Session 1 – Being Present With God In Creation

Guiding Question: Where do you feel close to God?

Online/In-Person Suggestions: If you decide to “kick off” this group in-person, meet outdoors in a natural area. Invite the entire household, including children, to this session. You might meet in a grassy area outside the church right after worship on a Sunday morning, or meet on a Saturday at a nearby park. Make sure to plan a rain date. If you plan to hold this first session online, you’ll see tips in parentheses that give you specific ways to translate the activities to an online setting. If you do this online, this session should just include parents, not children (because it’s hard to pull off a whole family on a Zoom screen).

Supplies: Leader Guide, Nametags + Markers, Bell (optional), Timer (can be a cell phone), and the participant handout “Being Present with God in Creation: A Practice” (hand out, or send via email, one for each person)

Session 1 Reminder Email: This is a template that can be used to craft a reminder email about the time and place of Session 1.

*Hello Friends!*

*Our “Practical Tools for Raising Faithful Kids” group will kick off on [DATE] with a gathering after worship service at [TIME].* ***(Or: …on our online platform Zoom at [TIME]—here is the link you’ll need \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.)*** *Here are the details:*

1. *We’ll meet at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ after worship* ***(Or: Designated Time and Zoom Platform)****. I’ll have my nametag on.*
2. *Kids of all ages are welcome.*
3. *You may want to bring a snack and some water.*
4. *We’ll do introductions and one prayer practice that is appropriate for all ages.*

*Our time together will be about 45 minutes. If we don’t see you for Session 1, we’ll see you for Session 2 on Zoom on [DATE] at [TIME] – here is the link you’ll need \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_!*

*Sarah*

# Session Overview

* Gathering & Prayer (15 min)
* Spiritual Practice (10 min)
* Debrief/Reflection (10 min)
* Closing & Blessing (2 min)

# Full Session Guide

Gathering & Prayer (15 min)

* Gathering
  + As the group gathers at the designated time and place/Zoom link, greet each person and invite them to make a nametag (or display their name on Zoom).
    - You might say: **“Hello Clark family! It’s so good to see you. Would you mind making nametags? There are stickers and markers on that picnic table. We’ll be starting over here in just a few moments.” (Or: “Please make sure your family name is listed on your Zoom screen.”)**
* Welcome!
  + A few minutes after the designated meeting time (no more than 5 minutes) welcome the group to *Practical Tools for Raising Faithful Kids*.
    - You might say: **“Welcome everyone! We’ll introduce ourselves in just a moment. Welcome to our first gathering of *Practical Tools for Raising Faithful Kids*. I’m so excited to explore this important topic with you and to get to know each of your households better.”**
* Opening Song/Prayer
  + Explain you will open with a song, or spoken prayer, then introduce yourself.
    - You might say: **“Let us begin with prayer. Today we are going to sing our prayer. *(Or simply lead into the spoken prayer)*.”**
  + Spoken-Prayer Options:   
    **God, you have filled the world with beauty… As we encounter that beauty in your creation, help us to drink in what the Apostle Paul calls your “invisible qualities, eternal power, and divine nature.” Make us awake and alive to the beauty of who you are in the beauty of your creation. In the name of Jesus, our Lord… Amen.**

Or: Lead people in a “Creation-List Prayer” by asking each person to name a favorite “thing God created,” and then pray, thanking God for each of the things on the list.

* Introductions
  + Ask each person gathered to share their name and, if comfortable, to share a place where they feel close to God.
    - You might say: **“I want to make sure we all know each other's names. Let’s go around the circle (or screen) and introduce ourselves. I’ll go first. Please tell us your name, and then share with us a place where you feel close to God.”**
* Why We Are Gathered
  + Give a brief summary of what this group is (and what this group is not).
    - You might say: **“We will spend some more time on this in our next session, but I wanted to take a moment to name why we are here and what this group is for. This is a group of people building community around a shared desire—the desire to nurture our own faith lives and the faith lives of the children we love. I am not an expert, but a co-explorer. My hope is that throughout our sessions we will encourage each other by sharing from our own experience rather than offering advice or judgment.”**

Spiritual Practice: Being Present with God in Creation (10 min)

* Introduce and explain the spiritual practice for this session: “Being Present with God in Creation.” Give each person a Session 1 handout, or send it to each person via email.
  + You might say: **“Today we are going to do a practice that will help us be present with God in creation. I’m going to give you seven minutes to find a spot nearby or explore this area (or to walk outside into a place where you can see nature). To ground yourself and begin to notice God’s presence more clearly, I invite you to use all five senses. Notice and name, either to yourself or someone else if you’d like to do this together, five things you can see. Then notice and name four things you can hear. Next, three things you can feel. Next, two things you can smell. And lastly, one thing you can taste. These instructions are on the handout I’ve given each of you—it’s called “Being Present With God In Creation.” I’ll gather us back together using this bell, so don’t go too far away (give a return time for those who go outside).”**
* Ask if anyone has a question.
* Give participants seven (7) minutes to do the practice. Encourage parents with children present to do the exercise jointly and share their sense ideas with one another.
* If you’re doing this experience online, participants will need to walk outside their house to follow these directions—just make sure they know what time to return.
* Call participants back together, for example by ringing a bell.

Debrief/Reflection (10 min)

* Once participants have re-gathered, lead them in reflecting on the experience.
* Make sure to affirm each response.
  + For example, if someone shares “I noticed the most beautiful flowers blooming over there—they are yellow, which is my favorite color.” You might respond: **“You noticed beautiful flowers in your favorite color. Thank you!”**
* Reflection questions:
  + **What did you notice?**
  + **I wonder what feelings you experienced—maybe you felt excitement, boredom, or peace.**
  + **I wonder how you felt God’s presence.**

Closing & Prayer (2 min)

* Before you close with a prayer, remind each household that they can use their copy of the Session 1 handout “Being Present with God in Creation: A Practice” as an everyday guide for everyone in the family—when they’re outside together, taking a walk, or on an excursion or hike. Remind them of the next gathering time and encourage them to try the practice again at home.
  + You might say: “Before we close with a blessing, remember that you can use your Session 1 handout again and again at home with your kids. Please try it at home once or twice before we meet again on [DATE] at [Time] on Zoom.”
* Close Session 1 with a simple prayer.
  + You might say something like: **“I’d like to end each session with a brief prayer or blessing. I’ll say, ‘This is our prayer’ and you’ll respond, ‘Thanks be to God.” or ‘Thank you God.’**
* Here’s a closing prayer (or substitute your own):
  + Leader: **“Jesus, send us out in peace to love and serve you and the world you created. This is our prayer…”** People: “Thanks be to God.”
  + Leader: **“We invite you, Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to draw us to yourself, to help us ‘taste and see’ your goodness all around us. This is our prayer…”** People: “Thanks be to God.”
  + Leader: **“You created us in your image God—please help us to know and follow your voice. This is our prayer… ”** People: “Thanks be to God.”

Follow Up Email: This is a template that can be used to craft a follow-up email from the kickoff session.

*Friends,*

*It was lovely to see/meet most of you this afternoon! I’m attaching the handout from the spiritual practice we did today—I hope it was a meaningful way for you to connect with God and creation.* *If you were not with us today, I hope you’ll consider trying this at home! In addition, here’s a link to the song we sang “Praise the God of All Creation.” We’ll gather again on Zoom on [DATE] at [TIME]. I’ll send a reminder and Zoom link the day before.*

*Blessings,*

*Sarah*

# Session Resources:

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Method <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQg7seUGDUc>