved?

Scene 5. You have gone to a party with your best friend. You are with a group of strangers, and these young people start to tease your friend about his or her faith. They make fun of religion and insult your friend's church. No one has noticed you. Would you get involved?

3. Invite the group to be seated and call forward the volunteer who has prepared to read resource 1–B. Introduce the story of how Moses crossed the line, with these or similar remarks:

- Have you ever been torn between two friends, found yourself in the middle of an argument, and been forced to take sides? Moses faced this difficulty as a young man. Although he grew up as an adopted Egyptian prince, he recognized that he was a Hebrew, and he noticed that his people were suffering. This is the story of his dilemma, and you are invited to participate in this reading by asking aloud the question on each cue card as it is raised.

Invite the youth to read aloud from resource 1–B. Help him or her by raising the appropriate cue cards and leading the response.

4. Conclude by reading Proverbs 31:8–9. Tell the group that Moses could not ignore the oppression of his people. He chose to become involved and stand up for them, but his anger carried him too far across the line. He was forced to run away to the desert and leave his Hebrew and Egyptian people behind. But in the desert he heard God's voice and learned to speak up for the Hebrew people.

Activity D **Snack Break (5 minutes)**

Activity E **Freedom Song–Story Wheels (15 minutes)**

Related Scripture passages. Exodus 15:20–21, 1 Samuel 2:7–8, Luke 1:51–53

Materials needed. 22-by-28-inch sheets of poster board, one for each small group; a pair of scissors; sets of colored markers, one for each small group; a tambourine; a compact disc; Bibles, one for each small group

Before the session. Estimate how many small groups of six to eight people you will have. For each one cut a large circle from a large sheet of poster board. In the center of each circle, make a hole that is wide enough for a marker to pass through. Write on each circle one of the following names and its corresponding Scripture citation. Use each name at least once.

- Miriam of Egypt: Exodus 15:20–21
- Hannah of Ephraim: 1 Samuel 2:7–8
- Mary of Nazareth: Luke 1:51–53

1. Divide the young people into small groups of six to eight individuals and give each group markers and one of the circular posters that you created. Begin with these questions:

- When you hear the word *prophet*, what images come to mind?
- Do you know of any women in the Bible who could be called prophets?

Continue by telling the group that the third time a prophet is named in the Scriptures, the title is given to Miriam, Moses' big sister. Mention that other women prophets also are named in the Bible and their words are often written as poems or songs. Holding a tambourine read Miriam's song from Exodus 15:20–21.

Now hold a compact disc and give the following directions:

- Just as the tambourine and the compact disc are symbols of music and song, so do these round posters symbolize the voices of three of the women prophets of the Bible: Miriam, Hannah, and Mary. Notice the name and the Scripture passage written on your poster. Find this short passage and read it aloud several times, paying attention to the nouns and verbs, the images and the meaning of the words used.

Then with your small group, make a story wheel to illustrate the message of the woman prophet assigned to you. A story wheel is a kind of illustration in which the message, in symbols, pictures, and words, forms a circle that can be read as you turn the wheel. You must rewrite the words of your prophet, using only drawings, like hieroglyphics, to symbolize the message. If time permits, you may decorate the wheel with musical notes or other images.

2. After 10 minutes invite two young people from each small group to present their group's story wheel. By placing a marker through the hole in the center of the poster, you should be able to rotate the story wheel as the story is being told.

Conclude the activity by commenting that Miriam, Hannah, and Mary were true prophets because they sang about God's promise to rescue the needy and free the oppressed. Their songs of hope are echoed throughout the sacred Scriptures.

Activity F **Picture This (15 minutes)**

Related Scripture passage. Exodus 3:13–15

Materials needed. paper and pen, a pair of scissors, a small basket, a pad of newsprint with an easel, markers, Bibles, a watch or stopwatch to mark time

Before the session. Write the following six descriptions of the presence of God, including their Scripture citations, each on a separate slip of paper. Capitalize two words in each description as indicated. Fold the papers and place them in a small basket.

- Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2)
- Bread from Heaven (Exodus 16:4)
- Mountain of God (Exodus 3:1)
- Pillar of Cloud (Exodus 13:21)
- Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:22)
- God of your Ancestors (Exodus 3:15)

1. Divide the group into four teams and gather them around a newsprint easel. Explain the activity as follows:

- The Exodus story is full of close encounters with the mysterious presence of God. In the story of the burning bush, God reveals the divine name “I am who I am” [Exodus 3:13–15] to Moses. Other descriptions for the presence of God are in Exodus. We are going to play a combination of charades and Pictionary to see if you can guess what those descriptions are.

Present the following directions for the game to the whole group:

- *[Hold up the basket that you prepared.]* In the basket are a variety of descriptions for the presence of God that are found in the Book of Exodus. Each one has two main words to draw or act out.
- Select two players to represent your team. When it is your team’s turn, those two players must come forward and pick a slip of paper from the basket. They each must choose one *capitalized* word of the description, and they must also decide who will draw clues for his or her word on the easel (Pictionary) and who will mime his or her word (charades). Players can mime or draw only the word that they have chosen.
- The players’ teammates will have 2 minutes to guess the description of God’s presence that is being presented. After 1 minute the player at the easel may write down the Scripture citation as an additional clue for the team. They may look it up.
- If the time expires before a team has guessed one or both parts of the name, then the other teams are invited to make suggestions.

2. Choose someone to act as timekeeper and begin, allowing 10 minutes for the game. In the event that the teams guess the names quickly, any extra slips in the basket could be offered to random pairs of young people to present for the whole group.

Activity G Set Free (15 minutes)

Related Scripture passages. Exodus 3:1–11, Luke 4:16–21

Materials needed. a pillar candle and matches; a large crucifix; the pebbles from activity A; dried branches from a tree or bush; a pair of sandals or shoes; 5-by-36-inch strips of light-colored fabric, at least one for each person; a Bible; fabric markers

1. In the center of your prayer space, place a pillar candle and a large crucifix. Put around the candle the pebbles from the opening activity and some small branches. Place a pair of sandals or shoes on

the floor in front of this focus area and pile on top of them fabric strips, at least one for each person. Gather the young people around the focus area, seated in chairs or on the floor, and begin the prayer using these or similar words:

- Have you ever noticed a striking sunset, a bird song, the silence of snowfall? When something grabs our attention, it makes us stop, listen, and notice more carefully. Noticing or paying attention can be a kind of prayer.

Light the candle and invite a young person or a leader to read Exodus 3:1–11, the story of Moses and the burning bush. Distribute fabric markers and fabric strips, and lead a brief discussion of the following questions:

- What helps you to pay attention to the needs of people around you?
- What are some places where people are needy and struggling with injustice?
- What do you believe is the most disturbing issue facing the nations of our world?

Invite the young people to write on their fabric strip one word that describes an injustice that people suffer today. Then continue with the following reflection:

- Moses ran away from the oppression of his people and the Egyptians. At the burning bush he discovered that God saw injustice and slavery and heard the cries of the Hebrew people. And Moses, the misfit and the runaway, was sent back by God to confront the ruler of the most powerful nation in the known world, to demand that he set the people free.

2. Have the group members stand, holding their fabric strips. Lead them through the following ritual prayer to free up their eyes and ears, mouths and hands. Tell them that they should listen carefully during the prayer for directions on what to do with their fabric strip, and that when you say, “Holy God,” and you raise your arms, they should remove the fabric strip and respond, “Set us free!”

Leader. Holding the fabric in front of our eyes, we pray: God of Abraham and Sarah, take off our blinders and open our eyes to the needs of your people. Holy God . . . *[Raise your arms.]*

All. Set us free!

Leader. Holding the fabric around our ears, we pray: God of Jacob and Leah, unplug our ears and clear our heads so that we can listen to the cries of your people who are suffering. Holy God . . . *[Raise your arms.]*

All. Set us free!

Leader. Holding the fabric in front of our mouths, we pray: God of Israel, open our mouths that we might speak up on behalf of those people who are overlooked, put down, and never heard. Holy God . . . *[Raise your arms.]*

All. Set us free!

Leader. Wrapping the fabric around our wrists, we pray God of our ancestors Moses and Miriam, unchain our hands so that we can reach out to help your people who are treated unjustly. Holy God . . . *[Raise your arms.]*

All. Set us free!

Now hold up the crucifix and say:

- We believe that Jesus is God’s loving response to a people who are suffering, chained down, or oppressed. You are invited, one by one, to tie your bindings onto the cross as a prayer that people will be set free to care and act justly.

After the young people tie their strips onto the cross, instruct them to pick up a pebble and return to their place.

3. Conclude by reading Luke 4:16–21 and sharing a closing thought in these or similar words:

- In a time of crisis, God called on a family from the tribe of Levi—Miriam, her brother Aaron, and her little brother Moses. Together this family carried the responsibility of leading God’s people to freedom. You have been set free to care for, to notice, to hear, to speak up for, and to reach out to God’s people around you. The pebble you take home is a reminder of the responsibility that you carry to set people free.

Optional Activity

Rivalry—a Role-Play (30 minutes)

Related Scripture passages. Numbers 12:1–15, 1 Peter 3:8–9

Materials needed. newsprint, three sets of markers, masking tape, Bibles, poster board, one sheet for each small group

Before the session. Write on a sheet of newsprint the heading, “My Side of the Story.” Then list on it the following statements and sentence starters. Post the sheet in a prominent place.

My name is . . . *[Moses, Aaron, or Miriam].*

Let me describe my family to you.

We had a serious disagreement, but let me tell you my side of the story.

We were at . . .

The argument started because . . .

The disagreement was really all about . . .

I was trying to say that . . .

I think the strongest voice was . . .

The voice of God told us . . .

What happened next was . . .

In the end . . .

I think what happened was . . . *[fair or unfair]* because . . .

1. Introduce this activity by asking the young people to raise their hand if their family has never had a disagreement. Ask them to stand up if they have never argued with a brother or sister or their mom or dad about who is in charge. They will probably notice that not a lot of

hands went in the air and very few people stood up. Tell the group that every family experiences rivalries, gossiping, power struggles, and arguments, but such behaviors become a serious problem when they are experienced by the lead family in the nation. Miriam, Moses, and Aaron were strong and respected leaders among the Hebrews who left Egypt. Even though all three of them were called prophets of God, they were also brother and sister and were bound to come into conflict. Explain that in this activity the group will be role-playing the story of a disagreement that almost split apart Miriam, Moses, and Aaron, trying to present the three sides of the argument.

2. Divide the large group into three teams and give each a set of markers, Bibles, and a sheet of poster board. Assign the groups each a different one of the three characters: Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. Instruct the teams to read from the Book of Numbers the episode in which Moses’ authority is challenged by his brother and sister (12:1–15). Encourage the teams to read the story from the point of view of their assigned character.

Allow the teams 10 minutes to write a version of the story from the point of view of their character, using the comments on the posted sheet of newsprint as a guide. Invite the teams each to present their stories to the large group by selecting one person to read from their poster as three others silently act out the characters.

3. Lead the whole group in a brief silent reflection using these comments and questions:

- In the Scriptures God teaches us through the example and struggles of ordinary people and their families. What lessons did you learn from Aaron and Miriam’s public challenge of their brother Moses?
- Have you ever felt overlooked, not listened to, unfairly punished, not respected, or ganged up on by members of your family?
- Have you ever gotten into trouble because you challenged the authority of a family member?
- Call to mind the people who make up your family, including cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Is there a relationship in need of mending—is there someone you have hurt recently or a person you would like to pray for?

Conclude by inviting a young person to read 1 Peter 3:8–9.

Scripture References

Additional Scripture Passages

Numbers 6:22–27. The blessing prayer of Moses

Numbers 26:59. The names of the parents of Moses and Miriam

Psalms 103:6–8. The just ways of God were revealed to Moses.

Isaiah 58:6–10. Loose the bonds of injustice; let the oppressed go free.

Mark 12:26. Jesus teaches about the living God of the ancestors.

Revelation 15:3–4. The song of Moses

Lectionary Readings

Cycles A, B, and C
 Third Sunday of Lent
 Feast of Mary, mother of God
 Holy Thursday

Cycle A
 Trinity Sunday (Sunday after Pentecost)

Cycle B
 Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C
 Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Session Follow-Up

Family Connection

Newspaper Prayer Chains

Suggest to the young people that they try the following prayer activity at home. Make copies of the directions to send home with them. Use this family prayer service as a way of bringing home the Exodus message about hearing the cries of poor people.

Place a candle, a Bible, a padlock and keys, and a stack of current newspapers on the dining room table. Light the candle and read Psalm 34:1–6, which emphasizes that God hears and delivers poor people. Divide a stack of newspapers so that members of the family can scan them for headlines, pictures, or reports about people who are suffering, excluded, or persecuted. Look for stories about the victims of crime, poverty, harsh labor practices, racism, abuse, disease, and violence, as well as reports about those imprisoned for crime, addicted to drugs, or responsible for persecuting others.

Direct each person to select and cut out a 2-by-12-inch strip from a headline, picture, or story and to write a brief prayer intention on it. Invite each person to briefly share his or her news item. Then staple or tape the strips into interlocking links of a prayer chain so that they form a complete circle around the candle. Conclude by reading Isaiah 61:1–2.

The Story of Miriam, the Caretaker

Photocopy the first page of this resource and cut apart the copies as scored, making one set for each small group.

..... ✂
 She coated the basket with _____ and hid my brother in the _____ along the riverbank. I watched over him (Exodus 2:3).

.....
 We are the descendants of _____, and now we live in Egypt (Exodus 3:6).

.....
 Mother managed to hide my baby brother for _____ months before she put him in a _____ basket (Exodus 2:2–3).

.....
 My name is _____ (Exodus 15:20), which means “rebellious.” I have a brother called _____ (Exodus 4:14).

.....
 I stood up and offered to find a _____ _____ for the baby, so I brought my _____, who was offered _____ to look after her baby (Exodus 2:7–9).

.....
 I am a _____, which means my family belongs to one of the _____ tribes (Exodus 6:19–20).

.....
 My baby brother was named _____, which means “_____”(Exodus 2:10).

.....
 The _____ came to the river and found my brother (Exodus 2:5).

.....
 We have been made slaves to build the cities of _____ and _____ for the Egyptians (Exodus 1:11).

.....
 _____ has decided that there are too many of us and decreed that Hebrew boy children should be thrown into the _____ (Exodus 1:22).

.....

hioPtm	aonAr	nubtmie
eINi	seoMs	seaResm
iraMim	ernsu werHbe	teeviL
oPrahah	wrde tuo mhi eht fo l artew	ehrte
deres	gewsa	caboj
pusapyr	rweHbe	ohmert
fo haPorha traguhed		

.....

Answer Sheet for the Story of Miriam, the Caretaker

Here are the completed sentences placed in proper sequence:

- My name is **Miriam**, which means “rebellious.” I have a brother called **Aaron**.
- I am a **Levite**, which means my family belongs to one of the **Hebrew** tribes.
- We are the descendants of **Jacob**, and now we live in Egypt.
- We have been made slaves to build the cities of **Pithom** and **Ramses** for the Egyptians.
- **Pharaoh** has decided that there are too many of us and decreed that Hebrew boy children should be thrown into the **Nile**.
- Mother managed to hide my baby brother for **three** months before she put him in a **papyrus** basket.
- She coated the basket with **bitumen** and hid my brother in the **reeds** along the riverbank. I watched over him.
- The **daughter of Pharaoh** came to the river and found my brother.
- I stood up and offered to find a **Hebrew nurse** for the baby, so I brought my **mother**, who was offered **wages** to look after her baby.
- My baby brother was named **Moses**, which means “**I drew him out of the water.**”

Moses Crosses the Line

Read the following sentences from the Scriptures, pausing where noted. At each pause the leader holds up the corresponding cue card and leads the group in reading the question on it. Then read the reply to the question.

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 1, “What did he see?”]

He saw their forced labor.

Then Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 1, “What did he see?”]

He saw an Egyptian beating one of his kinsfolk.

Moses looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 2, “What did he do?”]

He killed the Egyptian and hid him.

When he went out the next day, Moses saw two Hebrews fighting.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 1, “What did he see?”]

He saw two Hebrews fighting.

And Moses said to the one who was in the wrong, “Why did you strike your fellow Hebrew?”

[Pause while the leader raises poster 3, “What did he say?”]

“Why did you strike your fellow Hebrew?”

The man answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

[Pause while the leader raises poster 3, “What did he say?”]

“Who made you a judge? Do you mean to kill me?”

Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely this thing is known.” When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 2, “What did he do?”]

Pharaoh sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 2, “What did he do?”]

Moses fled.

Then Moses settled in the land of Midian.

[Pause while the leader raises poster 4, “Where did he go?”]

The land of Midian.