



The 8 Bowl of Life Ceremony

A multi-sensory lesson to demonstrate the heightened awareness one acquires in experiencing the every day trials of life.

ENHANCER OF JOY

Justice Seeking

DURATION

60 minutes

LESSON DEVELOPED BY

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GOAL

Justice Seeking is Joy Seeking

TIPS TO PREPARE

- Review instructions in Engage section
- Listen to suggested songs
- Create spoons in groups of 8
- Place other artifacts on table with bowls for enhanced aesthetics

MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- Music player
- Recording of India Arie's "Beautiful Day" from album Testimony Vol. 1
- "Ella's Song" by Sweet Honey In The Rock from the album Breaths
- Rectangle table for bowls
- 8 small tasting spoons per participant
- 1 small bowl or container for each food element: salt, lime juice, water, red pepper, honey, olive oil, cider vinegar, & coconut
- 8-Bowl Reflection hand-outs

- Pens, napkins
 - Business card size papers (1 for each)
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SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

- Chairs in semi-circle with table at the opening
 - Suggested music playing
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SCRIPTURE FOCUS

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
 - Isaiah 43:2
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Purpose

1. Participants associate the mutuality of life's joy and challenges as a sign of maturity/growth
 2. Participants relate the mutuality of life to the mutuality of justice
 3. Participants consider how community or church life can aid or hinder one's ideas about the joys and challenges;
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Further Study

Conceptual Background for the Ritual and Education

Human development is categorized and understood through socially constructed markers. Given the social group some of these markers are similar and some are quite different. For

example, birth among many social and cultural groups is considered a key human marker consequently it is acknowledged in a variety of ways. In the context of many African indigenous cultures, birth is a welcoming of the Spirit (Some, 1999, 2003). It is a marker that a spirit is coming from the heavens with a particular purpose to becoming human. It is celebrated and cherished. In the practice of community, children then become integral to the well-being of the village. So much so that you may here a greeting in South Africa which translates “How are the children?”. If the children are fine, then the village is fine. The work with people of African descent to reconnect, re-member who they are is the primary reason for the creation and practice of the eight-bowl ceremony in the early 1970s. The 8-bowl ceremony is applied to significant human markers such as birth, adolescent to adulthood, marriage, pregnancy and even the physical death and return of the soul as a function of being community. This is an educational activity and experiential ritual that presents a wholistic view of flourishing as life experiences of joy and challenge to be complimentary not oppositional. There is a time, a season for all things. How they are recognized and addressed can be significantly informed our relationships, families and community and church.

Some, Sobonfu (1999) *Welcoming Spirit Home: Ancient African Teachings to Celebrate Children and Community*, New World Library Calif.

Introduction for Leaders

Rituals and why we have them in our Christian context are often times associated with the ideals of our faith more so than the realities of the faith. One sign of maturity is when we see more of life to be mutually inclusive than mutually exclusive. The Biblical text in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 affords the participants to reflect upon the “wisdom” or “sight” gained through the seasons and situations of life. It situates the mutuality of inhibitors and enhancers of joy as a function of life- “the beautiful day” (a song by India Arie used in the lesson). This lesson uses a multi-sensory approach (sight, sound, taste) to demonstrate the heightened awareness one acquires in experiencing the trials and the joys of life and, that we do not experience them by ourselves but in relationship with others. The reflection questions in the lesson as well as the ritual itself connects the mutuality of life to the mutuality of justice: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (Dr. Martin L. King). The lesson component to Gather declares the mutuality of life seasons as all in God’s time and all beautiful in God’s sight (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). The section of Engage has two exercises (Bowl Ceremony & Who I Am) that can be carried out in small groups (or whole group of 10-15). The Reflect section (JustPeace exercise) has participants consider how can people struggling against inequities and injustices see a beautiful day? How can we as a community of faith journeying in the seasons of challenge see

a beautiful day? (Isaiah 43:2)

Gather

Gather: (5 minutes)

While the song, "Beautiful Day" plays everyone extends a welcome and greets everyone in the room.

Activity 1: Call to Community Litany and Opening Prayers

Leader: Let Us Say Aloud Responsive Litany of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Leader: There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

Participants: A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

Leader: A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

Participants: A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

Leader: A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

Participants: A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

Leader: A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

Participants: a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Leader: What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race.

All: God has made everything beautiful in its time.

Leader: Let Us Pray

Engage

Engage: (40 minutes)

Introduction: The eight-bowl ceremony originated from the justice movement of African Americans in the 1970s. It demonstrates the importance of including experiences of challenge as a part of the joy formula rather than a deterrent to the joy. The seasons of life experiences are associated with each food element in the bowls. The eight bowls serve as an enhancer by pointing out that these experiences are shared by everyone in community. We all taste each element of life in the bowl. The 8 bowl is an experience of communion in which each life experience is associated as a common “bowl” known to the youngest and to the eldest. The tasting of the elements in the bowl aids in recognizing that the experience of adversity or the pleasant experience is not unique to any one social location. Inhibitors to joy make look different from one generation to the next however, the taste of that adverse experience is the same from one generation to the next.

Activity 2: The 8 Bowl Ceremony

Note: Distribute tasting spoons and center the eight bowls on the table so that participants can see them. Ask everyone to review the hand-out on the meaning of each bowl. This can be read aloud or silent as it is said aloud by the leader during the actual ceremony. The leader should pause between each bowl to provide ample time for everyone to taste the food element.

The leader instructs participants to take a taste from the bowl as it is passed around using their spoons. One spoon is used for each bowl. Leader(s) may read the description of each element or choose participants to read each element. Depending upon the size of the group, there can also be groups of readers for each bowl of life.

1. Cider Vinegar – Appreciation for Tradition and Family: To learn strength in racial/ethnic pride, commitment to household and extended family, reverence, value and appreciation for the foundation for life chances which those who came before having laid.
2. Honey – Joy in Relationships: To learn to appreciate the sweetness and goodness of life experienced through positive interpersonal relationships.
3. Lime – How to Overcome Bitterness: To develop a sense of expectation that betrayal by human beings will occur in life (healthy paranoia) and to learn to retain dignity, composure and self-worth even when feeling hurt by the words, actions or inaction of other people.
4. Salt Wisdom and Balance in Making Life Choices: To learn flexibility, creativity and moral balance in making choices and decisions.

5. Red Pepper (chili) – Resilience in Critical Situations: To learn to expect the unpredictable circumstances in the form of crisis situations and tragedy and to develop the ability to be resilient in the face of crisis.
6. Water – Willingness to be Renewed and Changed: To learn spiritual depth, and to know “where your help comes from,” and how to go about receiving spiritual renewal.
7. Oil – Reliance on Community Power: To learn to move towards inevitable death with confidence and grace. This is a confidence born out of the learned appreciation of the power of a cohesive family and community where each person is valued for their contribution. To be able to reflect this confidence and grace as wisdom and encouragement to the youth as an example of true power.
8. Coconut – Assurance of Inevitable Blessings: To learn reliance on One greater than one’s self and with age and wisdom to recognize your blessings and good luck as life benefits which have nothing to do with your own intelligence, skill, or power, but is solely due to the unpredictable goodness of the God.

Activity 3: Who I Am In This Season?

Note: After the ceremony is complete by everyone tasting the elements and hearing the explanation, each participant writes a phrase to complete the following (printed on the bowl handout) choosing a bowl element to identify with by sharing aloud their response, I know the season of “salt,” “red pepper,” “honey,” etc., because....

The leader should allow two minutes for participants to gather their thoughts about their own experiences and the elements of the bowls. Soft music without singing aids to center thoughts and ideas about the bowl. Stories of Bible characters associated with the life element such as Moses who experienced critical red pepper times as well as water times or Abraham and Sarai. Additionally, to support thinking about these elements can be the stories of their contemporaries who faced joys and challenges.

Reflect

Reflect: (10 minutes)

The leader shares that there are realities of injustice and inequity that are more prevalent for some than for others. These injustices and inequities are continual inhibitors of joy. These inequities keep some of us continually tasting the same bowls!. Imagine now we are with

those who continually face critical red pepper times without water or constantly given lime and never honey.

The Reflect handout uses Handout 2.

The leader asks the question? “Can you think of some of those people?” If you can write on the small card who they are and put that card on the table with the 8 bowls (small business cards are distributed). While the music “We Who Believe in Freedom” plays, think of a group or a condition where there is no or very little support for the life seasons.

Discussion on what was placed on the cards and why are shared by the participants.

Questions:

1. How can people struggling against inequities and injustices see a beautiful day?
 2. How can we as a community of faith despite the season of challenges see a beautiful day
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Send Forth

Send Forth: (5 minutes)

Leader: We have an opportunity to bring a different season into the lives of those we encounter. It begins right now with how we embrace the seasons we are in and those of whom we know and care about. Our closing affirmation is Isaiah 43: 2. Can we turn to someone and repeat these words to one another:

When you face stormy seas, I will be there with you with endurance and calm; you will not be engulfed in raging rivers. If it seems like you’re walking through fire with flames licking at your limbs, keep going; you won’t be burned.

Isaiah 43.2 (Voice translation)