

Through a Mirror Dimly

Considering Public Violence, Disbelief and Faith with Youth -

A session to help youth talk, pray and think about life and faith following a violent situation.

Session Plan

60 - 90 minutes; adaptable for small or large groups

Suggestions for Use:

- As a youth group gathering
- In two parts (e.g. two consecutive Sunday mornings)
- Shorten and use for Church School
- For a mid-week Bible Study or lunch time gathering

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 8-13

Make a big poster or banner with this scripture.

“Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Preparation and Shopping:

- 5-7 full length mirrors (inexpensive and available at any discount store)
- Newsprint, markers, tape
- Prepared signs and questions for the Mirror Graffiti, the "God in your time" Response Poster, the Personal/Small Group reflection and the Closing Prayer.
- Bibles
- Art supplies (play dough, clay, watercolors, paper, water in containers, paper towels)
- Music and speaker (Create a playlist or search for a playlist of instrumental music)
- Wax pencils, Wet Erase markers, or peel off china markers (office supply stores/craft store/amazon.com)
- Window cleaner and paper towels (several bottles is helpful if available)

Arrival

Participants should enter the room as music is playing.

Mirrored Graffiti

Place full length mirrors (5-6) around the room. Write or print open ended questions on pieces of colored paper and tape to the tops of mirrors. Use overhead markers or china markers for participants to write their answers onto the mirrors. (You can also use newsprint for the graffiti responses).

Open-Ended "Mirror" / Graffiti Questions:

- *I don't understand why ...*
- *The ____ this week makes me feel ...*
- *I want to know ...*
- *Something I have never understood is ...*
- *God is ...*
- Create your own questions.

Gathering

Spend a few minutes preparing the group for the session. It might be helpful to agree as a group that different opinions and experiences should be honored - to agree that this lesson deals with difficult issues and sometimes discussions and lessons like this can be heated as we listen to different opinions. Agree to listen "without edits" (a practice of listening to someone and truly listening - not simply waiting to respond), to respect opinions and differences. Open with a prayer - asking God for a time of peace in the midst of chaos and doubt; a time of unity and a glimpse of hope in a dim circumstance.

Questions and Answers

Using newsprint and a new mirror (or whiteboard or chalkboard) ask the group to list their questions about the violent acts that have taken place and the conversations, issues and grief that continue in the aftermath. Put ALL questions the youth have on the board. It is important to emphasize to the group that NO question is out of order or dumb. The leader can and should admit that they don't have answers or answers that are sure to help but they will all work together to share their sadness, anger, numbness, whatever is being experienced and to let go or allow more time for those they cannot answer today.

Going through the question list identify who can answer which questions and how. Some might need some time, or an assigned person to seek the answer. If internet access is available, it might be helpful to access particular websites. Resources from PDA (Presbyterian Disaster Assistance) and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program are available on the Presbyterian Mission Agency website. New York Times, TED Talks, and the United Nations website may also be helpful.

On a separate sheet of newsprint or on another mirror - work your way through the question list and try to answer the questions as best you can. Work toward a consensus or group agreed answer. List the answers in order of the questions. For those questions that an answer cannot be located or agreed upon - write the phrase "GOD, IN YOUR TIME, HELP US TO SEE CLEARLY" - **use a different colored marker for these answers.**

Personal Reflection (Smaller Group Conversation)

**If you have the time/inclination you can make handouts with these questions or provide each participant with a small journal or composition notebook (very inexpensive and available at Walgreens, CVS, Target, etc.).*

In small groups (2 or 3) have the participants think about and then share their answers to the any or all of the following questions:

- Is it possible to understand why someone would want to carry out such an act of violence?
- Should we, as people of the Christian faith, take action to decrease violence? Why or why not?
- What were your immediate thoughts or reactions to hearing the news of this incident?
- With your small group - come up with three things that YOU can do (either as individuals, as a small group or as a church).

Make a Symbol

Using the craft materials (beads, pipe cleaners, clay, watercolors) have each person (while still in the small groups) make a symbol of their stories that they shared above. It might be a question mark, or a particular figure, a bracelet, or a simple picture / painting. It is also a powerful visual reminder of the group's conversation if you choose one specific medium to work with. For example: everyone has pastel crayons and paper, or everyone has origami paper, or everyone has embroidery thread to make bracelets. Unity and communal expression is visually evident when everyone uses the same materials. Or, if you have a group with lots of different types of learners - the variety might be more helpful. Either way - the activity is about the personal meaning and NOT artistic talent.

Option: Give everyone the same art supply (clay or play dough, watercolors) while they are sharing - encourage them to paint or mold something that expresses what they feel or have experienced.

*Note: Some young people are extremely challenged or threatened by anything connected to arts and crafts. It is perfectly fine to give them the option to pass. They can still participate in the sharing without making something. They might also just enjoy doodling or manipulating the clay. Small journals or sheets of paper with pens can be helpful for those who do not wish to use art materials. An area for silent reflection – perhaps around a low table with candles to light as they pray or meditate.

Scripture

Read the passage from 1 Corinthians. Ask the group to close their eyes and listen carefully. Read the passage aloud. After the first reading - ask the participants to share a word or phrase that they might remember or that “stands out” for them. Something that they were drawn to. After several people have had a chance to share - read the passage again. After the reading ask the group to share anything new that they heard. In this second reading - what stood out to the group?

After the groups have had a chance to share their answers - invite them to open their bibles and turn to the passage. Allow time for them to find the page. Invite them to read the passage one more time - this time in their same small groups. Ask them to sit quietly for a few moments, in silence, after they have read the passage in their groups.

Scripture Reflection

In their small groups - have the participants answer the following questions:

- What do you think was the main point of this passage for the original readers?
- What is the most important part of this passage for YOU today?
- Are there similarities or places of “intersection” between this passage and the personal story or stories you shared previously?
- What is the message that would be helpful for the world? For those who are victims or families of victims? For the church?
- Why do some questions have to go unanswered?

Closing Prayer

Using the mirrors, some window cleaner, and paper towels - clean away the questions. Place the cleaned mirrors around the room and invite the group to participate in an interactive closing prayer. On the top of each mirror tape a piece of paper with the following phrases:

- God, we pray for...
- God, forgive us for...
- God, help us to see...
- God, you are...
- God, we need to ...
- God, why ...

Play some quiet music and invite the group to wander through the mirrors and use the dry erase markers or china markers to write their prayers on the mirrors. When they are done have them come to the center of the room, or back to a table or central location and stand together.

Close the group with following prayer:

God of faith, hope and abiding love - we know that we will never possess all knowledge, or wisdom. Grant us the peace to rest in your will. Grant us the courage to follow your way. Give us enough faith that we will seek to live like your son and our redeemer, Jesus Christ. Give us enough hope that we will look for your Spirit among the ruined, destroyed, broken, and unclear. Remind us of YOUR love - the love that brought us to you, the love that can heal us now, the love can take the place of confusion, the love that can answer the unanswerable questions. We want to see clearly but we will trust in you. In your name we pray - Amen.

Leave the mirrors around the room and invite the youth to add their prayers anytime they wish. Covenant together as a group to note the prayers each week and take time to offer them to God.

Writer: Gina Yeager-Buckley / Mission Associate – Presbyterian Youth and Triennium