

Begin your Meeting with Play!

10-min Playful Devotions for the Beginning of Meetings

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Introduction

These devotions came out of an idea— how can we spark the imaginations of the people of God? So much of the time, we feel like when we have meetings, we have to cut out everything that feels extra, so that we can be efficient. There's no time for frivolity. We need to be serious and get down to business and do our work.

Fred Rogers, host of the children's TV show *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, said, "Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play IS serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood." Research shows us that when children play, they are learning valuable skills that they can carry with them throughout their life— skills like experimentation, teamwork, and problem solving skills.

Often adults feel like we can't, or shouldn't, take time to play. But research is now showing that play benefits not only children, but also grown-ups. Stress and trauma make our brains go into "survival mode." But play can help move our brains from "survival mode" to "learning mode."

God created us to be playful creatures throughout our lives! Play helps us become more adaptable and creative. It helps us build social connections and sparks our imaginations, making us more open to new ideas and new people, and better equipped to face new challenges, and perhaps better able to discern what God is calling us to do in this time and this place. It is absolutely worth it to take some time to play!

This booklet contains devotions for the beginning of meetings. Some of them need to be done in person, but some can be done over Zoom meetings. Some need a few supplies, and some don't. Every devotion begins with a quote about the importance of play, followed by an activity that utilizes some type of playfulness (games, art, body movement, imagination, playful questions, etc). Then there is a Bible passage that connects with the activity, and finally a prayer.

These devotions are designed to help people utilize playfulness to connect with each other and with God. May they spark your holy imagination!

1. The Kingdom of God is like yeast

“Play is a catalyst. The beneficial effects of getting just a little true play can spread through our lives, actually making us more productive and happier in everything we do.” – Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: 1 pkt yeast, 1 tbsp sugar, ¼ c. warm water, mug or bowl

1. Mix yeast, water, and sugar in a bowl or mug, observe how it looks.
2. Read the parable of the yeast, Matthew 13:33–

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

3. Think of a happy memory associated with baking, or think of something you would love to learn how to bake. Share with the group (include details!).
4. Observe the change in the yeast. It should look bigger and foamy!
5. Read Matthew 13:33 again–

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

The kingdom of God is like yeast– it grows and makes baked goods bigger and fluffier!

6. Pray: *Dear God, help us to be like yeast in the world. Use our gifts, talents, and resources to help us increase the goodness and joy in the world. Amen.*

2. The Playfulness of Creation

“In an unpredictable, changing world, what we learn from playing can be transferred into other novel contexts. We seek out a variety of new contingencies through play, allowing us to thrive anywhere in the world.” – Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: play-doh

1. Pass out a small bit of play-doh to each person.
2. One person reads Psalm 104. While everyone else listens, they also use their play-doh to sculpt the most ridiculous animal they can imagine. It can combine parts of multiple animals, or be a completely new animal. Remember, it shouldn't be perfect— you only have until the reader finishes reading! We're going for creativity, not perfection. Psalm 104—

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

*O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent;
you set the beams of your chambers on
the waters;
you make the clouds your chariot;
you ride on the wings of the wind;
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to
flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to
the valleys,
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the
earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their*

*habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the
mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your
work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle
and plants for people to cultivate,
to bring forth food from the earth
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the field are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
You have made the moon to mark the
seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come
creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.*

People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

There is the sea, great and wide;
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

There go the ships
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in
it.

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled
with good things.

When you hide your face, they are
dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die

and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are
created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they
smoke.

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have
being.

May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.

Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

3. This is a Psalm that describes and celebrates the wide variety of things that God created, including people, places, the earth itself, and all its animals. There is even mention of the Leviathan, which at that time was the name given to any large, scary sea creature, which it says that God made just for the fun of it!
4. Once the psalm is read, then everyone should take turns describing their new animal to the group. If there's room, place all the animals in the middle of the table for the rest of the meeting, as a visual reminder of the creativity that God brings to creation.
5. Pray: *Dear God, help us to be inspired by your vast imagination and wonderful creativity. When we face challenges, stir up in us a sense of creativity, so that our imaginations rise to the occasion. Amen.*

3. Called to Something New

"We are designed by nature and evolution to continue playing throughout life. Lifelong play is central to our continued well-being, adaptation, and social cohesiveness." – Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: a Bible with maps in the back, or a map of the Middle East, paper and writing utensils

1. Think about, and then share with a partner, your answer to one of these questions: What is the most unique place to which you have ever traveled? Or, what is the most unique place in the universe you would like to go? (You can define "unique" however you would like.)
2. As a whole group, read Abram's call story in Genesis 12:1-7.

*Now the **LORD** said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

*4 So Abram went, as the **LORD** had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot and all the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the **LORD** appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the **LORD**, who had appeared to him.*

3. In this story, God calls Abram away from the land of Haran, where he has lived his whole life, and tells him to live in the land of Canaan, where he has never been. God also gives Abram some big promises.
4. If you have a map of the ancient world, look up both Haran (in what is now eastern Turkey) and Canaan (what is now Israel & Palestine). Imagine how far it would have taken to walk between these two places.
5. With your partner, take a minute or two to make a list of all the different emotions that come up when a person goes to a new place or encounters a new thing. Think about which emotions are positive, which are negative, and which are both. Talk with your partner about how Abram might have been feeling as he heard God's call. What similar emotions might we feel as we think about God's call for our congregation?
6. Pray. *O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (From ELW Evening Prayer)*

4. Making it Work With What we Have

“Taking a pause for play does a lot more than take your mind off the problem. When you play, you engage the creative side of your brain and silence your “inner editor,” that psychological barrier that censors your thoughts and ideas. This can often help you see the problem in a new light and think up fresh, creative solutions.”-- Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, M.A., Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., and Jennifer Shubin, “The Benefits of Play for Adults,” www.helpguide.org.

Supplies: aluminum foil, a large plastic container with water, pennies

1. Give each person a piece of aluminum foil, roughly 4-6 inches square. Each person should sculpt their piece of foil into a boat.
2. Float the boats in the water and see which boat can hold the most pennies before it sinks.
3. Read the story of Baby Moses in Exodus 2:1-10–

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” 8 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

4. Moses’ mother was in what probably seemed like an impossible situation— Pharaoh had ordered that all of the male Hebrew babies should be put to death. But his mother used what she had, and figured out a way to help her son survive. Sometimes we encounter what feels like impossible situations, but with God’s help, we can figure out a way to use what we have to do what God is calling us to do.
5. Pray. *Dear God, help us to be inspired by Moses’ mother. When we feel stuck in difficult situations, open our minds and hearts to creative new ideas, so that we might continually follow you. Amen.*

5. Shaping Hope out of Hopelessness

“Curiosity’s reason for existing is not simply to be a tool for acquiring knowledge; it reminds us we’re alive. Researchers are finding evidence that curiosity is correlated with creativity, intelligence, improved learning and memory, and problem solving.” –Dr. Brené Brown, Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience

Supplies: Pipe cleaners

1. Pass out 3-5 pipe cleaners to each person in the group.
2. Read the story of Ezekiel and the Valley of the Dry Bones from Ezekiel 37:1-14–

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath[a] to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11 Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

3. In this story, the dry bones symbolize the hopelessness that the people of God were feeling at the time. They felt like their hopes and dreams had dried up. But God brought the bones back together, connecting them with one another and putting flesh on

them. God breathed the breath of life into them. This was a symbol that God would restore hope to God's people.

4. Have each person shape their pipe cleaners into the image of a person. Shape that pipe cleaner person into a posture that represents hope to them. When everyone is finished, each person takes a turn showing their pipe cleaner person to the group.
5. If there is room, display the pipe cleaner people somewhere in the room for the rest of the meeting, as a visual reminder of the hope that God gives us.
6. Pray. *Dear God, when we feel like our hope has dried up, help us to feel your presence. Help us to remember that you carry hope for us, and you promise to bring us restoration and a future with hope. Amen.*

6. Interests and Gifts

"If we let the play drive express itself well into adulthood, as we are built to do, we find opportunities to play everywhere. The brain keeps developing, adapting, learning about the world, and finding new ways to enjoy it." – Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain. Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: none

1. Give everyone a moment to think about this question. What is one topic that you could give a 5 minute presentation about without needing to do any preparation? Maybe it's a random hobby that you are very interested in, or maybe a medical procedure you have needed to learn about out of necessity. (Assure people they don't actually need to GIVE this presentation— we just want to know the topic.)
2. Have everyone share their topic with everyone else in the group. If you want to take the time, you can have people ask questions about each others' topics.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-12—

4 Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, 5 and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

4. This passage talks about how we each have a variety of gifts, but they were all given to us by the same Lord. We may each be interested in and knowledgeable about different things, but the same Lord has given us those interests. When we come together as the Body of Christ, we each bring our own unique interests and knowledge that we can use to serve God.
5. Take a few minutes to brainstorm— are there any ways that the group could utilize any of the unique topics that were raised?
6. Pray. *Thank you, God, for all of the unique gifts, interest, and knowledge that you have given us. Help us to remember that we are all members of the Body of Christ, and that each of us can share our unique gifts to build each other up and to serve you. Amen.*

7. Movement and perspective

“Movement play lights up the brain and fosters learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience.” –Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain. Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: none

1. Instruct everyone to lean forward in their chair as far as they can, so that their backs are as close to parallel with the floor as they can (comfortably) get. Have everyone turn their heads as much as they can side to side. Then have everyone lift their head forward. Discuss: how much can you see?
2. Instruct everyone to slowly sit up until their backs are as close to perpendicular to the floor as they can (comfortably) get. Have everyone reach their arms either up towards the ceiling or out to the sides as much as they can, so they can feel their muscles stretch. Discuss: how does that make your body feel?
3. Instruct everyone to remain sitting up and turn their heads and bodies to both sides as much as they can. Have everyone lift their head forward. Discuss: how much can you see, now that your body is in a different position? How does that make your body feel?
4. Read the story of Jesus healing a bent-over woman in Luke 13:10-13–

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

5. How did the woman’s perspective change when Jesus healed her and she could stand up straight for the first time in years?
6. Moving our bodies can help us to feel better and remind us to look at things from different perspectives. This can help us to be more creative and resilient.
7. Pray: *Dear God, we thank you for the wonderful bodies you have given us, and the amazing ways they move. Help us to give thanks to you with our whole lives, including our bodies. And guide us to look at things from new perspectives as we seek to do your will. Amen.*

8. Imagining Peace

“Sometimes when a situation is really heading south, a moment of imaginative play is the only thing that provides enough distance to see the way out of a predicament.” –Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: None

1. Instruct everyone to close their eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths, to feel a sense of peacefulness.
2. Instruct everyone to keep their eyes closed and imagine themselves being in a peaceful place, whether it is a real place or simply a place they are imagining. Maybe they are in the middle of a forest, with the wind rustling the leaves of the trees around them. Maybe they are on a beach, watching the waves lap the shore. Maybe they are in their bed, snuggled next to a furry pet. Have everyone reflect: As you imagine this peaceful place, what do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Imagine God joining you in this place, sitting or standing next to you. Take a few moments to reflect on what it feels like to imagine yourself in this place, with God by your side.
3. Instruct everyone to open their eyes, and read 1 Kings 19:11-13–

He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

4. In this passage, Elijah was feeling desperate, and he wanted to see God. He was in a cave on the side of the mountain, and many intense things happened— strong winds, earthquakes, and fires, which often accompanied God’s appearances in the Old Testament. But God was not in any of those things— God was in the sound of sheer silence.
5. Invite people, if they feel comfortable doing so, to share a bit about the peaceful place they imagined. Reflect, either with the group or individually, about how God sometimes shows up in ways that we might not expect. Sometimes we find God’s presence in the peaceful places or the sheer silence.
6. Pray: *God of peace, we give you thanks for showing up for us in all kinds of ways. We give you thanks for peaceful play and for working through our imaginations. Help us find ways to connect with you and experience peace. Amen.*

9. Faith (and Play) Like a Child

"It is well-documented that play is associated with psychological and physical well-being in children. While there is currently only a small amount of research on this topic in adults, it does suggest that play has positive benefits for adults as well. But I believe it doesn't take research to know that bringing more play into our lives feels good, shifts our mood, dials down stress, and can help us be more resilient when faced with daily challenges."-- Beth Kurland, PhD, "How to Reclaim your Playful Self and Find More Joy," article on PsychologyToday.com, posted May 24, 2023

Supplies: None

1. Instruct everyone to close their eyes and think back about themselves as a young child. What sorts of activities did you like to do for fun? What was it about those things that you loved?
2. Take a few minutes to think about and reflect on those things. Maybe you loved to ride your bike down a bike trail because it gave you a feeling of freedom. Maybe you loved to play baseball because the way your body felt when you felt yourself swing the bat and hit the ball was so satisfying. Maybe you loved playing through harder and harder video games, because you loved the challenge and the feeling of accomplishment when you completed a level. Maybe you loved painting because it felt so good to play with colors and shapes and make something beautiful. Maybe you loved to learn about dinosaurs or trains or space or bugs simply because you found those things to be very interesting.
3. After a few minutes, have everyone open their eyes and share with each other an activity they loved to do as a child, and why they loved to do it. (Remember, "It was fun," is a perfectly good reason!)
4. Read Luke 18:15-17–

15 People were bringing even infants to Jesus, that he might touch them, and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. 16 But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

5. Jesus encouraged little children to come to him, because, he said, "theirs is the kingdom of God." Perhaps this is because Jesus knew what psychologists are realizing—play in adulthood is associated with resiliency, problem-solving, mental health, and well-being. And children are often better at playing than adults.
6. Think about (or talk about) how we can learn from and be inspired by our childhood selves and the children around us.
7. Pray: *Dear God, help us to find opportunities for play in our lives, so that we might be renewed by the joy it brings. Amen.*

10. Breath, Wind, Balloons, and the Holy Spirit

"Play seems to be one of the most advanced methods... to allow a complex brain to create itself." –Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: Balloons

1. Have everyone take a few deep breaths, pausing between each inhale and exhale, thinking about how the breath feels in their lungs.
2. Read Genesis 2:7–

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

3. God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into him, and the man became a living being. Think about how God gives us the breath of life.
4. Give everyone a balloon and instruct them to blow it up but not tie it off. Then, have everyone simultaneously let go of their balloons, so that at the same time, all of the balloons deflate while flying through the air.
5. Find where the balloons ended up. Were any of them in surprising locations?
6. Read the beginning of the Pentecost story, Acts 2:1-4–

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

7. A wind from God rushed through the room, causing surprising things. In the Hebrew language, the same word means “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit.” On the day of Pentecost, God’s Holy Spirit was rushing through the room, causing surprising things like making tongues of fire appear over everyone’s heads and making everyone able to speak in different languages.
8. Pray: *Holy Spirit, we pray for your presence, even when it comes in surprising ways. Come and fill our lives and our ministries with your breath of life. Amen.*

11. Co-Creators

"Play is called recreation because it makes us new again, it re-creates us and our world." —Dr. Stuart Brown, Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Supplies: Large piece of paper, markers or crayons (preferably a different color for each person)

1. This is a group drawing activity. Begin by having someone draw a line of some sort on the paper, and then passing it to the person next to them, that person draws a line, passes it again, etc. Each person can only draw one line. It can be curvy, wavy, jagged, etc, but once they lift their marker or crayon off the paper they pass the paper to the next person.
2. Pass the paper around so that each gets to draw at least three lines. (You can keep going longer if the group wants to.)
3. Hold the paper up so that everyone can see it, and then discuss what you see. What do you notice about the picture? Is it abstract? Do you see any recognizable images?
4. Talk briefly about the experience of drawing together. Did you have any particular picture you were trying to draw? Did you experience any thoughts or feelings as the picture evolved? What was it like to work on a drawing with other people?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 3:6-11—

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. 9 For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Let each builder choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

6. St. Paul wrote in the early church about how sometimes people divide themselves up based on their different ideas or based on loyalty to certain individuals— but God calls us to work together, even when that means that things look different than what we expected. We are building on the work of those who have gone before us, the work of our ancestors in the faith, and we trust that God in our midst, doing the work of making the ministry grow.
7. Pray. *Creative God, help us to remember that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and that you are one guiding all of us. Help us to work together to accomplish your will. Amen.*

12. Listening for the Voice

"Research shows that breaks involving amusement may help replenish depleted cognitive resources, and that the replenishment continues through difficult tasks." –Dr. Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*

Supplies: none

1. Have someone in the group close their eyes. While the person has their eyes closed, silently choose someone in the group to whisper the name of the person with their eyes closed. The person with their eyes closed has three tries to guess which person whispered their name.
2. Do this activity a few different times, so that at least a few people in the group get a chance to be the guesser.
3. Talk briefly as a group— was it easy or hard for the guesser to figure out who was whispering your name?
4. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10—

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

5. Samuel heard a voice calling his name, but he thought it was the prophet Eli. Eli finally helped him recognize that the voice was God, calling to him. We are surrounded by voices all the time, from many areas of our lives, and sometimes it can be hard for us to figure out which voice is coming from God, and what God is calling us to do. Sometimes we can hear God's voice if we go sit or lie down in a quiet place, listening for God. And sometimes trusted people around us can help us figure out whether a voice is coming from God.
6. Pray: *Loving God, help us keep our ears open for your call, so that when we realize we are hearing your voice, we are ready to respond like Samuel, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen."*