

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Youth in this age group love to discover things. In many ways, they work hard to make discoveries every day. They may not be aware of it and they might deny it, but they are curious and want to understand themselves and the world. Be gentle with them as they push back at your suggestions to do certain things. Given the chance to complete an activity with a group, they will forget their embarrassment and have fun. These youth might be ready to question everything you ask, but that means they really do want some answers. Most of all, when you trust and believe in these youth, they will return that trust to you.

About this Exploration

The concepts of blessing and letting go are not new to us. We see them in the natural world, and we experience them in our lives all the time. How we choose to relate to them, however, makes all the difference. In this Exploration we will discover how others learned to let go, thereby opening space for something new to emerge in their lives, and how they were able to find the blessing in both the challenges and the joys of life. As we explore this faith practice, we will consider the implications of blessing and letting go within our communities, churches, and the world. We may discover the freedom available to us when we are able to both embrace and release in a world of constant transition.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Samuel 16:1-23
Ephesians 3:14-20

Leader Preparation

Find a place to sit quietly as you prepare for these discovery activities. Pour some salt, sugar, or fine sand on a small plate (enough so you can push it around with a finger). Draw some paths through the crystals. As you do, consider ways God might guide you along the way. Make crossing paths and take random turns as you come to a new path. Imagine God providing you many different paths to discover along the journey of your life. Thank God for the chance to try new things, to learn new things about yourself, to find new ways to experience faith, and, in these activities, to share all that with others.

Prayer: Thank you, Creator God, for the many paths in the life of faith. Inspire me to lead these young people in their discovery of the many facets of blessing and letting go that surround them each day. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Blessed Fall (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Blessings come in all shapes and forms. In this activity, youth will accomplish a physical task while thinking about the blessings of everyday life. Consider your own life. Make a list of things you could identify as blessings. Then consider (if you haven’t already) this group of youth. How are they a blessing for you? Imagine the feelings you have of letting this group go as the group time comes to a close. Look at both sides of blessing—one person offers and another receives. How does that affect your view of blessing in daily life? Pray for God’s wisdom as you share blessings with these youth.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Distribute Bibles and ask youth to turn to Ephesians 3:14–20. Ask for volunteers to read this text aloud. After the reading, ask youth what it means to be filled with the fullness of God. See if anyone agrees that to trust God is to be blessed by God.

Form pairs, with both in each pair about the same height. Demonstrate a simple trust fall, in which one person stands behind the other with both hands up at their partner’s shoulder height. When ready, he or she says, “Ready.” The person falling should cross both arms and lock both knees, and when ready say, “Falling.” The person in front then falls backward to be gently caught by the other. This should be done from a short distance at first (six inches), but then the distance can be gradually increased. It’s possible some youth will be familiar with this activity. Together, talk about how this falling exercise is like letting go and trusting another. This happens any time a person trusts God to meet a human need. After trying this a few times, switch the commands to “Blessing” and “Letting Go.”

Ask youth to consider ways that God blesses them in their daily lives. Make sure the group understands a blessing to be something like a gift from God. Talk about what it means to fall into God’s arms to receive those blessings. Challenge youth to consider the simple things of each day as blessings to discover. With each trust fall, encourage youth to think hard about possible blessings. Try to keep the pace slow and steady and thoughtful. If you have more time, make a list for all to see of the many blessings God provides.

Close this activity with a discussion, asking the following questions:

- What blessings are easy to see and receive?
- Which blessings are not so easy to see and receive?
- What does it mean to trust God when times are good?
- How about when times are tough?

2 Cut and Run

Leader preparation: Imaging a world without some specific thing is difficult to do for people of any age. This activity challenges youth to consider the possibility of going without, but in a fun relay. As the activity progresses, challenge youth to go deeper with their thoughts as they are able. Combine the fun of the physical part of the activity with the test of thinking beyond the ordinary. They can do it with your encouragement.

Blessing and Letting Go

with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes. with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Write the following statement on each of two index cards: “If I never had . . . , I would still be blessed because . . .”

Supplies:

- 2 index cards
- markers and newsprint

Post two sheets of newsprint at one end of your meeting space and place markers by each one. Form two teams, and have both teams line up at the other end of the meeting space, each team across from a piece of newsprint. Explain the activity: The first person in each line is to take an index card and race to the newsprint, write the two words that they would use to fill in the blanks of the statement on the newsprint, and then run back to the line and give the index card to the next person in line, who repeats the action. If you have a reluctant participant, make that person the referee and allow her or him the leeway to make up ridiculous rules and penalties during the relay. Congratulate the team that finishes first.

If you have time, mix up the teams and run the relay again, with youth writing different words.

Discuss what it might be like to choose to live without something. What benefits might come from a situation of living without something? What challenges might come? Remind the group that God has promised to work good in our lives, even in tough times.

3 Dig It Up

Leader preparation: This activity makes either a great outdoor lesson or a wonderful imagination exercise. Participants will remember that God has been blessing the Earth for a long time, but there has also been much loss along the way. It’s at least a bit daunting to think of what creation will be forced to let go of next. To be ready, participants can be aware and have a new perspective that includes finding the blessing in saying goodbye. Remember, too, that the joy of discovering new parts of creation offer hope for a wonderful life.

Supplies:

- outdoor space
- (optional) magnifying glasses

Ask youth to sit on the ground and arrange themselves in the shape of a square. Explain to the group that they have just been named the head biologists for a natural expedition to discover a new form of life in the space between them. Some super-smart scientist has figured out that this is the one place on Earth to make this discovery. If possible, give each participant a magnifying glass. As a group, discuss what it would mean to identify every living thing in the space inside the square, including things like a bird that landed there and the microscopic creatures that can’t even be seen with a microscope. Work together to make a list of all the things that may be living inside your square. Marvel at the complexity of creation—so many things in so little space. Once you’ve exhausted the list of things that might be there, speculate on what the one new discovery might be. Talk about whether or not it is really new—is it something that didn’t exist until this week, or has it existed since God first created it, but humans couldn’t perceive its presence?

Thank God for the beauty of nature and the joy of discovery. Remind the group that humankind has let go of thousands of creatures since the world started. Ex-

inction has removed many species from Earth. We were blessed with their presence and benefit from their fossils, but it makes us wonder what will be lost next. Ask participants to spend the next few days finding a way to be thankful for the blessings of the Earth. Remind them that they might discover something new one day, and they will have a chance to pass on that blessing, too.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Change for Change (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In many ways, youth experience more change in their first 18 years of life than during any other period. Finding God's grace in all that transition is part of today's activity. Make a list of all the things that create change in a young person's life—sports, moving, body, pets, friends, schools, and so on. Check your own memories around the important changes in your past. Consider your feelings then and now. What have you learned? What would you do differently? Remember, some youth won't really think they've experienced much change. You can help them find simple changes so they can participate in this activity. Then make sure you ask for God's guidance as you discern blessings in the middle of change

Supplies:

- writing paper
- pens or marker

Give a piece of paper and a pen or marker to each youth in the group. Tell them you are going to give them 15 seconds to think and 45 seconds to draw. Ask them to think about one change that has taken place in their lives (changing schools, moving, death of a grandparent, braces). After 15 seconds, tell the youth to draw, as fast as they can, what they think of when they think of this change. Encourage them to fill the whole piece of paper. Lines and splotches and stick figures will do. After 45 seconds, gather in a circle and ask youth to take turns holding up their papers and describing the change they drew about. Assure them that their art skills are not being judged. Give each youth a chance to talk about what it means to go through a significant change.

Next, have youth pile the drawings in the middle of the circle. Have the group stand in a circle with their backs toward the middle. Shuffle the papers and hand each youth a drawing and ask them to keep it out of sight as they sit down. Tell them you will give them 30 seconds to look at the drawing they have now (yes, a youth might have his or her own). Have each youth look at the picture for a quiet moment and think about a change in his or her life that seems to match the picture, or find something in the picture that reminds the person of a change in his or her life. Go around the group again and invite each young person to talk about this new drawing and the life change it reminds him or her of. Repeat this activity as often as time and interest allows.

Summarize the activity by asking the following questions:

- Why is change harder for some people than it is for others?
- Where might there be blessings in change? Where might there be difficulties?
- Why is it a challenge for people to let go of things the way they are?
- How can we help ourselves find blessings as we are facing change?

5 No More Grudges

Leader preparation: This activity calls for sensitivity and a willingness to hold a confidence. Youth will be asked to talk about holding grudges and discovering the blessing of asking for forgiveness. Take a minute to remember the feelings associated with being angry with someone and not wanting to let go of those feelings. Then take another minute to remember the benefits of asking for forgiveness and knowing that God's love is bigger than grudges. Spend time with the artwork "Forgiveness" and ponder what the artist might have been hoping to portray here. Ask the Spirit to work through the artwork and the creativity of the group.

Supplies:

- index cards, pencils
- scissors
- craft sticks
- tape or glue
- artwork: "Forgiveness" by Thierry Ona, <http://www.art.com/products/p12191417-sa-i2792541/thierry-ona-forgiveness.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6c47c0957fdb4b65a64ba2cbe037088f&searchstring=forgiveness>

Have "Forgiveness" by Thierry Ona on display as youth arrive. Draw their attention to it, and ask them to guess what the artist titled this painting. After a few moments of making guesses, tell the group that the picture is titled "Forgiveness." Invite conversation about why it might be called that.

Invite each youth to bring to mind a time she or he was mad at someone and did not want to make up right away. Without asking youth to reveal details about these situations, discuss grudges by asking:

- What were your feelings in that situation?
- What are some reasons people hold grudges?
- What would it feel like to let go of a grudge?
- In what ways might letting go of a grudge be a blessing to both the person who is holding the grudge and the person on the other end of the anger?

Ask youth to help you make a list of some reasons young people might hold grudges against one another. Then give each participant two index cards and two craft sticks. Have them look at the artwork "Forgiveness" again and copy the two characters—one on each card. Have youth cut out the figures and glue or tape each one to a craft stick. Form pairs, and give pairs three minutes to identify a grudge to act out between two people, using the drawings on craft sticks like puppets. Ask them to include forgiveness and reconciliation in their puppet plays. After pairs have prepared their skits, have each pair perform its play for the entire group. Invite group questions and reactions after each skit.

Encourage youth to play out a forgiveness scene in real life this week, especially in cases of a long-standing grudge.

6 Jesus' Farewell

Leader preparation: This is a chance to laugh and play with your group. Consider video recording the final presentation and showing it to others as a way of passing on the blessing to others. Keep in mind that Jesus' ascension into heaven

is a serious matter to us as Christians, though visually there is room for humor in this story. God works through laughter and story over and over again in the Bible. Take advantage of that to motivate youth to approach the Bible with an open mind and playful spirit.

Supplies:

- modeling clay or Play Dough
- wax paper
- craft sticks
- (optional) video camera

Give each youth a ball of modeling clay or Play Dough. It's fine if they make shapes or play with the clay. When everyone has arrived, read aloud the story from Luke 24:50–53 of Jesus ascending into heaven. Together, wonder about the disciple's feelings as Jesus was leaving them for the final time. Remind youth that the disciples had to let go of the thought that a living, human Jesus would be with them every day. Read Luke 24:50–53 again.

Bring out the craft sticks and extra modeling clay or Play Dough. Put strips of wax paper on the table, and ask the group to create a diorama or model of this story. Encourage them to include the earth and some idea of heaven and also to include other things that could have been there. Talk about what they are doing as they build the scene. Acknowledge the strangeness of the scene, with Jesus offering a blessing and then floating away. Emphasize Jesus' blessing as a final message to his friends before returning to God.

Ask a volunteer to use the model to retell the story, possibly video recording the narration.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Now It's Gone (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Youth will be asked to engage in quiet reflection in this activity, so be prepared for various possible reactions. You might want to consider ways to make the setting more comfortable, but it's not necessary. Trust that God has a plan for this activity that allows youth the freedom to express themselves and think through this activity thoroughly.

Supplies: None

Ask the youth about trips they have taken with family, school groups, or other youth organizations. Find out what they learned from their travels. Then talk about trips they would love to take someday. Have some fun dreaming and remembering.

Ask youth to find a comfortable position to relax while you read aloud the following.

Relax and know that God's Spirit is with you today. Remember a time when you traveled and learned something about a time or a place that you had not known before. Think of how exciting it is to experience something new. There's something special about newness. Picture a new place you loved vis

iting and something new you learned there. Focus on one new thing you experienced or learned. When you are ready, hold up one hand. (*Pause.*)

Good. Now do your best to remember all the details of what you have chosen. Consider what you saw, what you touched, what you smelled or tasted, what you heard. Take a moment to fully take it in. Now let it go. What would it mean if this were the last time you could ever have this memory? What would it mean for you to set this experience aside? How would you cope? Who would help you cope?

After a few quiet moments, invite youth to consider what it means to let go of a good memory. What might be the blessings provided through this experience? Pray together for God's help in understanding lessons learned though both positive and negative life events. Leave youth with the promise that God turns all things to good, just as flowers follow the sun throughout the day.

8 Blessed You

Leader preparation: In order to help youth understand the benefit of looking beyond themselves in service to others, it may be helpful to remind them of times when they have needed to lean on someone. In this activity, you'll have the chance to have fun with memories. Be prepared to talk about being rocked to sleep, sucking thumbs or fingers, using a pacifier, fighting with friends, playing games inside and outside, goofing around, and more. The better you consider your own memories of your youth, the better this activity will be.

Supplies:

- stuffed animals or small toys

Invite the youth on a journey back in time today. Ask them to listen carefully as you read aloud 1 Samuel 16:1–23. Ask: *What did it mean for David to be chosen by God? What memories do you think he carried into his new life as king?*

Put a pile of stuffed animals or small toys in the center of the circle. Ask one person to help arrange the objects so everyone can see them but no one can reach them (if possible). Now point to one of the items in the pile, and tell the group what you are looking at. Then tell the group a story from your own youth that this object brings to memory. Be as descriptive as possible and have fun. Say thanks to God for the blessing of that memory. Then go around the group and invite each young person to tell a story prompted by one of the toys. Ask each one to thank God for the blessing at the conclusion of his or her story.

Comment on how everyone in your circle has these kinds of stories. Although God may not be present in physical form, the blessings of memories remind us that God is with us always. Challenge youth to be aware of at least one new experience in the coming week that they want to remember. Remind them to look for the blessings in the new stories they collect. As a group, thank God for blessed memories.

9 A Little Song and Dance

Leader preparation: Help youth learn about sending one another out with a blessing. Learn the song "Shalom Chaverim," listening to it at the link below. Plan to lead this song or bring in a helper who can. You don't need a great voice to sing this round, just energy and enthusiasm.

Supplies:

- song: “Shalom Chaverim,” traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnn>

Teach youth the song by singing it through a few times. Offer the English translation of the words, noting that this is a song of blessing to sing to friends when they are leaving. Now sing the song as quietly as possible; then sing it as loudly as possible. Try singing it as a round.

Discuss the meaning of the song for a couple minutes. Remind them this joyful farewell can be sung at many occasions when someone is leaving. It’s a rouser for their journey. What a great reminder that letting go can often be a celebration. If you have time, get up and dance while you sing the song again. Have participants challenge one another with their dance moves, but keep singing. Create a Spirit-filled moment in this activity that will send the participants out with blessed joy

Reflect

Uncovering new truths might not be the work of this age group, but they can be surprising at times in their insight into the world and the life of faith. What discoveries arose out of these activities? Were there times when the discussion was so fun the time flew by? Did the activities spur questions that brought out the ideas of this faith practice? Where did you find yourself stuck or wondering? Make notes for the next time you use these activities. If some changes are obvious, write them down now, and if there were some particularly memorable moments, keep the notes here so you can enjoy them the next time you return

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The encounter with scripture for this age group is one of questions and surprises. Instead of a helpful or comforting answer book, older youth may perceive the scriptures as more of a puzzle to be solved or a source of wonder. Don't hesitate to point out the places where youth will say, "Really? That's in the Bible?" Make the scriptures come alive. This age group spends so much time in front of screens that it may be a challenge to keep them focused on the Bible. Be vigilant in engaging the scriptures and challenging youth, whose developmental tendencies are often selfishness and interrogation, to consider its relevance in their lives. God is not finished with this age group, and the scriptures can help, if given the chance. Consider using a contemporary version of the Bible, such as Eugene Peterson's *The Message* or the Contemporary English Version. Both can be found online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/>.

About this Exploration

The practice of blessing and letting go is integral to human existence, for to be alive is to experience change. The biblical narrative is, in large measure, the story of God's people and their history of leaving behind and journeying toward. Just as the Hebrew people are about to enter a new land, they must say goodbye to Moses and embrace a new leader. The end of one chapter often means the start of something new and completely different. We negotiate these times of transition by grieving the losses, letting go, and moving onto new adventures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called his disciples to let go of old understandings and embrace a way of life based on love and grace. As we grapple with the scriptures, we recognize that to live is to let go, to live fully is to bless and be blessed.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Matthew 5:43-48

Leader Preparation

On a piece of paper draw a circle for every participant in your group and for you. Write the names of the youth inside the circles, if you know them. Next, take your fingers and put them one by one on the circles, praying for each one: "Child of God, God bless you." Don't forget to give yourself a blessing. Then fold the paper as small as you can and close your hand around it. Take one minute to sit quietly and call on the Spirit's help to be a blessing as you prepare for these activities. In the silence, breathe slowly and close your eyes. Trust in the Spirit to be your ever-present guide. Repeat the touching of the circles, the speaking of the blessing, the folding, and the silence until you feel calm and ready to lead.

Prayer: Bless me, Holy One, as I prepare to lead this group of young people. Open our hearts to one another and to your Word. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Book of Books (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity will probably be challenging for most youth. Be prepared to encourage the group as they realize how difficult it is to put the books of the Bible in order. Work to make sure everyone participates. As you prepare to teach, recall that if the scriptures had been enough, God might not have needed to send Jesus. Help youth appreciate that faith is about Jesus and his mission, not just words on a page.

Before the session, print the name of each book of the Bible on a separate index card. On the backs of the cards with the names of books in the Old Testament, print "OT." On the backs of the cards with the names of books in the New Testament, print "NT."

Supplies:

- Bibles
- index cards, markers
- "Books of the Bible," Attachment: Activity 1

Have the index cards with the books of the Bible on them in the middle of the table or space as the group arrives. Ask participants to work together to put the cards in order. After they've struggled a while, point out the OT and NT on the backs of the cards so they can work on the Old Testament and the New Testament separately. When they are struggling again, give them the list of categories and first letters of the books of the Bible, Attachment: Activity 1. Finally, read aloud the list of books of the Bible, letting them correct their work.

After completing the task, gather the group and discuss the value of knowing about the book that is so important to their Christian faith. Invite them to tell what they have learned about the Bible, including how it is collection of books. Encourage them to tell about their favorite Bible stories. Comment that a good way to really get to know someone is to spend time with him or her; likewise, a good way to get to know more about faith is to spend time with the Bible. Challenge them to learn one new Bible story a week for a month. It's a blessing to know Bible stories, and the more participants know, the more blessed they will feel

2 Words Become More Words

Leader preparation: Comparing various Bible translations might encourage questions from youth. The purpose of this activity is to consider how new Bible versions may be a blessing and how it might be challenging to let go of an older version. Make sure you allow time for youth to consider how they have been blessed by the words of scripture that have been passed on through the generations.

Before the session, write each of these Bible references on a separate index card:

- John 13:33-35
- John 3:16-17
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
- Romans 8:38-39
- 1 John 4:7-9, Psalm 23.

Blessing and Letting Go

to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- a King James Version Bible, or copies of the KJV text for verses listed above (available at <http://www.biblegateway.com/>)
- Bibles in an assortment of versions
- index cards, pen

Give everyone a different version of the Bible and an index card. Ask each participant to look up the passages on her or his card and be prepared to read that passage to the group.

Gather the group and ask them how they feel when they hear a favorite song covered by someone other than the original singer or group. Ask them what it is like to go to a movie based on a favorite book.

Invite youth to read the verses they looked up. After each verse is read, read that same passage from the King James Version of the Bible. Invite youth to note the differences and similarities in the texts. Tell youth that sixty years ago, they probably would have read these passages from the King James Version of the Bible, because that was the Bible used in most churches at that time. Point out that it has been hard for some older people to let go of listening to the Bible in the King James Version.

Talk about the blessings that might come from reading the Bible in newer versions. *How might Christians be respectful of those who prefer the older versions and those who prefer the newer ones?*



3 Tweets from St. Francis

Leader preparation: This simple activity can be a lot of fun. Youth will make a piece of art come to life as they teach one another what it means to be a blessing. Be prepared to tell about the life of St. Francis, referring to this Wikipedia article as needed: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi.

Supplies:

- artwork: “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” by Giotto di Bondone, <http://www.art.com/products/p11724653-sa-i1350212/giotto-di-bondone-st-francis-of-assisi-preaching-to-the-birds.htm?sorig=cat&origid=0&dimvals=0&ui=b2c89647ba56409d894161743bb14f5d&searchstring=st.+francis+feeding+the+birds>

Show the artwork to the group, and tell them about the life of St. Francis. He has long been known as a priest associated with nature, and this piece of art shows him preaching to the birds. Many Christians consider St. Francis as the patron saint to all of nature. Tell your group that they will have a chance to bring this piece of art to life.

Ask for a volunteer to be the first “St. Francis.” As a group, think about what God might say to animals through someone like St. Francis. *How would God help the animals know they could be a blessing to other animals and to people?* Come up with some ideas, and let the first “St. Francis” imagine what she or he might say. Have the rest of the group assume an animal character. Make sure they think about what they are, and have them be ready to ask “St. Francis” whether or not they are a blessing. Carry out the scene like a television talk show. Have “St. Francis” talk to the animals, and have the animals ask questions. Change “St. Francis” several times, and work hard to keep the focus on how the animals are a blessing and how human beings can be a blessing to animals and be blessed by animals. At the end thank God for St. Francis and for each participant’s favorite animal.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Saying Goodbye (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This scripture activity puts blessing and letting go together as youth search the Bible for a few verses about saying goodbye, which always includes letting go and, often, blessing. Print each Bible reference on a separate index card:

Numbers 6:24–26	2 Timothy 4:6–8
2 Corinthians 13:11–13	1 Samuel 20:42
Genesis 24:55–67	Exodus 13:33–41
John 14:25–31	Ruth 1:6–14
Revelation 3:20–21	

On newsprint or whiteboard, print the following questions in a list:

- Who is saying goodbye to whom?
- What is the circumstance of the farewell?
- Of what are these individuals letting go? What might be the blessings for them?
- What is your favorite phrase or verse? Why?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- index cards, pens
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) highlighter pens

Initiate a conversation about saying goodbye by asking the following questions: *How many times do you think you said goodbye last week? How many of these situations are still clear in your memory? Why?*

Invite participants to tell stories of memorable goodbyes in their lives. Be ready to offer a story of your own. Be gentle with those whose grief is fresh. Assure the group that God’s presence is with you as you call on the Spirit to guide your thoughts and words.

Form pairs, and make sure each person has a Bible. Have each pair draw an index card or two. Ask participants to look up the verses, discuss the goodbye being said in the passage using the questions on the newsprint or whiteboard, and prepare to tell the group about it. As each pair reports on its passages, encourage all youth to look up the passage being discussed. They may want to highlight the favorite phrases or verses.

Summarize your conversation by asking: *What wisdom do these Bible passages offer you about saying goodbye?*

5 Sing a Song of Blessing

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the song “Beloved, Let Us Love One Another” by viewing the video given in the Supplies list. Enlist a musician to help if you need it. In this activity, participants will be blessed by learning a key passage in scripture while releasing some of their inhibitions. The more fun you have teaching this song, the more likely the youth are to have it in their memories

for years. Enjoy the fun, knowing the Spirit is at work through the music, rhythm, and sounds.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song: “Beloved, Let Us Love One Another,” <http://youtu.be/-bbKRBTggo4>
- device for accessing Internet
- (optional) children’s rhythm instruments

Tell youth that knowing scripture verses can be a blessing; offer an example of verses that have been meaningful to you. Music is an easy way to memorize scripture. Distribute Bibles and look up 1 John 4:7–8 together. Ask a volunteer to read the verses aloud, and then teach the song. Sing it through once or twice, and then join them in singing it in different ways:

- Accompany the singing with children’s rhythm instruments, if available.
- Clap along with the verses.
- Sing the song with everyone in the group lying on the floor face down.
- Stand in a circle to sing. When it’s time to clap, clap hands with a person across the circle.
- Stand in a circle and whisper the song into the ear of the person on the right.
- When it’s time to clap, snap fingers.
- Give each person (or pairs, if you have a large group) a drum part—clapping all the beats, clapping the off beats, clapping once at the beginning and once at the end, stamping feet.
- As time allows, have youth come up with their own suggestions for other ways to sing the song. If you have a chance to sing this song for other groups where you meet, go for it!



6 One Book at a Time

Leader preparation: This activity offers a presentation/review of some interesting Bible facts and offers your group the blessing of reading a whole book of the Bible, 3 John. Print a certificate of achievement for each group member, filling in “Reading 3 John” as the achievement. As you do this activity, remember that blessing comes from the way the Spirit works through the scriptures to invite questions and discussion. Call on the Spirit to reveal a simple truth for everyone as they experience God’s word. Know that as you open the Bible with youth, God will come to them through the experience.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- fine-tipped markers
- “Award Certificate,” Attachment: Activity 6

Make sure every participant has a Bible. Remind the group that the scriptures are God’s blessed gift to the whole world, and God’s people are called to know the scriptures. First, invite group members to quiz one another on basic Bible facts. If they are having trouble getting started, ask the following questions:

- How many books are there in the Bible? (66)
- How many testaments are in the Bible? (2)
- What is the shortest verse in the Bible? (John 11:35)
- What is the longest verse in the Bible? (Esther 8:9)

- Which books have the stories about Jesus? (the Gospels)
- Which book has the story of Creation? (Genesis)
- Which books have the Ten Commandments? (Exodus and Deuteronomy)
- Which is the shortest book in the Bible? (3 John)

Form pairs. Have them look up 3 John and read it aloud in unison as a pair. When pairs finish, congratulate the group on reading an entire book of the Bible. Tell the group that in a way John was saying good-bye in this last letter, which is like a shortened version of the end of the Gospel of John. Invite youth to identify the blessings that John names in this letter.

Distribute the certificates of achievement and have pairs complete them for one another by filling in the name and date and coloring the border. When the certificates are completed, collect them and distribute them individually with a blessing: “[Name], God bless you through the Word.” Tell youth that you would be happy to give each person 65 additional certificates, one for each book of the Bible they finish reading.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Bible Words (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Participants in this activity will consider blessings in scripture through a word activity. Given the chance, these young people will surprise you with interesting, insightful thoughts. Trust that the Spirit has something in mind through the use of words here. As their stories emerge, connect them to the activity, and show the group how blessed they are and how many blessings they receive.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- lined writing paper
- pens/pencils

Form pairs. Give each pair a sheet of writing paper and ask them to write the word BLESSING down the left hand margin, one letter per line. Challenge each pair to create a sentence that tells about God’s blessing to us in the Bible, using the letters in “BLESSING” as the first letters of the words in their sentence. For example: Beloved, Let’s Everyone Stand Strong In kNowing God. It’s okay if they stick in some short words to make sense of it. Ask each pair to read their sentence to the group, and applaud all efforts. Comment that whenever they think of the word “blessing,” they may remember today’s activity.

Distribute Bibles, and ask pairs to find Matthew 5:43–48. Have pairs read this passage and then make note of the challenges that Jesus sets forth. Compare answers with the entire group. Together, wonder about when a challenge can be a blessing. What blessings might come from Jesus’ instructions? Invite youth to consider the meaning of verse 48. Remind youth that perfection is only possible in Jesus. *So, how do Christians reach for that kind of perfection? When will we be made perfect?* Facilitate a discussion about what makes a blessing hard or easy for a person. End with a closing question. *What are some ways God will help us work toward being a blessing for others?*

8 What Good Is That?

Leader preparation: The mix of discussion and scripture verses here will help youth imagine the loss of a friend. The disciples were undoubtedly scared silly when Jesus ascended to be with God, but we know the rest of the story. Jesus left an advocate behind so we would never have to be afraid. Help the group know that being afraid is okay, and any scary time gives a chance to call on God's Spirit to help. And the Spirit will help.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask youth if they've ever heard the expression "It doesn't matter if you win or lose; it's how you play the game." Invite their opinion of the saying. Chances are, at least one participant will find this expression confusing or frustrating. Talk about a time in your own life when you lost something important (preferably a competition) and be honest about your feelings afterward.

Remind youth that the scriptures tell a different story. There's never even a chance to win, because Jesus has already won the victory for us. In baseball terms, Jesus hit a grand slam. In soccer, he scored the only goal in the shootout. In bowling, it's a perfect game. Ask: *Since we can't lose, what actions can we take to be a blessing to others—how can we "play the game" of discipleship well? How can we use our actions to come to the aid of a person facing a tough time? How can we use our words?*

Ask youth to turn to Acts 1:6–11. Have a volunteer to read the verses aloud. Invite a discussion about what meaning these verses have for Christians today. Since Jesus is no longer living on Earth, the work he started has to be carried on by others. That's where Christians come in—we are called to do the work of Jesus.

Invite the group to imagine how difficult it must have been to say goodbye to Jesus that day. The disciples didn't know when he'd come back, and 2,000 years later, people are still waiting. One kind of letting go is trusting that God's time might not match our own. Ask: *What might help us be more patient in waiting for answers from God? What things can we do to make the best use of our time while waiting for God's answers to our prayers? If we let go of waiting for the answers—trusting God completely—how will that affect how we live each day?*



9 Forward/Reverse

Leader preparation: This activity might bring back memories for some leaders. Memorizing verses comes and goes as a way of learning about the Bible. Keep in mind that a memorized verse is a lifelong tool. It may not be seen as important now, but when needed, Bible verses often come back as sources of strength in times of struggle. Encourage the youth in your group to trust the Spirit as they memorize parts of the Bible. The "sighs too deep for words" mentioned in Romans 8:26 may actually come from the places in our memories where we store up these verses. Youth will be blessed by the Spirit's intercessions because of your time with them in this activity, so have fun and enjoy God's promises coming to life in your group.

Make as many copies of the attachment as there are members in your group. Cut apart the squares with the words, and put these in an envelope for each person.

Supplies:

- "Romans 8:26," Attachment: Activity 9
- envelopes
- Bibles

Ask youth to turn to Deuteronomy 34:1–12 and read it silently. Ask for a show of hands to indicate which group members have heard this story before. Guide discussion by asking: *How might you use this story to talk with another person about what it means to have faith in God?* Comment that God can use the stories in scripture to help us witness to our faith.

Ask group members to recite any Bible verses they know by memory. When anyone recites a verse, give a round of applause. Explain that God can use memorized Bible verses to help us long after we first memorize them. It might not seem important to memorize a verse, but doing so can be kind of a lifesaver later. Tell the group that today they are going to memorize a Bible verse.

Form pairs for participants to help each other memorize the verse. Give each youth an envelope with the words of Romans 8:26. Have the partners work together to put the words in order. Then have each practice saying the verse by removing one word block each time the verse is said out loud. Other suggestions for memorizing include breaking the verse into smaller parts, creating a rhythm pattern such as a rap or song, or singing the words to a familiar tune.

After pairs have worked at memorizing the verse, spend some time sharing ideas about what makes memorizing easy or difficult. What advice might they offer one another about memorizing scripture? Finish the activity by discussing the meaning of Romans 8:26. Invite youth to offer their understanding of these words. *What comfort might this verse offer in the midst of a bad day or a time of crisis?*

Reflect

What a joy it is to open the scriptures to another person. There are more stories than most could ever begin to talk about in a lifetime. In what ways did these activities help God's story come alive for youth? Which activities seemed to fall flat? Make notes so that the next time you'll achieve the best activity plan.

Attachment: Activity 1

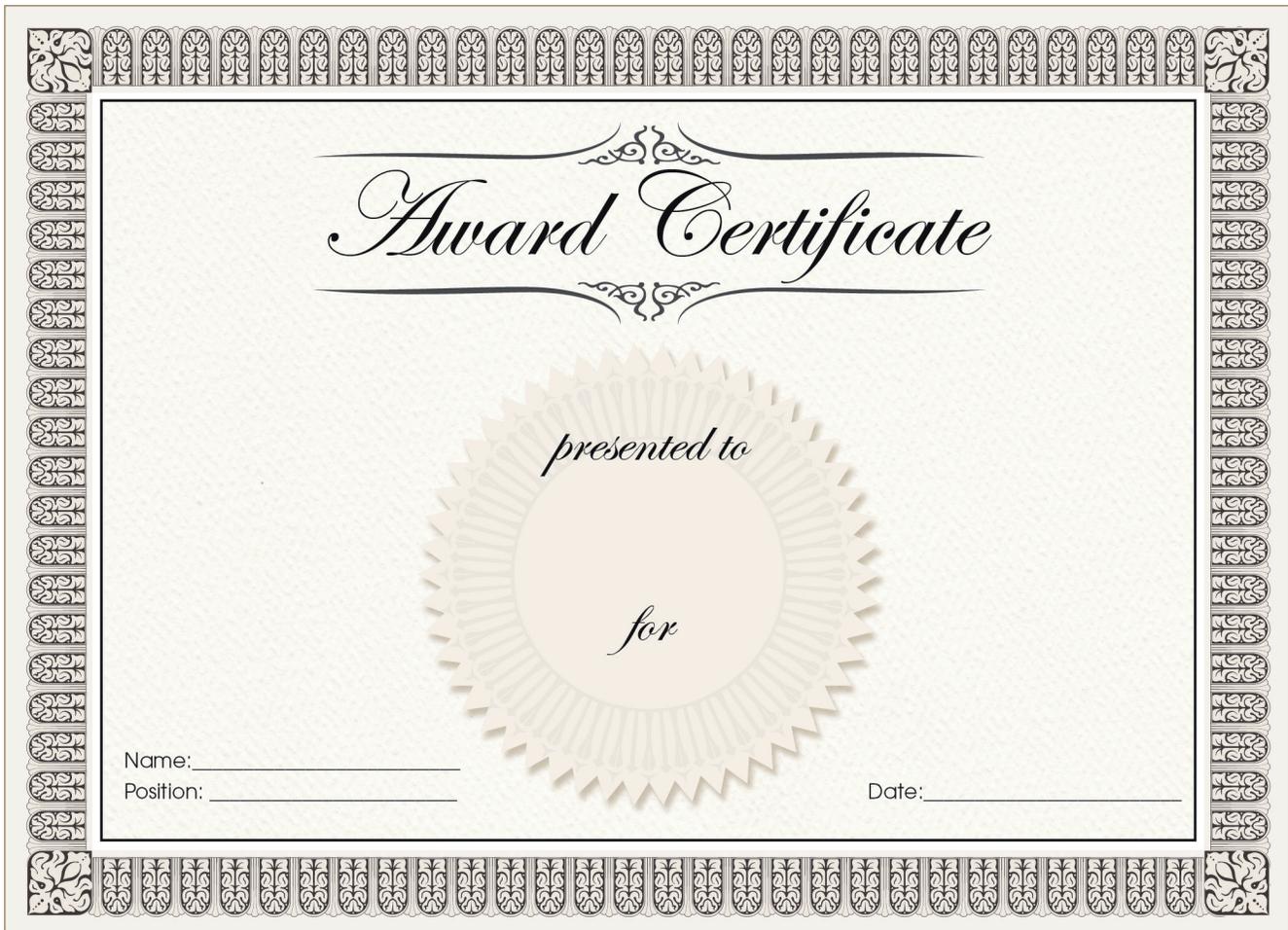
Books of the Bible

Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures)				
Law	History	Poetry and Wisdon	Major Prophets	Minor Prophets
G	J	J	I	H
E	J	P	J	J
L	R	P	L	A
N	1 S	E	E	O
D	2 S	S of S	D	J
	1 K			M
	2 K			N
	1 C			H
	2 C			Z
	E			H
	N			Z
	E			M

New Testament (Christian Scriptures)				
Gospels	History	Letters of Paul	General Letters	Prophecy
M	A	R	H	R
M		1 C	J	
L		2 C	1 P	
J		G	2 P	
		E	1 J	
		P	2 J	
		C	3 J	
		1 T	J	
		2 T		
		1 T		
		2 T		
		T		
		P		

Attachment: Activity 6

Award Certificate



Award Certificate

presented to

for

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Attachment: Activity 9

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

Likewise	the	Spirit	helps	us
in	our	weakness;	for	we
do	not	know	how	to
pray	as	we	ought,	but
that	very	Spirit	intercedes	with
sighs	too	deep	for	words.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

It might not go over so well to tell this group that “discipline” and “discipleship” are closely related words. As youth in this age group push boundaries and rules to assert themselves as independent thinkers, leaders who work with youth need to be savvy in establishing and explaining boundaries. Youth may not admit it, but they want direction and guidance—exactly what discipleship is all about. Be clear with expectations and fair with direction, and your group will join the learning with eagerness.

About this Exploration

As followers of Christ, we are on a journey of discovery. In both blessing and letting go, we look to Jesus as our example and trust God for guidance. Jesus shows us how to love and forgive, just as we are forgiven. As Jesus’ disciples we are called to let go of our own understandings and open ourselves to new paths filled with compassion, kindness, and thankfulness. God’s Spirit dwells with us on this difficult and rewarding adventure, as individuals and as the body of Christ. We are encouraged to discard our own agendas and allow the peace of Christ to inform our thoughts, so we can live in harmony. Christ’s message fills our lives so we might bless others through loving, grace-filled words and actions.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Proverbs 3:5–9
Colossians 3:12–17

Leader Preparation

Take a piece of paper and fold it in half. Fold it in half again and again until you can't fold it anymore. Write this on the outside of the tiny folded paper: "God is with me." Then open it one fold at a time and write the same sentence each new space is revealed. When the paper is flat again, refold the paper, one fold at a time, saying, "God is with me," and thinking of a time or a place when that is true for you. Unfold and refold the paper as you pray about leading these discipleship activities. Trust that the rituals, habits, and patterns of discipleship provide faith-building strength.

Prayer: Eternal God, I give thanks for your unchanging love. Inspire me as I guide these young people in exploring rituals, habits, and patterns of discipleship so that each one in our group may grow in love for you and for neighbor. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Repeat, Repeat, Repeat (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity invites youth to consider the patterns of discipleship. Recall the parts of your church's worship service that you can sing or say without thinking about them. Keep in mind the blessing discovered over time when a faith-building activity is repeated and repeated. Help youth appreciate how establishing good faith patterns will help when difficult times arrive. Having a ritual for letting go, such as a funeral, is an absolute necessity as a faith practice.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Begin your time together by asking youth to turn to Proverbs 3:5–9 and reading it aloud in unison. Invite participants to report their first impressions of the scripture.

The writer of Proverbs 3:5–9 captured the importance of living each day as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus. Trusting in God's guidance each day is easier when we follow certain patterns. Such practices as praying before meals, worshipping with our congregation, taking care of people when they're sick, reading the scriptures, and being gracious and kind are rituals or patterns of behavior that help living as a disciple become second nature. In the most challenging times, participating in a ritual or pattern, such as a funeral service or a healing service, makes those times easier to deal with.

Gather in a circle and give the following instructions for the game.

One person will start a pattern with three moves, such as shaking a leg, waving a hand, and nodding. The next person has to do repeat those three moves and add three more. The challenge is to see how many moves can be added before someone goofs up.

If the game proves too difficult, lower the number of moves added by each person and start again. When the group plays a second time, start at a different place in the circle so that everyone gets a chance to try something easy and something complicated.

After the activity, discuss together why remembering patterns can be difficult sometimes. Name the things that make remember a pattern easier, such as repetition. Explain that living a life of faith is a life of finding patterns. Trying to remember everything all at once is nearly impossible to do. Over time, though, each part makes more sense. God is in the parts, slowly working to help each person create a pattern of faith that is a blessing.

2 What's in a Name?

Leader preparation: This simple activity helps participants compare doing God's work alone with serving as a disciple in partnership with others. As youth consider the way that some animals care only about their own survival, they can think about how humans have been blessed with the ability to work together. Be prepared for a challenge from someone about how humans seem to have plenty of conflict among themselves. Affirm that God created humankind and declared it to be good. The Bible says that with God, all things are possible.

Blessing and Letting Go

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- variety of small plastic animals, or photographs of a variety of animals

Invite youth to choose an animal as they arrive. Gather the group and ask participants to name things that the animals they've selected need to survive. Divide the group into smaller groups, and ask the small groups to imagine an animal they might create that includes some of the characteristics of each of their individual animals. Have each small group tell about their created animal. Ask each group to answer the following questions:

- What might you name this animal?
- What is this animal afraid of?
- How does this animal protect itself?
- What does this animal eat?

As a group, wonder about the differences between the animals they created and the lives they live every day. Ask:

- How are your lives the same or different from an animal's life?
- What things scare humans?
- What makes life risky for people?
- What's the biggest difference between animals and humans?

Have a conversation about the human abilities to communicate and make decisions. Wonder together about the benefits of their ability to think about God. *What difference does it make to be able to ask God for help? What might God still be creating in you?*

Thank your group for their creative thinking and remind them that God has promised to be present from the beginning. God created each person for a reason. We get to spend our lives figuring out what that reason is.

3 Back(ward) Talk

Leader preparation: Switching perspective helps keep this age group guessing. This activity challenges the brain on several levels. Help the youth succeed in this activity by thinking through what you would do if you had to do this same thing. Trust the Spirit to help you and your group come up with good ideas for backward situations. Make sure the whole group participates, and don't be afraid to laugh.

Supplies: None

As youth arrive, say "Goodbye" to each one. When everyone is present, gather the group and ask for two volunteers. Describe the following scene to act out.

These two friends decide to go buy ice cream cones at their favorite ice cream store, even though the cones are little expensive. When they arrive at the ice cream shop, they each order a double-dip cone. The problem for these two actors is that they have to act this scene out backward—starting with eating the ice cream cones and then going to the part where they decide to go get cones.

Ask the pair to begin their skit. Tell the rest of the group they can help the actors by suggesting what comes next. Encourage the actors by adding your own suggestions. After the first pair finishes, ask other pairs to try similar skits, as time allows. Have the group help decide what to act out.

After the skits, talk about the challenge of doing something that doesn't make sense. Invite the group to list blessings that may come with familiarity. Remind youth that disciples are often more familiar with their faith talk than others. To those who are visiting the church or to those who are wondering about Jesus and the faith, church language and church ways don't always make sense. Ask for group members to suggest understandable ways to explain their faith to youth who are not churchgoers.

Say "Hello" to each group member as he or she leaves.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 See and Say (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity, youth will use single words to describe what they see in a piece of art. Ask the Spirit to guide you as you help them make connections between their words about the art and the challenge to be a blessing to others wherever they go in the coming week. Consider times in your own life when you have been a blessing and only realized that when looking back. Plan to tell a story of one such time to encourage youth to examine their own lives for times when they've done God's work and ways they can do so in the future.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Sisters in the Wind" by Ethan Hubbard, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- recording of meditative music or nature sounds
- markers and newsprint

Gather youth in a circle. Invite them to become quiet and make themselves comfortable. Begin to play some meditative or nature sounds. Pass the artwork "Sisters in the Wind" around the circle so that each group member can take a close look. Ask youth to be thinking of one-word descriptions of this piece of art. Place the picture in the center of the circle after all have had a close look.

Stop the music. Explain that each participant will have several chances to say one word about the piece of art. Affirm that their responses don't need to seem profound but can simply be a word that comes to mind when they look at the painting. Tell the group that they will respond to each one-word description with the following phrase: "Thank you, God, for eyes and words." Ask a volunteer to begin the process of speaking one word followed by the response. Work around the circle as many times as you can. Record the words on newsprint as they are spoken. Keep going until the words run out.

Place the newsprint in the center of the circle with "Sisters in the Wind." Reflect on what all the words say about the painting and what God might be trying to help people think about through this art. If there's time, challenge youth to write some six-word stories about the painting with these words.

Remind youth that the work of following God is easier when there are partners for the journey. Challenge them to be a blessing as they discover new partners on their journey of discipleship this week.

5 Follow the Bouncing Ball

Leader preparation: Bring the words to the Lord's Prayer or another common prayer your group would know. Be prepared to help participants recite the prayer as needed. This activity might stress out some group members. Watch for them, and make them referees with the power to make ridiculous rules. Most of all, help the participants know that discipleship can be fun.

Supplies:

- a soft ball
- index card or sticky note
- tape

Have the youth form a circle and count off. Have each write his or her number on an index card or sticky note and attach it to the front of a shirt or blouse in a visible place. Make sure each remembers the number. Then have the group members scramble and form a circle again (keeping the numbers visible). Explain that the person who is number 1 will throw the ball to the person who is number 2, who throws the ball to the person who is number 3. This continues until the person with the highest number throws to the person who is number 1. Tell them you'll be timing the group. Try this a couple times before adding a new twist.

Then, while they throw the ball, they have to recite the Lord's Prayer one word at a time, one person at a time, starting with the person who is number one. They have to see how fast they can do it. When they've done it a couple times, talk about the difference between throwing a ball and talking and throwing at the same time.

Then pray the Lord's Prayer in unison. Explain that God has blessed all people with prayers like this that make it easier to pray sometimes. Ask:

- What does it mean to get a gift of prayer from God?
- How does it make you feel to have a memorized prayer ready when you need it?

Use this as an example of how discipleship involves repeating faith-building activities so that they become habit. Tell youth that in many cases, Christians who seem too ill to speak will move their mouths to pray along with a visitor who is praying the Lord's Prayer. In trying times, a familiar pattern or set of words for praying is a blessing. Remind the group of the joy of knowing something like the Lord's Prayer as a community of disciples. Encourage them to pray it often.

6 Time for Reflection

Leader preparation: In this activity participants learn a meditation-like technique to help them reflect on the blessing of being God's children. Look over the whole activity to see if quiet music or candles might be helpful additions to your setting. Be patient with youth who have trouble with this sort of activity. Gently ask them to set aside their silliness for a minute for the sake of the group. Know that some will follow through and some won't, but that the Spirit can work in each heart in surprising ways.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers or crayons

Have each participant draw a calendar for the next thirty days on a piece of paper. When they've drawn the calendar, ask them to circle any four days with a differ-

ent color marker. Together, list things that people do every day. Acknowledge the many things that people do without really thinking and other things that take all the energy a person has. Discuss:

- Why do some people like to be busy all the time?
- What does it feel like when you are too busy?
- How hard would it be for you to spend an hour being quiet and listening for God?

Practice the following activity as a group.

Sit quietly on the ground or floor, or in a chair. Breathe slowly in and out and close your eyes. Put your hands together but don't intertwine your fingers. Tell yourself, "I am God's child. I am loved." Say this three times, separated by taking ten deep breaths. After the third time, say, "Amen."

Allow time for group members to try this. Tell youth they've just learned a new discipleship practice. It can be called prayer or meditation or sitting and listening for God. Tell the group that you expect them to try this on each of the days they circled on the calendar. Ask them to write down what it feels like and any changes that happen. Tell them you will check back with them to hear about any blessings they discover by doing this simple activity.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Easy Reader (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Participants need to know that it's okay to put sticky notes on the pages of their Bibles and to write in their Bibles. It's a book that's meant to be used. In this activity, youth will mark a place to begin reading the Bible. Your job will be to help them feel good about their choices and not overwhelmed. They can do it. Let someone struggle through Leviticus. It leads to big and crazy questions. Have fun talking about the power of reading the Bible. Make the most of the idea that finding the blessings in a good habit makes for a good faith practice.

Supplies:

- Bible
- sticky notes
- pens

Talk to the group about the blessing of reading the Bible every day. Open up to the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Read Luke 1:1–4 together. Tell youth that this is a great description of why it's good to read the Bible on a regular basis. Discuss this, using the following questions as your guide.

- What difference might it make in your life if you read your Bible more often?
- What are some ways to make Bible reading a habit?
- How might we encourage one another in daily Bible reading?

Give everyone a sticky note, and say each person has 45 seconds to find a place in his or her Bible to put it. When everyone is done, have each youth tell where he or she placed the sticky note. Challenge youth to begin reading their Bibles this

week at the place marked with the sticky note. Invite them to talk about the best times to read and to make a commitment to when they will begin. Reassure them they can read a little or a whole lot or anything in between.

Pray together that each participant will find new meaning in the old words of the Bible.



8 Sticking Together

Leader preparation: Sometimes it's difficult to convince youth that they are a blessing to other people. This activity provides a creative way to explore how they are blessed by Jesus. Prepare for the activity by spending time with artwork "Christ Among the Children." Think of what you like and what questions you have about it. Your questions likely will be similar to the questions youth might have. Plan to be playful with this activity and to help youth enjoy creating and enjoying artwork.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Nolde, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- construction paper in various colors
- newsprint
- markers
- scissors
- glue sticks

Invite the youth to work together to make a piece of artwork to remind them we are all on God's team together. Have each youth choose a piece of construction paper and draw a figure representing him- or herself. This can be simple or elaborate. When all are done, have each cut the figure out as closely to the lines as possible. While they are doing this, you can draw and cut out a larger simple figure to represent Jesus.

When everyone is done, use a piece of newsprint as your canvas. Have youth arrange the figures in a group and glue them in place. Put the figure of Jesus close to the group. As this is happening, ask participants about the team they are creating.

- How does it affect your feelings about the group to know that God is always at your side?
- What can you do to help one another remember that God is with you?
- What's one thing you could do to help a friend know that God is always at his or her side?
- What are the blessings of friendship?
- How might we welcome other people into this group?

Admire your artwork, and then view "Christ Among the Children" by Emil Nolde. Compare and contrast the two pieces of work. Note especially the excitement in the painting and in the artwork the group has created. Challenge youth to realize they have been blessed with the ability to offer that joy to others.

9 Faith Patterns

Leader preparation: Hold a Bible in your hands as you consider the following questions: How many stories do I know in this book? What surprises me when I

think of what is written here? How can this book be of help to me as a disciple? How can I help youth know this book a little better? Remember that one way God uses the words in the Bible is to inspire you to a life of active faith. As you practice with your group, faith is strengthened and lives are changed. Thank God for your part in the faith development of the young people in the group. Ask for the Spirit's guidance as you consider discipleship with them.

Supplies:

- paper
- washable markers

Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to work as a group to make a large square or rectangle on the tabletop with all their pieces of paper touching. When all the papers are in place, have a volunteer draw a large picture, so that every piece of paper has some of the lines of the drawing (for example, a big smiley face, a car, a church building). Make sure there is part of the drawing on every piece of paper. Ask each group member to take one of the pieces of paper.

Gather in a circle on the floor. Explain that discipleship is like meeting God over and over again. Christians may seek to meet God in ways that are ancient practices or they may seek God through new perspectives. Read aloud Colossians 3:12–17. Ask youth to identify anything familiar in the activities suggested in this scripture.

Ask youth to get up and mill around until you call “Gather!” At that time, they are to meet at the table and reassemble the picture, according to your instructions. You might say “normal” to tell them to put the picture back together just as it was. Or you might tell them to put the picture together backward, upside down, mirror-image, or Picasso-style. Play several rounds.

After the game, ask:

- How many of you would have preferred to always put the picture together in the “normal” way. Why?
- What happened when you had to put the picture together in a different way?
- How might having a familiar way to show your faith help you as a disciple?
- What Bible stories and prayers do you know that might make it easier to tell someone else about your faith?

Reflect

The idea of discipleship might seem beyond the developmental capacity of some youth. How did these activities reveal what the youth in your group can handle? Consider ways to improve these activities the next time you use them. Make notes about the successes you had and cross out things that flopped. Make a list of suggestions for making things go more smoothly next time.

Explain that sometimes a fresh look at scriptures or at faith can be meaningful. At other times—especially times of loss or stress—having a familiar pattern in expressing faith can be the most meaningful.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

It's difficult to predict how youth will respond to tradition on any given day. Some are captivated by history and might connect with the idea that the church has a wealth of interesting stories and practices. Others might be convinced that there is no need to look backward. As you work with tradition, keep in mind that youth thrive on stories, and the Bible can deliver all the excitement you need. Most importantly, youth need to know that their unique contributions to the church are acceptable, even if they are untraditional. Encourage a positive look at the stories that have brought the Christian message forward, and don't be afraid to find the humor throughout history.

About this Exploration

As Christians, we are supported in the process of blessing and letting go by rituals that have grown out of the traditions of the church over the centuries, by the pastoral concern expressed by our faith communities in worship and other areas of our common life, and by the many acts of kindness and mercy extended to us in the name of Christ. As new occasions for blessing and letting go arise, we, as faith communities, develop new responses that may become part of our ongoing traditions. Although our behavior may be rooted in and shaped by our traditions, these traditions are not static. They are constantly modified and expanded as we move on in life. This Exploration provides resources for participants as they discern ways in which looking back on our shared tradition propels us forward into the future.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 148
Acts 10:1-48

Leader Preparation

Open your Bible to John 1. Reread the familiar words “In the beginning was the Word . . .” Knowing this primarily refers to Jesus doesn’t mean that you can’t insert yourself into the sentence as a way of finding the Spirit in your own life: “In the beginning was me . . .” This isn’t meant to be self-centered, but rather a reminder that in God’s time frame, you’ve been present all along. Repeat the phrase “I was with God and God was with me.” Imagine God’s Spirit within you. It’s capable of carrying the whole history of the universe. Think of uncovering just the information you need to help youth in your teaching sessions. Remember God will provide.

Prayer: God of all times and places, thank you for the many faithful people who have carried the traditions of faith forward. Show me my part in the process. Send your Spirit to fill me with energy and excitement for the time I will spend with these young people. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 We Remember (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use the “Bible Characters” attachment as a starting point for discussion. This activity shows youth their connection to the past and the possibility for influencing the present and future. As you consider all who have gone before us, it’s easy to be thankful for each of the Bible heroes we know so well. The additional benefit of this activity is to remember there are more people named in the Bible than just those we are most familiar with, as well as Christian teachers through the ages. Remind youth of their place on the list of those who carry the tradition forward.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- children’s story Bible or Bible concordance (check with your pastor or the church library)
- paper
- markers
- “Bible Characters,” Attachment: Activity 1

As youth arrive, give each one a copy of the “Bible Characters” handout. Ask each youth to take a moment to check off his or her favorite Bible character. Provide a children’s story Bible or Bible concordance as well as Bibles for youth to use as a reference, as needed. Ask youth to tell which character they selected and why. Have youth take a moment to look in their Bibles for any reference materials about Bible characters, such as time lines, names index, or glossary. What other names catch their attention? Discuss:

- What does it take for you to consider a person as a Bible hero?
- What lessons can be gained by knowing something about Bible heroes?
- What can we learn from the way God called people to serve in Bible times?
- How might God be calling people today?
- Where do you fit in with this list of people of faith called by God?

Not to be morbid, but one thing all these people have in common is that they are dead. Talk about how interesting it is that even though these people lived thousands of years ago, their stories continue to be important to us. Ask the group for other examples of people whose stories outlive them (presidents and other political leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other social justice leaders, sports heroes, musicians). Discuss:

- What does it mean to know that we have a limited time on earth? How does it affect the way we live each day?
- What things would you like people to remember about you?
- The church gives us the tradition of telling stories about people of faith. What part do you have in keeping this tradition alive?
- How does knowing where we came from in the traditions of the church help us know where we are going?

Say a prayer of thanks for each Bible character the youth mentioned and add the name of each participant.

Blessing and Letting Go

to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.



2 What Did You Say?

Leader preparation: Unless you know Latin, the exercise in reading Latin might seem overwhelming. Just give it your best shot. You don't need to worry about pronouncing the words correctly. This isn't a lesson in Latin but a conversation about how language and tradition go together. God will be with you as you share the richness of Christian tradition. Before youth arrive, cut the handouts in half, with the Latin on one half and the English on the other.

Supplies:

- “Latin Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 2

Set up the chairs in rows so that all participants are seated as in a traditional worship setting. Distribute the half of the handout “Latin Prayer.” Form two groups and read the Latin prayer responsively, alternating lines. Don't worry about laughter and struggles; just encourage youth to do their best. Tell your group that for centuries many churches used the Latin language for worship, even though most people didn't read or write Latin. Some churches still worship in Latin and find it meaningful. For others, worship works better in their native language.

Place the chairs in a circle, and distribute the prayer in English. Read the prayer together, with the two groups alternating lines as before. Comment that the words of worship have been carried forth from generation to generation in hundreds of languages. Discuss:

- How is it a blessing that some people translated God's Word and worship materials to make sure they could be understood?
- If you always worshiped exactly the same way, what would be great about that? What would be frustrating?
- When do you appreciate making changes in worship? When would you rather things remain the same?
- What suggestions do you have for people going through a time of change?

3 Live from Your Place

Leader preparation: Combining a physical and mental challenge can enrich learning for youth. This activity encourages youth to think about important changes in their lives and how God might be involved in them. Prepare yourself by remembering your own times of change and how you got through them. Remember that we trust the Spirit to provide assistance in all that we do. Even when we are not aware of it during a time of change, we can usually look back and find the ways God was with us.

Supplies:

- a large foam ball or beach ball

Ask the group to sit in a circle and place the ball in the center. Invite youth to recall all the things that changed when they moved from middle or junior high school to high school. What did they learn from this experience? Pass the ball around, asking youth to name something they learned or advice they have for younger youth facing this situation as they hold the ball.

When the ideas run out, have the group stand up. Place the ball between two people. With participants not using their hands, have them pass the ball to the next two people in the group. Try to keep the ball in the air. Have the group sit down when the ball returns to the start.

Invite youth to think about changes that they and their friends face right now. Pass the ball around, inviting youth, as they hold it, to name one way they cope with change. When the ideas run out, stand and pass the ball around again, as before, to keep the energy flowing.

Again, sit in the circle and ask youth to think about how God might be helping them navigate changes in their lives. Wonder together how traditions and rituals support Christians when they are in the midst of transition. Finish by talking about the blessings God provides through friends and relatives when we are in a time of change.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Either/Or (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity, participants will connect tradition and change with the ways they do things in their own lives and the need to make changes sometimes. Preview this activity, adding other categories that are important for your group. Keep in mind that there is much to be learned by allowing youth to laugh while they learn.

Supplies:

- song: “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” by Jaroslav J. Vajda (tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos), <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/gomychild.htm>
- device for playing this song repeatedly

As youth gather and during the activity, play “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” in the background.

Explain that you are going to name some “either/or” categories. For each category, designate one side of your meeting space for each choice. Instruct participants to go to the side that is the choice they like best. Each time, after youth have moved to their sides, allow a minute for youth to talk with others on that side about why they made that choice.

Here are some categories to get you started. Depending on your group, youth might want to suggest other “either/or” categories.

- too many rules at home / not enough rules
- cold dessert / hot dessert
- bike helmet / no helmet
- do something outdoors / play video games
- individual sports / team sports
- pipe organ / guitar

Gather the group for discussion. Think together about how groups develop traditions based on the choices they make.

- What does it mean to have a tradition based on the usual choices people in the group make?
- What would the church be like if we didn’t have any way of knowing what has happened in the past?
- What’s the difference between a solid tradition and a routine for the sake

- of avoiding change?
- What is the benefit of blending old traditions with new ideas?

Finish by noting the song that has been playing in the background. The composer is still alive. His compositions take traditional tunes and give them new life with new lyrics. Talk about the tradition of music in church.

- What is the benefit of taking an old song and giving it new lyrics? How might that be helpful in teaching a new generation about Jesus?
- What other things that are familiar or common get changed to have a new use?
- What is one thing familiar right now that might be fun to change? How might God want us to use that familiar thing to spread the good news about Jesus?

5 Creative Stuff

Leader preparation: This activity is a combination of observing some ordinary things from differing perspectives and imagining changes to them. Read Acts 10:1–48 before participants arrive. Become familiar enough with the story to help youth think about it while and creating their own interesting piece of artwork. Remember that God is able to work through all things for good, so call on the Spirit to guide you through this thought-provoking exercise. Keep the youth busy creating with their hands, hearts, and minds.

Supplies:

- a bag of random objects, such as paper, tape, yarn, glitter glue sticks, markers, cardboard tubes, scissors, old magazines, and anything in the church school supply cupboard that looks interesting

Gather youth in a circle, and empty the bag in the center of the circle. Define a boundary for creating a communal piece of art, and tell the group they have five minutes to be artistic together. If any participants seem to be opting out, encourage them to make at least one addition to the art. As a group, move around the piece of artwork, inviting comments about things that look different from new perspectives. Point out that life sometimes looks different when we take time to change our point of view. Invite everyone to continue looking at the artwork while you or a volunteer reads aloud Acts 10:9–43. Talk about the artwork and the story.

- Imagine that this artwork was inspired by this story. What can you see in the art that might fit with the story? How does the artwork change when you think of it in that way?
- How does God use the world around us to help us understand Bible stories?
- After hearing the story, what would you change about this art to make a clearer connection (even a small one) with the story?

Remind the group that artists throughout history have been trying to help people understand God. Point out that sometimes even such Bible heroes as Peter had to give up their old ideas of how they thought God's people should act. Explain that the Spirit blesses God's people with new ways of thinking in each new generation. Ask the participants to recall times when they've had to change their minds about something important. *How might we help people understand Christian traditions by using new ideas?*

6 Bucket List

Leader preparation: Practice the origami for this lesson. This activity keeps participants' hands busy while providing a safe environment for discussion. Keep your questions open-ended, and make sure the group is accepting of the dreams and ideas of all members. God's Spirit sends us in different directions. For information on "bucket lists," see the online "Benefits of a Bucket List," <http://stress.about.com/od/resolutionsandchanges/a/Benefits-Of-A-Bucket-List.htm>.

Supplies:

- origami vase instructions, <http://www.origami-instructions.com/easy-origami-vase.html>
- paper
- markers
- scissors
- Bibles

Some youth may be familiar with the concept of a bucket list, but take time to make sure everyone is clear. Make sure they understand the things on one's bucket list can be short term goals, not just "before I die" goals. First, discuss the idea of creating blessings in our lives by not missing out on opportunities to do things we wish we had taken the time to do.

Invite youth to think about a bucket list for the next month—a list of things they would like to take the time to do (for example: a bonfire with friends, hiking, picture taking, a family celebration, a visit to a museum).

Use the instructions to guide youth in folding an origami vase, calling it a bucket. Then cut several small strips of paper for each person. Have each one write ideas for his or her bucket list and put them inside the origami bucket.

Form two groups and read aloud Psalm 148, alternating verses. Ask:

- What does this traditional psalm have to say about living life to the fullest?
- How might having a bucket list help you praise God? Where does praising God fit into your bucket?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Pattern Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Making patterns is a part of our history. Learning a new pattern is similar to the way that we go through many changes in life. In this activity, youth try something new as they adapt to a new pattern. God calls on us in many directions over the course of our lives. We do not get to play the same way over and over. We might have to let go of an old pattern to learn a new way of clapping and a new way of thinking. Trust that God will help youth make a connection with the changes in their life and the changes the church goes through over time. This is seed planting, not harvest. What you plant today will bear fruit in a future most likely beyond your time with this group.

Supplies: None

Sit in a circle. Teach the youth this set of repeating hand motions: clap both knees, clap hands, clap shoulders with arms crossed, clap hands. Then teach this line: “Once I took a trip to . . . [a place]; I packed a bag but forgot my . . . [item].” Youth, in turn, will name a place for the first blank (camp, the cabin, Nebraska, outer space, a chocolate factory). For the second blank they will name some item normally included in packing (toiletries, clothes, camping supplies). While maintaining the clapping rhythm, youth can take turns filling in the blanks. Eliminate youth who goof up by not following the pattern or not coming up with something to say. (Keep them in the circle to keep practicing the clapping pattern.) You might need to point at the person whose turn it is next. Play several rounds, changing the hand motions each time.

Allow time at the end of the game to talk about how adjusting to something new requires coordination, thought, and practice. Ask a few questions to connect the activity with tradition:

- In what ways is it helpful to play the same game in the same way, over and over again? How can it be fun to change the rules sometimes?
- What activities do you usually do the same way every time?
- How does it help us to grow as Christians by having stories, rules, and rituals that stay the same? How might our faith grow by making changes?
- Do you think you are more likely to be a person to carry forth traditions or a person to lead some great changes?

8 Now, But Then

Leader preparation: Be ready to think beyond today in this activity. Youth will be asked to make connections between the way things are now and how they used to be. Consider helping your group trace a single object or idea, such as transportation or communication tools, or trace the history of the church through time. As youth move through history, remind them that God has been alongside people at all these times. Help youth see how some changes were difficult because they meant loss of old habits or preferred methods of doing something. Help kids affirm that even though things change, God will always be at their side.

Supplies:

- magazines or wall calendars that can be cut apart
- construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- markers, pens, pencils

Form groups of three. Ask each group to create a “now and then” poster, using the supplies you have gathered. Tell them they need to fill a sheet of construction paper with their poster. The idea is to make connections between something as it is now and how it used to be—either a long time ago or last month. Encourage funny connections. You might suggest topics such as a women’s right to vote, slavery, telephones, computers, popular music, dress, and so forth.

Gather the entire group and have each small group show its poster. Wonder together about why things change. Discuss:

- Where is God when things are changing? How much do you think God cares about what happens every day?
- What had to be given up or let go in the change?
- How is the God of the Bible the different or the same as the God of today?

- What can we learn about change from Bible characters like Abraham, or Zacchaeus, or Paul?
- How are we blessed by God in the same ways as these traditional heroes of the Bible?

9 Hatched, Matched, Dispatched

Leader preparation: This activity considers three main church traditions. Remind youth that baptisms, weddings, and funerals are all serious occasions, but with God's sense of humor some laughter about each is okay. Have fun coming up with ideas about how these traditional worship moments might have happened in the past, thinking about how they happen now, and imagining how they may happen in the future. It's not as important to be historically accurate as it is to consider the way things change and what things stay the same while others change.

Supplies: None

Invite the group into a discussion of three important church traditions: baptisms, weddings, and funerals. For each of the three, ask:

- How might this service have been done in churches that had no electricity or printed hymnals?
- What do you think participants in these services wore? Why do you think so?
- What do you think the pastor wore?
- How old were the people being baptized, married, or buried?
- What did families do after the service?

Form three groups and assign each group one of the traditions: baptism, wedding, funeral. Ask each group to plan a skit that demonstrates this tradition as it might have been 200 years ago. Encourage them to use words that make them sound like they are from that time and act like people might have acted. Tell groups they will have five minutes to plan.

Ask each group to present its skit. Ask some of the following questions to generate conversation about the blessings of traditions and or change:

- If people from a century ago attended a baptism, wedding, or funeral in our church today, what changes do you think they would notice? What things would be basically the same?
- What traditions in the church seem like a blessing to you?
- What makes it a blessing to stay the same or to change sometimes?

Reflect

Discovery is sometimes elusive. Even when we know what we are looking for, we might miss it along the way. Take a minute to think about doing these activities with the youth in your group. When did you stop and think, "I don't know what to do next"? Highlight what worked and what didn't, and include any modifications you might make for future use. Take time to write down some of the comments youth made. Pray that the seeds planted in these activities will find harvest in the future.

Attachment: Activity 1

Bible Characters

Noah A man of God known for his boat-building and animal-caretaking skills. God called Noah and his family to restart the human race following a big flood.

Miriam Moses' sister. She knew how to celebrate God's amazing gifts. She sang and danced when God saved the Israelites from the Egyptians.

Elizabeth Mother of John the Baptist. It's fun to remember that the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist were related and pregnant at the same time. When Mary visited Elizabeth, John kicked inside of his mother. Elizabeth thought it was a sign from God.

Moses Leader of the Israelites. When the Israelites needed a guide to lead their escape from Egypt, God asked Moses to take charge. He did, and Moses led the people with confidence.

Sarah Abraham's wife. She is an example of how a committed partner in a relationship often makes sacrifices (like pretending to be someone else in an emergency) in order to share God's work.

Mary Mother of Jesus. Not much is known about Jesus' mother. Even though she was young, she demonstrated a commitment to faith which is an example to all.

Jacob This twin brother had a mom who really did love him best. After spending a night wrestling with God, he got a new name, Israel, and became a powerful leader of the Israelites.

Esau Jacob's twin brother got the short straw every time.

Rebekah Isaac's wife played favorites with her sons and helped Jacob become the heir when that title should have gone to the older twin, Esau.

Joseph This son of Rachel and Jacob had so many crazy experiences, like being tossed into a pit by his jealous brothers, that a musical exists to tell his story—"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Isaac This Bible hero, the son of Abraham, faced a few scary moments, like the time his dad held a knife over his throat, about to kill him. God called Isaac to be one of the few stable, unchanging, stay-at-home leaders of the Israelites.

Ruth This dedicated follower of God was willing to do anything for the sake of serving her friends and family.

Esther This woman was a Jewish hero. She used cooking to gain enough power to save an entire group of people—the Israelites.

Paul When his name was Saul, Paul apparently stood by and watched while the first followers of Jesus were killed for their beliefs. We have enough letters from Paul to know that he spent the rest of his life trying to make amends for that.

Attachment: Activity 2

Latin Prayer

Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes,
laudate eum, omnes populi.
Quoniam confirmata est super nos misericordia eius
et veritas Domini manet in aeternum.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Praise the Lord, all you nations:
praise God, all you people.
For God's mercy is confirmed upon us
and the truth of the Lord endures forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son, and Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Older youth constantly challenge themselves to understand what makes life important, even when they are unaware they are doing so. When asking youth in this age group questions, it's important to move beyond simple answers. Even when the thinking is challenging, these youth will engage in it. Still, when exploring the world around them and the mission from God, youth also need concrete examples to explain more abstract concepts. They understand that all people experience blessing and loss, but they benefit from real stories that help them make sense of how blessing and loss might affect them.

About this Exploration

God's call to blessing and letting go is a call to action. Those who receive a blessing have a mission to give a blessing. Responding to God's call requires that we let go of the way things were and boldly set forth in response to the call, an active process that often involves hard work. We receive that call as individuals and also as members of the community of faith. When we let go of habits and comforts that threaten to impede our journey, and to which we cling, we are freed to go forth both as recipients and givers of blessing. In this Exploration we journey with ancestors who have been sent forth and have struggled with fear, promise, grief, and hope. Like them, we are called to lay aside material blessings so that we may open our lives to spiritual blessings in our context and mission.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 12:1–5
Romans 15: 22–29

Leader Preparation

Find a map or globe to look at as you prepare for these activities. Remember that Jesus tells us to reach out to people in all parts of the world. Trace your fingers around one country. Consider all the people there who haven't heard God's good news. Know that this learning time is one small part of the process of making Jesus' story known and finding ways to share it with people near and far.

Prayer: Holy One, send your Spirit to remind me of your call to mission. Help me find ways to listen to other people and ask about their needs, so that I might inspire others to join me in carrying your Word and your work into every corner of the world you have created. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Pass It Around the World (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You can make this activity as challenging as you want it to be. The connection between passing on the Bible and passing on God's Word can be simple and fun. Encourage youth to consider the challenge of letting go of one way of thinking about spreading God's Word (using the Bible only, inside a church building, in English) and accepting the possibility of new ways (pictures, a variety of gathering places, other languages). As you lead the group, trust that God will provide you with insight.

Supplies:

- Bible

Gather your group in a circle. Hand a Bible to the first person, and ask him or her to pass it on to the next person in some special way (behind the back, over the shoulders, underhand). While passing the Bible on, the person should say, "What was mine is yours. Have fun and pass it on." The next person passes the Bible with the first special move and adds another. Continue this as many times around the circle as you can. Keep adding the new moves until it becomes complicated and even more fun. Try this as a timed activity.

After the game, sit together and discuss what it means to pass on God's Word. Offer the information below, from Wycliffe Bible Translators (<http://www.wycliffe.org/About/Statistics.aspx>). Here are figures about the worldwide status of Bible translation (2010).

- 6,800+—the number of languages spoken in the world today
- 2,000+—the number of languages without any of the Bible, with a need of a Bible translation to begin
- about 340 million—the number of people who speak the 2,000 languages where translation projects have not yet begun
- 1,500+—the number of translation programs where Wycliffe is currently at work
- nearly 75%—amount of the world's remaining Bible-translation needs that are located in the three areas of greatest need
- 1,211—the number of language communities which have access to the New Testament in their heart language
- 457—the number of language communities which have access to the entire Bible in the language they understand best

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Although Bible translation is progressing at a more rapid rate today than ever before, an overwhelming amount of work has yet to be done. *Recall the difficulty of the activity you did as a group. What would have made it easier?* Imagine together what it means to translate God's Word into the languages of all the people in the world. Ask:

- What surprises you about the number of languages spoken and the number of Bible translations still to be made?
- What are some ways Christians today can reach out to others with God's Word?

category.

- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

2 Goodbye Blessing

Leader preparation: Often even the youngest person has to say goodbye to a loved one—a pet or a friend or relative. People move, schools redistrict; friends visit and then leave again. Feel free to share your own goodbye story. This activity helps youth know they are not alone in saying goodbye.

Supplies:

- paper
- pens, pencils, or markers
- Bible

Give everyone a piece of paper. Ask them to write down the name of a person or an animal that they had to say goodbye to (it doesn't necessarily have to be because of a death). Next, have each youth write down four positive things about this person or animal.

Gather in a circle and invite youth to tell the name of the person or animal and the four things they wrote down. Listen carefully to the stories that come out of these goodbye descriptions. Thank the youth for their willingness to tell their stories.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 15:22–29. Ask:

- What is Paul going to do before he goes to Rome? What blessing will this offer to these people?
- In what ways does God provide hope in tough times, such as saying goodbye?
- In light of God's love, how might you say goodbye to a good friend who is moving or to an elderly grandparent who is dying?
- What would you say if you knew the other person was not Christian?
- What good things can come from letting go and saying goodbye?

3 Down and Around

Leader preparation: Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32 before you lead this activity. This activity helps youth understand how a change in perspective can make a task seem easier. Too often the idea of mission, especially in the context of blessing and letting go, can seem like a daunting task. It can help to break the task into its simplest parts. In this case, find the easiest way to take one step at a time, and leave the rest to God.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a collection of hard objects with various shapes (toys, cans, pencils)
- a ping pong ball

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). *What was the father in the story willing to let go of? What happened because of this?*

Explain that the younger son bounced around from place to place like a ball in a pinball machine. Then remind them that when the son decided to come home, his dad welcomed him with a party. Ask:

- If you had been the father, how would you have treated this younger son?

- How hard is it to accept someone back into your life who has been mean to you?
- If you had been the older brother, how would you have treated this younger brother?

Consider how God loves all the characters, but how they are seen at any given time makes a big difference to the character's ability to accept God's love. Invite the youth to act out this story in a different way. Have each one choose one of the hard objects you've brought. Stand in a circle, with some distance between each person. Tell them to use the hard objects in their hands to pass the ping pong from person to person until they've gone completely around the circle. Don't give them any other instructions, just hand them the ball and say go.

Most groups will struggle with knocking the ball through the air from person to person. When they've fumbled around for awhile, tell them you want them to try this game again, but this time, have them sit on the floor and tell them to keep the ball on the floor. Talk about how a change in perspective means a change in how complicated a task may be. Remind youth that they have a chance to be a blessing to others, and it might not require doing something difficult. It might be as simple as rolling the ball instead of bouncing it all over the room. *What is one simple thing you can do to tell another person of God's love?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 From Darkness to Light (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Open your mind to the gift of artistic expression as you prepare for this activity. Youth will consider light and dark in images and words as they consider a dramatic piece of art. Let yourself feel whatever feelings you have as you view the artwork. Trust that God will provide you with ways to talk about art as a normal part of God's communication with us. Allow room for different ideas as youth describe what they see. Have fun imagining what the artist might have been thinking when the piece was created.

Supplies:

- artwork: "The Baptism of Jesus" by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- pens or pencils
- paper

Have the artwork on display as youth enter the learning space. Invite youth to identify what is interesting or notable as they look at the picture. Have them close their eyes and consider what feelings they have about the picture. Explain that this painting created by Pheoris West, who is African American, depicts the baptism of Jesus from the artist's perspective.

Take turns telling stories of baptism—either of your own or of the baptism of a friend or family member. Discuss what it means to know that we all share the same baptism as Jesus.

Distribute paper and pens or pencils. Ask youth shade in one side of the paper. Remind youth that Pheoris West used light and dark in important ways in this

painting. Ask youth to draw or write words on both sides of the page. They can write words that describe the art or words that express their feelings. They can write Bible words that remind them of baptism, or they can write the name of Jesus or their own name. Discuss:

- What does Jesus mean to us in terms of light and dark?
- What things in life do we experience as light and dark? How can Jesus help us cope with them?
- When we face a difficult time, what help is it to know that Jesus has traveled the path before us?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus said this? “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

5 Leaving Time

Leader preparation: This activity asks youth to consider their peers who might be going through a time of significant change. They will be asked to offer advice to one another. Think of some things you might say to someone who is moving, going to college, switching schools, dealing with a health issue, or experiencing another major life change. Ask God for guidance as you try to make a connection with changes in nature that bring about new life and changes in people’s lives that can lead to the same sense of newness. Gather some leaves, stones, seed pods, sticks, or other natural items from your neighborhood.

Supplies:

- natural items from your neighborhood
- artwork board
- white glue
- markers
- Bible
- song: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>

Gather youth in a circle on the floor or around a table. Place the natural items you gathered in the center. Invite a conversation about the changing of seasons:

- When do things seem most fresh and new?
- When does it seem that a lot of change is happening?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 12:1–5. Ask youth to imagine the changes that Abram and his family would undergo in the near future:

- What might be exciting about their future?
- What might be sad about their future?
- What help do you think they will need?

Without naming names, invite youth to tell stories about people they know who are going through a significant change (moving, a new job, a different school). Brainstorm ideas about how to offer help to someone in a time of transition.

- What might they need most?
- What might not be helpful?

During your conversation, glue one of the collected natural items onto the artwork board as each idea is presented, and write the idea next to it. Remind youth to think of other youth in need every time they see one of these natural objects. See what kind of interesting connections youth can make between the changes in nature and the changes in people's lives. Affirm their unique ideas. Have them use the artwork as a visual display of ways to encourage others. If possible display it for others to see.

Introduce the song "In the Bulb There Is a Flower." *As you think about the natural items on the board, how are they transformed in nature? A bulb releases a flower, a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, an acorn is the beginning of a mighty oak tree. How might this natural sequence of letting go bring hope to the people going through significant changes?*

Stick to It

Leader preparation: Martin Luther has been quoted often as saying he'd plant a tree today even if he thought the world would end tomorrow. In this activity, you'll offer your group a chance to think about what it means to live for the day while planning for a bright future. The example of planting is somewhat universal. Remember, though, that each participant comes to this activity with a unique perspective and experience. Imagine what it is like to think about the future when life seems endless and immortal. Some youth don't have the luxury of thinking about what they want to be or do when they get older; they simply want to live another year.

Supplies:

- sticks, one for every participant
- seeds, one for every participant
- Bible

Hand a stick to each participant to add to a pile in the middle of the table. When everyone has arrived, ask participants what they think this pile of wood might be used for (a fire, really cheap toys, and magic wands). Now hand everyone a seed and invite them to tell stories about how this tiny seed might become a stick. Invite the group into a conversation about how God created trees to survive even when branches fall off.

Remind the group that Jesus told several stories about planting, and remind youth that planting seeds is a job for all of us. Ask volunteers to read aloud Mark 4:1–9, 26–32. Ask youth to think of ways that God has planted seeds in them about loving one another and helping those in need. Ask: *In what ways might you plant seed of God's love and care in the lives of others?*

Sending & Serving Activities



Number Please (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: People go through all sorts of changes in their lives. They grow older, lose weight, change jobs, go to school, move, get sick, marry, and more. This activity asks youth to consider one way to be a blessing to others. They'll do it by practicing some observation skills and talking through the ways to see others as more than just passersbys.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers

Give each participant a piece of paper and a marker with the instruction to write his or her favorite number so that it is as large as the paper. After writing the number, youth can add color and design to their papers, as long as the number is clearly visible.

Next, ask youth to list on the back of the piece of paper the different changes they think might experience in their future (getting older, growing taller, gaining or losing weight, learning new things, going to different schools, getting married, having kids, getting a job). Have them say the things aloud as they write them, and encourage all participants to write down as many ideas from others as they like.

Invite the youth to play a numbers game. Have all but one youth (the “guesser”) stand at the opposite end of the room with their number sheets hidden. When you say “go,” have the youth hold up their numbers for ten seconds. The guesser should try to memorize the numbers revealed. After ten seconds, have the guesser turn around while the other youth exchange places. The guesser can then turn around and try to reposition the numbers in the right order. Let the guesser have a couple chances (depending on your group size) before choosing another person to be the guesser.

After playing a while, ask youth some questions about what works and doesn’t work when trying to use observation skills in a game like this. Then ask the group to talk about ways to notice the changes in people’s lives.

- How can they do a good job of noticing what their friends are experiencing?
- What in a person’s face or physical appearance might be a clue to their mood or emotions?

Challenge the group to think of someone to whom they can offer a blessing in the next week. Brainstorm a few ideas for offering blessings (a phone call, a text message, a conversation). Send the youth away knowing God calls them to notice others and to be a blessing in simple ways every day.

8 Know Tag Backs

Leader preparation: Part of reaching out to others in mission is knowing something about the people to whom we are reaching out. This activity asks youth to learn something about the other members of the group and then make a connection with that knowing and serving others in mission. Make sure all the youth participate in this activity. If someone seems to be opting out, make him or her a referee and allow the creation of funny rules. Assign people to be “It” if the group is struggling, or be the first tagger yourself.

Supplies: None

Teach youth a new kind of tag where they have to find out something new about one another. Ask youth to spread out in your space as far as they can from one another. One person is “It” and calls out something that at least one of the other youth might share an interest in (funny movies, duck hunting, backgammon). He or she should say, “God blesses those who are interested in . . .” Whoever shares that interest must take one step toward the person who is “It.” Adjust the length

of the step depending on the size of your space and the ability of the person who is “It” to come up with questions. When the person who is “It” can touch someone, that person is “It.” Continue the game as long as time and interest allows.

Discuss with the group how connecting with another person makes it easier to be a blessing to them. Challenge each one to make a plan to talk to one person this week and offer a blessing. *What words can you use to carry God’s message in an appropriate way?* Have a name in mind before leaving today.

You Can Do It

Leader preparation: It will be helpful to gather information about mission and serving projects that your church and your denomination support. Check websites for information about aid organizations with whom your church works and bring stories and photos to show the youth. Recall your own experiences of being part of mission and serving projects with others.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers

Greet youth with a high five as they enter the space. Tell them, “You can do it.” Remind participants that Jesus once said to the disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37–38). Invite youth to offer their ideas about the meaning of Jesus’ words.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 9:35–38. Invite the group to spend time thinking about what it means to be sent out as a laborer for God, especially with those people who are in need. Jesus calls his followers to serve the poor, the sick, the hungry.

Distribute paper and markers. Have youth start by writing their names inside a small shape in the middle of the paper. Then, around the edges of the paper, have them write some ideas, in different shapes, about who might need them to offer God’s love and care. Ask: *If Jesus were looking for people in need in our community and in our world today, whom would he see?*

Reflect

When considering blessing and letting go in terms of mission, there is room to imagine new ways that God can be made known. These activities challenge youth to let go of traditional ideas and create new ways to offer blessings to those around them. As you consider these activities, what challenged youth? Where was there confusion? Note the activities where the learning came naturally and highlight those things. Where there was difficulty, consider what changes might be made next time. Enjoy the moments of remembering spiritual growth as you helped youth practice their faith.

Think both globally and locally. Challenge youth to fill in all the space around the edge of the page, and then draw lines from their names in the middle to all of the names on their paper. Talk about how difficult it would be for one person to do all the work of providing these blessings. Reassure youth that they can make a big difference in the mission field of their own family and neighborhood, sometimes working alone and sometimes working with others. Tell about the ways that your church works with aid organizations and mission projects to labor on Jesus’ behalf. Share any photos or stories you gathered. *What does it mean to spread God’s love through work in a shelter, or by building a house, or by filling bags with food?*

Help youth identify ways to include mission involvement in their busy lives. Challenge them to try it, and see how the Spirit will work in their lives.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

Although everything might seem like it is pointed at the future for these young people, it's pretty difficult to move them beyond thinking about themselves or the present. The challenge in directing this age group to taking a look at the future is to keep the focus on how they will help to shape and how they will be affected by that future. Remember, this is a developmental reality, not an attitude problem. It's just where they are.

About this Exploration

Experiences of blessing and letting go teach us there will be more change, loss, and grief in the future. Letting go is an essential part of our lives. Our resurrection faith provides us a vision of blessing and being blessed in the midst of letting go. Blessing does not come easily, and the process of letting go can be a painful adventure. Genuine hope is often costly and benefits from the courage of our imagination. The practices in this Exploration open individuals and congregations to the blessings for the journey when we are willing to let go.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 29:1–14
Luke 2:22–38

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Write the following phrase on a piece of paper as you prepare for these activities: “God is good all the time. All the time, God is good.” Take a walk through your home and then the space where your group meets. Touch the things that make you feel good about your life of faith—pictures of people you love, a Bible, your computer, paper and pencils, prayer shawl. As you touch each one read the above phrase aloud. Remind yourself that God is with you as you share your gifts through these activities. The memories these young people will take into the future include the time they spend with you in these activities.

Prayer: Eternal God, increase my trust in the work of the Spirit in my teaching. Help me and instill in each young person a confidence in a future filled with your hope and peace. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the



1 Dream Cards (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity invites participants to consider their role in the present and possibly the future. Youth get to test their faith in a made-up way and then answer serious questions about what it means to be someone God might call or speak to in the future. Remember your own questions about God and faith as you prepare for this activity. Keep in mind the various feelings associated with questions about faith and the future. Encourage youth to trust that this is an ongoing process.

Supplies:

- a deck of cards
- Bible, such as Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* or the Contemporary English Version

Gather youth together and tell them story of Joseph in prison in Genesis 40:9–19 and Genesis 41:14–36. Recap that Joseph had dreams about the future, and he could interpret the dreams of others. The only way to know if his dreams and interpretations were true, however, was to wait and see what happened.

Invite participants to take a Visionary Test today. Explain that you’ll be handing a deck of cards to the first person in line. The next person in line will then tell the first person what card is on the top of the pile. If the person who guesses is correct, he or she moves to the “visionary” side of the room. If the person is wrong, he or she goes to the “normal person” side of the room.

Hand the deck of cards to the first person and see what happens. Assuming at least one person ends up on the visionary side of the room, ask him or her to tell how it feels. Try the game as many times as time allows, and each time ask the participants how it feels to end up on one side or the other of the room.

Gather the group and discuss.

- Would being a visionary like Joseph be a blessing or a curse? How so?
- Do you think that any people today see visions? Why or Why not?
- Why don’t we hear more stories about visionaries in our time?
- Regardless of which side of the room you were on, what plans do you think God has in mind for your life?

Before the youth leave, remind them that God does work in mysterious ways, but a test like this one is just a game. If God wants our attention, we’ll know!



2 Fold to the Future

Leader preparation: This activity helps participants see the unpredictable nature of blessings in their future. Try this activity on your own first, so it makes sense to you. It might be helpful to have a sample of the folded paper to show. Remind participants that an unknown future doesn’t need to be frightening or intimidating. With God at our side, we stumble along the path without worry. Pray for God’s guidance as you share the good news that letting go in the future, though difficult, comes with its own blessings.

church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Christina’s World, 1948” by Andrew Wyeth, <http://www.art.com/products/p10041656-sa-i783641/andrew-wyeth-christinas-world-1948.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=0f6ded272c5f442f8f4b43201f2adbfc&searchstring=christina%27s+world>
- paper
- markers

Display “Christina’s World, 1948” by Andrew Wyeth where youth can see it as they enter your meeting space.

Distribute paper and markers. Give these instructions, one step at a time, for folding and marking the paper:

1. Put the paper in front of you so it is wider than it is tall (landscape perspective).
2. Fold it in half from side to side, like a greeting card.
3. Fold the half on top halfway back to meet the left folded edge.
4. Draw a person (a stick person is fine) on this thin quarter sheet that was folded back.
5. On the right side of what would be the inside of the card (but don’t unfold it yet), draw a house.
6. Draw a path from the person to the house.

Ask youth to set their papers aside and look at “Christina’s World, 1948.” Ask them to imagine the story inside the painting:

- Who is the girl in the painting?
- Why is she on the ground?
- What has she been doing?
- Whose house is it?
- How will this scene change in ten minutes? In sixty minutes?

Explain that for all of us the future will be filled with many times of blessing and times of letting go. There will be joyful times when things go well. There will be awful times when letting go will be a painful reality. Like this picture, we don’t know what will happen.

Have participants unfold their papers. Tell them to draw—on the center fold—something that might distract the person between where they are now and the house (such as a slide, a candy store, a mud puddle). Invite youth to show what they have drawn. Note how many different events mean many different futures. Ask youth to think of what blessings they might experience this week, and remind them to be prepared.

3 A-Maze-ing God

Leader preparation: Youth seek direction all the time—they just don’t necessarily know it or admit it. This activity asks youth to think about things that cause them to feel lost or trapped. This might be painful for some, so consider the questions in this activity ahead of time. Give youth time to think, though, as this activity is built around the idea that their busy hands might distract them enough to help them talk about this topic more seriously. Trust the Spirit to enter your conversation and help guide the discussion.

Supplies:

- 6' length of string or yarn for each participant
- Bible

Give everyone a piece of string or yarn about 6' long. Tell them not to tie it or do anything to mess it up. Ask youth to sit at the table or on the floor and put the string or yarn in front of them. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 29:1–14. Ask: *What does it mean to say that God has a plan for you?*

Explain that you are going to work together as a group to use your string to make a maze. Form it on the top of the table or on the floor, depending on space. Mark a starting and ending place far enough apart to create a bit of a challenge. Remind the youth that they can cross the strings, but encourage them not to tie any knots. As the youth work on this activity, work some of the following questions into the conversation.

- How do you decide which path to take?
- What are some ways life is like a maze?
- When have you felt like you were in a maze? What did you do?
- What does it feel like to know you have something like a maze to go through before you get to something you want?
- What does it feel like to be stuck without any idea of how to find your way out?
- How could you help someone else that feels like he or she is in a maze?
- How do you think God helps us when we are stuck in the maze of life, unsure of which way to turn?

As the youth complete and enjoy their maze, remind them that life will feel like a maze sometimes. It will be helpful to have a plan for finding the right way to go. Think of ideas of how to ask for help and whom to ask. Just before the time is up, have each youth tie a piece of string loosely around the wrist or ankle of another youth as a reminder that God can help them find the right direction.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 No Time for Rhyme (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: It takes experience to discover God's blessings in the middle of an experience of loss. This activity touches on the idea that God might provide such blessings all through life. Youth will have a chance to experiment with music as a way of opening up a conversation about loss. Seek the Spirit's guidance to take that conversation as deep as the youth allow. Be prepared for a conversation about a serious loss (a pet or a loved one) that someone might mention.

Supplies: None

Invite youth to recall music from an important event. It might be the national anthem, a Christmas carol, a song during a fun day as a child, a song at a wedding or graduation, or any other strong, musical memory.

Form pairs. Ask each pair to make up one line to sing to a familiar tune. The line is to be about losing something important. It's okay if they do something

funny. Make sure each pair comes up with at least one line and practices singing it aloud. They don't need to worry about the tune or the rhythm. When pairs are ready, gather the group in a circle and sing the song one line at a time. Start by clapping out a steady beat, and then point to the first pair to sing. Keep going until everyone has "sung" their verse.

Tell the group that their song was a valiant effort in dealing with loss, but that there might be better ways to help themselves and others. Ask the group for ideas for talking about losing something and how to deal with it. Remind them to look for unexpected blessings each day, like finding some loose change in the couch while looking for lost keys. Lead them into a conversation about the ways God might send them blessings in the midst of times of loss.

5 God's Tangled Word

Leader preparation: Sometimes youth are surprised to learn that at certain times in history and in some places today it has been dangerous to be a Christian, to worship and follow Jesus. This activity is both a physical challenge and a conversation to help youth consider how God has a plan for them to be a blessing to others. Think ahead of time about ways you might have a conversation with someone about Jesus. Imagine meeting someone and knowing that you could offer God's blessing to them in some way. How would it feel? How would you trust God to help you?

Supplies:

- Bible

Invite the group to join in a classic game of tangled hands. Have them gather in a circle and grab two different hands from people across from them in the group. They can reach over or under someone else's arms. Then have them try to untangle themselves so that no one is caught between anyone else. This may require them to twist, turn, and step under or over other teammate's arms. Let them struggle with this for a while (with the hope that they'll be successful). Make sure they don't let go of their hands.

Sit as a group and imagine together what it was like for the earliest Christians who had to meet in secret for fear of getting in trouble with the law. Compare the frustration and difficulty of untangling themselves with the challenges of secretly finding out which people were believers and could be trusted. It took time, thought, effort, and faith to untangle the truth about those who were followers of Jesus and those who wanted to get them in trouble.

Spend time thinking about what marks a person as a believer now. Ask some of the following questions to lead the discussion.

- What would it be like to carry a Bible for an entire whole day?
- What does it mean to be able to worship without fear of punishment or imprisonment?
- What if you could never say anything aloud about God?

Try the game of tangled hands again, but add a Bible to the mix this time. Tell the group they are going to play the same game, but this time they have to keep a Bible in someone's hand at all times. After they all grabbed hands, put the Bible in the middle and let someone grab onto it. Let them struggle for a while, and then talk about how they had to change their strategy. Remind them that God encourages them to tell the Bible story. Help them consider ways they can be like the earliest believers, seeking others who want to talk about the amazing story of Jesus.

⑥ 0001 0001 Ha, Ha!

Leader preparation: Participants will play a game while imagining the effect of technology on the future of the church. Consider your own thoughts about the vision involved in creating computers and how much more it might take to connect that to faith practices. There are always benefits to be found, but there are also losses. Before you begin, imagine the letting go that has happened as technology has taken a bigger place in the church. You'll be able to help youth empathize with others as they consider a future hard to imagine.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers
- Bible

Ask each participant to take four pieces of paper and write a "0" on three of the sheets and a "1" on the fourth sheet. Have them spread these sheets on the floor around the room.

Gather the group and talk about how computers have changed the ways that people work and communicate. Remind the group that this wasn't always the case. Explain that the first computers ran on codes that were basically a series of zeros and ones that told the computer to do things. Ask what things they would like to see technology provide in the future. Imagine with the whole group the innovations that will come in the next years.

Play a game in which everyone has to get across the room by stepping on 0 or 1 as one person calls out the numbers. Make up rules depending on how easy or difficult you want the game to be. For example: Only one person can be on a piece of paper. Players have to walk backward. Players have to close their eyes and be led by someone else.

After playing for a while, sit down and talk about what it was like to be told what to do in this game. Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:22–38. Ask:

- How was God directing the lives of Simeon and Anna? Of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus?
- In what ways do you think God is directing your life today?
- In what ways might God use technology to accomplish God's purposes?

Wonder with the participants about ways technology is a blessing. Lament with the group about ways in which letting go of the old ways of doing things will be hard on people. Talk about being led to help others understand God through technology. Name ways to do that, and send the group out planning their own ways to reach out to others.

Sending & Serving Activities

 **7 lessings Every Day (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: This activity invites deeper consideration of the concept of blessings in everyday life. Be ready to help participants who get stuck trying to find a blessing. Look at the cards ahead of time and remember some ideas of your own. Encourage the whole group to cheer each participant as the game progresses.

Prepare index cards by printing one of the following phrases on each one:

- Adopting a puppy
- Earning a spot on the team
- Visiting someone’s grandpa
- Playing games
- Having ice cream
- Talking with friends
- Going to church
- Learning to juggle
- Going to camp
- Running through a sprinkler
- Giving a hug
- Serving food to hungry people
- Donating clothes
- Singing;
- Playing tennis
- Being nice to someone
- Telling a funny story
- Eating a meal together
- Going shopping
- Praying
- Jumping rope

Supplies:

- prepared index cards

Ask youth to sit on one side of the room, and put the stack of index cards on the other side of the room. Explain the activity to the group. When you say “Go,” the group needs to get themselves lined up in order by birthday (month and day), but without talking. After they’ve lined up, the first person runs across the room and picks up the first card. He or she then gives two ways that the thing written on the card might be considered a blessing. Keep going until everyone has had a turn. Remind the group that you’re not looking for perfect answers, but any kind of ideas they might create.

After the game, talk about what it means to think about blessings in everyday life.

- How does looking for blessings help make each day easier or more interesting?
- What kinds of blessings do you hope for in the future?

Sending & Serving Activities

8 Singing Catch

Leader preparation: Listen to the song “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” What word of hope does this song hold for you? Recall times that it has been a challenge to hold onto such hope.

Supplies:

- song: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- device for play the song
- plastic cups
- ping pong balls

Listen to “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Ask youth if this song reminds them of anything, and invite their stories. Tell youth that one thing they never have to let go of is a childlike spirit—old songs and memorable songs are theirs forever. Together, list songs that are memorable for your group.

Challenge participants to learn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Don’t worry if they already know it—there’s an added element to make it harder. Listen to the pattern of the verses. Each stanza has two parts. For this activity, each participant will toss a ping pong ball to a partner while catching a ball from the same person. And they need to exchange balls in this way in time to the music. Keep trying until a pair throws and catches without dropping a ball through the whole song.

Congratulate the group on a job well done. Ask:

- How can songs remind us of God’s blessings?
- Where else can God’s blessings be found?

9 Traveling Time

Leader preparation: Youth need to know they can lean on others as they move through the many changes upcoming in their lives. This activity provides experiences of leaning on one another physically while answering questions about the future. Take time to think of the changes you’ve been through in your life. Consider, especially, the changes that you weren’t prepared for. To whom did you turn for help? What things helped you get through the change? Ask God for help as you travel a journey through change with your group.

Supplies: None

Gather youth in two lines, sitting back-to-back on the floor. Three people can sit together, if necessary. Invite the youth to go on a journey together. There will be many stops along the way. To get to the end of the journey, they’ll have to lean on each other and stand up. Have each pair try this to figure out the best way to stand up. Once they have that figured out, have everyone sit down again and lead them on their journey with five stops along the way.

1. Stand up and tell each other your answer to this question: *If, a year from now, you found out you were going to get a thousand dollars, how would you spend the money?* Sit down after both partners have answered the question.
2. Stand again and tell each other your answer to this question: *If, three years from now, your best friend moved in with your family, how would your life be different?* Sit down after both partners have answered the question.
3. Stand again and tell each other your answer to these questions: *If in five years you have to move to a different state, how would you feel about that? Who would be the first person you would tell about the move? Why?* Sit down after both partners have answered the question.
4. Stand again and tell each other your answers to these questions: *Imagine ten years from now. That's a really long time. What happens when you find out that because of health issues you can't eat your favorite food anymore? What will you do to get through such a change?* Sit down after both partners have answered the question.
5. Stand again and tell each other your answer to this question: *Now it's as long as you can think in the future. You are living on your own in a new place. You've left family and friends behind to start a new life. What do you need to help you feel good about your life?* After both partners have answered, gather as a whole group.

Invite youth to tell any stories or memorable responses to the entire group. Remind youth that these things—and more—will happen in their lives. Discuss:

- How will God help as you move through all these changes?
- How will you help friends and family members move through these changes?
- Who will you lean on through these changes?

Reflect

The best laid plans don't always work out. Now that you've tried these activities, take time to evaluate what worked and what didn't. How will you change things if you use these again? What things will be memorable? What things would you rather forget? Leave yourself some notes to make changes where necessary, and cross out stuff that didn't work for you at all. Remember you are planting seeds, and trust that the work you've done in these activities will lead to a bountiful harvest someday.