

Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

Ps. 1

1 John 5:9–13

John 17:6–19

Prayerful Discernment

Goal for the Session

Tweens, through the story of the disciples choosing a new apostle, will highlight the importance of prayer when seeking to discern the will of God.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” A. Katherine Grieb

Luke reports the community’s prayer, calling upon God as the one who knows everyone’s heart. They cast lots, an ancient biblical practice for determining God’s will, and when the lot fell on Matthias, he was “added to the eleven apostles” (v. 26). In summary, the community, under Peter’s leadership, took extraordinary measures to ensure that there were twelve apostles again before Pentecost. Why did they do that? Later on, when other members of the original Twelve died, this replacement action was not repeated. The deliberate reconstitution of the Twelve seems to have occurred in preparation for the reception of the Holy Spirit of the Lord, who had chosen exactly twelve to symbolize the restoration of the tribes of Israel.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Noel Leo Erskine

The first chapter of Acts is about transition and change in the leadership of the church. According to the first fourteen verses, Jesus took forty days in which he taught the disciples the mysteries of the kingdom of God as he prepared them to assume leadership for the church. It is instructive for us that the choice of Matthias was in the context of prayer. Prayer is the appropriate context for decision making as the church deals with issues of leadership. Prayer signals that the church looks beyond itself for guidance and direction.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jeffrey C. Peterson-Davis

This story of the selection of Matthias pushes us to ask questions about how we discern the will of God. This story stands at an important crossroad for the first disciples. Jesus has ascended, and they are about to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the crucible of the uncertainty in those days, the disciples remained faithful in prayer and in seeking the will of God. May it be that we would be sustained by that same focus in the uncertainty of these days.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara K. Lundblad

Justus lost the toss of the dice, but there is no indication that he lost his faith in Jesus. As the book of Acts unfolds, there are hundreds of unnamed people who pass on the story of Jesus. Most of them are even less well known than Justus. Without these ordinary folks, Peter and Paul would have remained quite lonely and ineffective in bearing witness “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The people listening to today’s sermon are there because ordinary people told somebody about Jesus. Thanks be to God!

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens are approaching the age when they have to start making important choices, some of which will affect their future. They are also starting to develop their own belief systems and need opportunities to make their own decisions about all kinds of things. As they learn this skill, they may be afraid of making a mistake or a poor choice. The session today provides the opportunity to point these young learners to the gift of prayer as a valuable resource in decision making—both as individuals and as a community of faith.

Loving God, deepen my understanding and guide me in prayer as I strive to discern your will at work in my life and in the life of my church. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ white cloth
- ☐ gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 23, 24, 31
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ sticky notes, pens
- ☐ bowl of water
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 1 on card stock, scissors, tape, colored pencils
- ☐ option 2: cardboard circles, aluminum foil circles (see Gathering); yarn, scissors, glue, pencils with erasers, tape
- ☐ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, recording of reflective music, music player

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you will be using option 2 in Responding, cut 7-inch circles of cardboard and 9-inch circles of aluminum foil, one of each per learner.

As tweens arrive, greet each by name, saying, “(Name), the Lord is risen!” As needed, prompt learners to respond, “Christ is risen indeed!”

Invite tweens to work together to arrange the white cloth in the center of your meeting space, placing the candle on it and arranging gold or yellow streamers in a festive design. Announce that this is the seventh, and final, Sunday of the Easter season. As you light the candle, say, “The light of the risen Christ is with us!” Pass the candle from person to person, inviting tweens, as they hold the candle, to tell about a high point or low point during the past week. Offer this prayer:

God of love, send your Spirit to teach us more about your love for all and how that might change the way we live. Amen.

Display Color Pack 23, and allow a quiet moment before asking:

- ✠ Which way would you go? How would you choose?
- ✠ What kinds of decisions do you have to make each day?
- ✠ What kinds of things do you think about before making a decision?
- ✠ What are some really important decisions that people make during their lifetimes?

Comment that today’s passage is about a time when the people in the early church had to make an important decision.

EXPLORING

Remind the group that the stories for the previous two sessions have come from the book of Acts, which tells the story of how Jesus' early followers were led by the Spirit to take the good news of Jesus into the world. Explain that today you are going back to the beginning of the book of Acts. Ask tweens to find Acts 1:15–17, 21–26 in their Bibles. Show Color Pack 24, and read through the time line up to Day 40 to help tweens visualize where this passage is located within the larger story of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the beginnings of the church.

In Jesus' time, casting lots was a common way to make a decision. This was probably done with marked stones or twigs, or may have been like drawing names or "drawing straws." The people believed that God controlled the results, and therefore controlled the choice.

Read aloud Acts 1:15–17, 21–26. Discuss the story, referring to the sidebar information as is helpful:

- ✠ What do you find surprising about this story?
- ✠ Why was Judas no longer an apostle (Matthew 27:3–5)? Why do you think the remaining apostles thought it was important to replace Judas?
- ✠ Read Acts 1:21–22. Do you agree with the criteria for choosing a new apostle? Why or why not?
- ✠ How do you understand the process of casting lots? When have you used a process like this? What are the advantages and disadvantages of making a choice in this way?
- ✠ Why do you think the apostles prayed before they cast the lots?

In Jesus' day, the number twelve was considered to be a number of completeness and perfection. Jesus had chosen *twelve* apostles, and perhaps they felt they needed to appoint a replacement for Judas to make their number complete again.

Show Color Pack 23. Distribute sticky notes and pens, and ask tweens to write their answers to the following questions on the sticky notes:

- ✠ What are some important decisions our church is facing?
- ✠ What are some important decisions tweens in your school are facing?

Place the sticky notes around the picture and allow time for everyone to read them. Discuss:

- ✠ How might we include prayer in our decision making? What difference might that make?

Invite tweens to create a short, simple clapping rhythm. Read aloud one of the choices listed on the sticky notes, then say, "It's your decision; you decide." Have tweens respond with their clapping rhythm, followed by shouting the words, "Pray first!" Repeat this for several of the choices listed.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Decision Cube** The disciples prayed first and then drew lots to make a difficult decision. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Decision Cube) made on card stock. Ask tweens to decorate the sections of the cube with colored pencils, then cut around the outside of the cube shape and fold on the dotted lines to form the cube, securing the edges with tape. Explain that when facing a decision, Jesus' followers can pray for the Spirit's guidance. This cube can help their thinking. Offer the example of deciding whether to spend one's savings on a new smartphone. Toss the cube and think of answers to the

question that comes up. Have tweens suggest other scenarios where they may need to make a decision, then toss the cube and discuss possible answers for that situation. Wonder together how the Spirit can work through human conversation and actions to guide and lead in God's ways.

2. **Prayer Reminder** Tweens can follow in the footsteps of the early church by praying for the Spirit's guidance in the decisions they have to make. Guide tweens in making a prayer reminder, following these steps: Print the words *PRAY FIRST* in the middle of a cardboard circle. Doodle a simple border around the edge of the circle. Keep the design simple, as fine details will not show through. Glue pieces of yarn over the letters and patterns. After the glue dries, place a circle of aluminum foil over the cardboard circle. Press the foil down carefully over the yarn or string, so the words and patterns show through. Smooth out plain areas with the eraser end of a pencil. Fold excess foil over the edges of the cardboard and secure it with tape. Tape another piece of yarn to the back of the circle to act as a hanging loop. Encourage tweens to hang their plaques where they will see them and be reminded of the importance of prayer.

EASY
PREP

Every Time I Feel the Spirit

Refrain:

Every time I feel the Spirit
moving in my heart I will
pray.

Yes, every time I feel the
Spirit
moving in my heart I will
pray.

Upon the mountain, when
my Lord spoke,
out of God's mouth came
fire and smoke.
Looked all around me, it
looked so fine,
till I asked my Lord if all was
mine. (*Refrain*)

Jordan River, chilly and cold,
it chills the body but not
the soul.
There is but one train upon
this track.
It runs to heaven and then
right back. (*Refrain*)

3. **Finger Labyrinth** Today's Bible story reminds disciples that prayer is an important part of discovering which path God wants them to take. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Finger Labyrinth) and ask a volunteer to read the information there. Invite tweens to find a comfortable place in your meeting space and use the labyrinth as described on the resource sheet for a time of personal prayer. Play some reflective music, such as "Blessed to Be a Blessing" (track 3 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Option: If your church has a labyrinth on a floor or in a garden, make arrangements for your group to use it.

CLOSING

Gather the group and light the candle. Place a bowl of water on the white fabric. Dip your hand in the water, letting water splash back into the bowl, as you say, "In baptism, we are called by Christ Jesus into a new and changed life." Invite tweens to take turns dipping a hand in the water as they name one thing they have learned about being open to the leading of the Spirit.

Close by singing "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" (Color Pack 31; track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

Extinguish the candle.

Say good-bye to each learner with a blessing: "(Name), God bless you in all you do this week!"

Decision Cube

	In what ways does my decision follow Jesus' example?	
How will my decision honor God's loving ways?	How will I feel about my decision tomorrow?	How might my decision hurt someone?
	In what ways does my decision show God's love?	
	What will happen if my decision is to do nothing?	

May 12, 2024
Prayerful Discernment

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

Finger Labyrinth



Labyrinths help people settle their bodies and quiet their thinking, to make it easier to talk to and listen to God. Sit in a quiet place and slowly trace your finger along the path of this finger labyrinth toward the center. As you move along the path, spend time thinking about the choices you might have to make in the coming week. While you're in the center of the labyrinth, talk to God about any decisions that are particularly pressing. Ask God to help you discover the best path to take. Follow the path out from the center, praying to God to guide you and trusting that it will be so.