

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Although children and youth certainly experience moments of blessing and letting go, the frequency and variety of such moments increases exponentially in early adulthood. Additionally, for young adults, many of the moments that necessitate blessing and letting go are consequences of their own personal decisions—notably, decisions about education, careers, and relationships. The additional responsibility for personal decisions may create anxiety and, in some cases, regret. The additional responsibility, though, also provides ample opportunities to develop skills of intentional discernment and gracious release. This Exploration allows young adults to explore the process of discernment in which blessing and letting go can occur.

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

The entrance into a moment of blessing and letting go is the calling of God. It is God who “calls” the suffering to eternal life, creating an opportunity for blessing and letting go within the grieving. It is God who “calls” us into a new place, providing us with the gifts to navigate the journey. So, in the first half of the 1 Samuel text, it becomes clear that David is God’s choice for Saul’s successor—God “calls” David from the pastoral (literally) to the prophetic. But in the second half, unaware that David is his successor, Saul himself chooses David to provide him relief in his suffering. In as much as God “calls” us into transition, the blessing that we receive in newness is to be passed on to others as they are able to receive it. This is a process that requires courage as well as compassion, power as well as tenderness.

Prayer: Generous God, thank you for all the gifts that enable me to navigate the journey you have planned. Help me to hear your voice and to courageously follow it. 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 & Engaging Activities



1 Walking in Their Sandals (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity encourages the group to speculate about David’s response to being called by God, as well as his family’s reaction. Listen carefully to all answers and refer some for conversation at a later time if you sense deeper personal issues. If the group is likely to have difficulties acting out the roles directly from the biblical text, consider reprinting the text in a clearer format from a website such as “Bible Gateway,” www.biblegateway.com.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask for volunteers to read the following character roles: The Lord, Samuel, Narrator, Jesse, Eliab (action only), Abinadab (action only), Shammah (action only), David (action only). After the volunteers present 1 Samuel 16:1–13, discuss the following questions:

- How do you think the elder sons of Jesse felt when they realized they were being rejected by the Lord? What feelings might have arisen for them when their youngest brother David was chosen? How easy or difficult was it for David’s older brothers to bless him after his anointing?
- How do you think Jesse reacted to the anointing of his youngest son? How did David’s leaving affect his household? What do you think his attitude toward his elder sons was after David left?
- How do you think David felt about being summoned to the consecration? What do you think that he was thinking and feeling on the way? How do you think he reacted to the reception Samuel gave him when he entered the room? How do you think David felt about the calling to become king?

As time allows, remain in character and role-play dinner at Jesse’s house that evening after the consecration. Invite actors to consider how the family may have blessed David as he was leaving to be king and how easy or difficult it was for various family members to let David go, or for David to let go of his family.

2 Say WHAT?!

Leader preparation: This activity is based upon the children’s game “Telephone.” God’s calling passes through our personal filters just like the messages are passed from one person to another in the game, sometimes creating confusion. Use the video as a light-hearted introduction to the “Telephone” game.

Supplies:

- film: the monkey chain sequence from *Madagascar 2: Escape 2 Africa*; scene from film, <http://youtube.kr2H1dB-UtE>
- DVD player or device with Internet access

As the group gathers, play the monkey chain sequence from *Madagascar 2: Escape 2*. Briefly discuss what happened in the sequence and specifically how the original message was altered by the time it reached the top of the chain.



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

Have the group arrange themselves in a line (or in a circle if the group is large), standing or sitting approximately one foot apart. Select a “start” person and whisper the first statement into his or her ear. Encourage that person to “pass” the message to the next person as quickly as possible, saying it only once. The next person will do the same, and so on, until the message has reached the other end of the line or is back to the “start” person in the circle. Ask the final recipient to reveal the message. As a group, discuss how the message was altered as it translated from one person to another. Choose a different “start” person for each of the following statements:

1. God says you shouldn’t shuck oysters in shallow sand.
2. God says the boat is sinking, so you need to bail out. But don’t try to save the captain’s desk. It’s moldy.
3. God says you need to go two blocks north, seven blocks south, talk to the man in the red overcoat, and he will tell you everything you need to know.

God calls each of us to a special task, but sometimes the calling is garbled by our resistance, our prejudice, our rebellion, or our assumptions. This story may help you think about that. There once was a person who was in a flood and the water rose all the way up to the roof of his house. Looking to be rescued, he went up on his rooftop to pray for God’s assistance. A canoe came by and the person in the canoe offered to take the man to safety, but the man on the roof refused, saying that God would save him. Then a boat motored by, and the captain offered to take the man to safety, but the man on the roof refused, saying that God would save him. Finally a helicopter flew low and the same offer was made with the same response. The water rose and the man drowned. Standing before God, the man demanded, “I prayed to you. Why didn’t you help me?” God responded, “My child, I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter. Why did you not accept my help?” Lead a discussion, using the following questions.

- What do you believe God has called you to do?
- What evidence helps you to confirm that call?
- What beliefs (about yourself, about the world) might you need to let go in order to respond to that call?

3 To Do List

Leader preparation: No matter how we are called or what we are called to do, there are certain things that need to be addressed and matters that need to be attended. When someone we love dies, there are arrangements to be made and personal affairs to be put in order. When we are called to a career, there are educational processes to be undertaken, specialized clothing or equipment to be acquired, and forms to be filled out. When we decide to have a family, there are doctor’s appointments, birthing arrangements, and nursery preparation. Even following Jesus is never as simple as dropping our nets and tagging along! This activity addresses the “to do” lists that inevitably form when one is blessed with transition.

Supplies:

- “The Game of Life” board game by Hasbro (also available for free download on the Internet)
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard



Set up and play “The Game of Life” as directed on the packaging, with the following addition: As participants make choices, discuss each choice in greater depth, charting on the newsprint or whiteboard what needs to be done in order to “make it happen.” When you finish playing (or you suspend play because the session is ending), discuss the following.

- What do you believe God has called you to do?
- Following God’s call is not as simple as “dropping our nets and following Jesus.” What things need to be done in order to make it possible for you to follow the call? (Do you need education? Experience? Resources? Contacts?)
- What items might be on your own personal “to do” list for responding to God’s calling in your life?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Meditative Discernment (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Ideally, discernment or decision making is done thoughtfully, if not prayerfully. But in this fast-paced world with so many distractions, how can one truly do anything thoughtfully? Throughout the ages, meditation has helped people of many faiths to attain the peace of soul, the purity of heart, and the clarity of mind to make important decisions. This activity suggests a practice of Lectio Divina, an ancient prayerful practice of reading scripture said to have been developed by Saint Benedict and Pope Gregory I.

There are many other practices in the vast interfaith area of meditative arts. Consult with your pastor for suggestions if your group is interested in exploring in greater depth. You might also find other scriptural texts to focus on, perhaps even asking the group to suggest texts that have been particularly powerful for them in the past. Finally, acknowledge that silence may be difficult for the group, because most humans tend to fill silent spaces with “white noise.” If this is the case, serene instrumental music may be played softly as a substitute for “silence.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) recorded meditative instrumental music and device to play it
- (optional) candles, matches

Gather the group in a quiet setting with as few distractions as possible. Light some candles, if allowed. Have the group turn off their cell phones and sit comfortably, but not lounging, with their hands free of objects. Invite participants to close their eyes, if that is comfortable, so that they can rely solely on their sense of hearing. (Make sure those who have hearing difficulties are appropriately accommodated so that they can participate fully.) Ask for three volunteers to read the scripture aloud.

Important decisions involving things such as careers, education, or relationships require an enormous amount of spiritual and emotional energy. For centuries, believers have found meditation helps to clear the heart, soul, and mind of distracting clutter. So today, participants are going to try a specifically Christian meditative practice called Lectio Divina, a prayerful, reflective reading of scripture. There are four steps.



Step 1. The first step is to read the scripture passage aloud twice. *Listen for a few key words or phrases that seem to grab your attention and note those in your mind.* As the first step, ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 3:16–19, slowly and without any emotion. After one minute of silence, have another volunteer read aloud Ephesians 3:16–19, slowly and without any emotion. Allow one minute of silence.

Step 2. The second step is to ruminate on the words or phrases that seemed to grab one’s attention as the scripture passage is read. *As you meditate on these words, if you get distracted by other thoughts, guide your thoughts back to the words or phrases. Think about what God is trying to say to you in those words or phrases. Ask God what you need to know.* Allow up to ten minutes of silence.

Step 3. The third step is to pray to God for direction and purpose. The scripture passage is read once more. *This time, contemplate what God is asking or urging you to do.* Have a volunteer read aloud Ephesians 3:16–19 at a more normal rate, but still without any emotion. Allow up to five minutes of silence.

Step 4. The fourth step is to focus one’s attention on God in our midst. *Be aware of your breath and know that it is the Spirit of God flowing through you, offering you the blessing of gifts and strength. Feel your heartbeat and know that it is God’s steady and consistent presence with you.* After one minute of silence, have everyone say “Amen.”

Invite group members to stretch and breathe deeply before departing.



5 Buffet of Options

Leader preparation: With the birth of Food Network, America has become familiar with the concepts of “flavor profiles” and “culinary fusion.” This activity utilizes these concepts to challenge young adults to let go of preconceived notions and think creatively about options.

Supplies:

- variety of fruits and veggies cut into appetizer-size portions
- saltine crackers
- variety of spreads, such as garlic herb spread, peanut butter, or jams
- knives or spreaders
- variety of spices, such as pepper, oregano, basil, sage, cinnamon, ginger
- plates, 2 per person
- napkins
- Bible
- 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

Before the group gathers, set the table with the foods and spices you have gathered. As the group arrives, encourage hand washing and discourage “grazing.” Then give participants about ten minutes to finish the first task.

Today you have been selected to create new and exciting flavor profiles to be tested by a secret panel of judges. Your job is to use these ingredients to make five new appetizers, featuring unique flavor combinations. You must make two of each kind of appetizer and put a set on each of two presentation plates. Plating is not going to be judged.



After participants have made their presentation plates, have members of the group form pairs for judging the creations. Give pairs about ten minutes to finish this second task.

Now, it's time to introduce the secret panel of judges. Pick a partner. Since no one in this room is a guinea pig, one of your presentation plates is for you and one is for your partner. Take turns trying each kind of item and give it a rating on a scale of one to five based on creativity and deliciousness. So, peanut butter and jelly might be a "two" because it lacks creativity, but garlic herb spread on prunes may be a "one" because it's just plain gross.

Call for the end of the activity by asking the group to clean up. After cleaning up the room, discuss:

- Which was easier to try, your own creations or those of your partner?
- What preconceived notions did you have about any of the combinations? How hard was it to let go of these preconceived notions in order to try them?
- What flavor profiles were surprisingly delicious? Which do you think you will make again some time?

Show the artwork "Christ Among the Children," and ask the group to look at it while you read aloud Matthew 19:13–15. Ask:

- What preconceived notions did the disciples have about the children that were brought to Jesus?
- What do you think the disciples thought about Jesus' rebuke of them and his blessing of the children?

6 Decision Four Square

Leader preparation: Decisions are made using a variety of techniques and tools. This activity takes the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (a methodology for theological reflection) and combines it with a playground game, "Four Square," for a unique exploration of the different ways we come to make decisions.

Locate a large open space either inside or outdoor for this activity. Use masking tape or chalk to draw a large square (at least 8 feet square) that is divided into four equal smaller squares. Write one of the following labels in each of the smaller squares: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience.

Supplies:

- masking tape or chalk
- rubber playground ball or basketball

As the group gathers, ask them to create four teams (one team to represent each square) and to place one team member in the represented square.

Explain that in the United Methodist Church it is said that one gets to know God and to know about God through one of four different methods or paths: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Three of these paths are equal, but one is primary—scripture. Hand the ball to the team member in the scripture square.

These four paths are also the four primary influences on how we make decisions. Sometimes we make decisions about our lives based on what we read in the Bible. Sometimes we make decisions about our lives based on family



or cultural traditions. Sometimes we make decisions about our lives based on logic or reason. Sometimes we make decisions about our lives based on experience. The object of a normal “Four Square” game is to eliminate the opponents in the other squares, but the object of this “Four Square” game is use each square—or path—to help make a decision. I will read the decision to be made. You will bounce the ball between the four paths and, when you receive the ball, name one way you might use that path to inform the decision. Then bounce the ball to another path. Once all of four paths have had input, we will rotate the board, change team members, and start again with a new decision.

Use these steps to play the game.

1. Read the first decision to be considered: “You are thinking about getting married.”
2. The team member in the scripture box bounces the ball to another box.
3. The recipient names one way he or she might use that path to inform the decision about getting married, and bounces the ball to another square, and so on until all four paths have had input.
4. Rotate the board by asking all teams to gather inside their square and move together to the square to the left.
5. Have the teams then choose another team member to represent them in their new square.

To continue, read the second decision to be considered: “You have just graduated from college and are looking for a job.” Repeat steps 2 through 5.

The third decision to be considered is this: “You have learned you are going to be a parent.”

Gather the group together and discuss the activity:

- Which of the four paths was most helpful or easiest to “use”? Which was least helpful or hardest to “use”?
- Why do you think it is important to use all four paths instead of relying on only one?
- What other resources besides scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are helpful when you are trying to make a decision? How are they helpful?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 What If I Were Wrong? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: One of the greatest fears that young adults have about letting go of the past and moving into the future is the possibility that they will make wrong choices. This activity addresses that fear by encouraging them to give advice to others, advice that they may need to hear for themselves.

Make a copy of the handout “Scenarios,” and cut apart the stories.

**Supplies:**

- “Scenarios,” Attachment: Activity 7
- scissors
- 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;video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- device with Internet access

As the group gathers, form pairs and give one scenario from the attachment to each pair. Explain that everyone is faced with difficult and important choices. Each potential path of each choice holds unique consequences.

Sometimes when you have taken a certain path, there are moments of doubt and regret. Things that once seemed like blessings feel more like curses, and you might long for a magic wand or at least a second chance to make those choices again. As a pair, read the scenario you have been given, and take a few moments to discuss what advice you might give to the person in your scenario.

Give the pairs about ten minutes to discuss their scenarios, and then call the group together. Have each pair read their scenario aloud and tell the advice they would give. For each one, ask the whole group: *What other advice might you give to the person in the scenario?*

After all the pairs have presented their scenarios, comment that because God is present with us through all of our choices, we are never without hope, even when we seem to make the “wrong” choice. Listen to the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Close with the following or a similar prayer: *God of Grace, through your Son Jesus Christ, we know that you do not desert us in our faulty judgments, but offer us the blessing of forgiveness. Help us to see the hidden promise in difficult situations and respond to your compassion with joy. Amen.*

8 Bless You!

Leader preparation: The actual origin of using the common expression “bless you” after someone sneezes is unknown. One possibility comes from Rome around the year 590. Pope Gregory I ordered unending prayer and parades of chanters in order to drive away the bubonic plague. Sneezing was thought to be a symptom of the plague; therefore, a blessing was offered in order to spiritually defend against it. Another possibility comes from the legend that one’s heart momentarily stops during a sneeze, and a blessing ensures the heart’s restart. This activity engages young adults to think of more logical reasons and beneficial situations for offering blessings to another person.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

As the group gathers, ask about the last time that the members of the group have blessed someone. (If one of the answers involves sneezing, offer the information from the Leader preparation as a point of interest.) Then ask about the last time the members received a blessing from another person. Receive all answers including both formal moments of blessing, such as by a priest or pastor, as well as informal moments of blessing, such as a care package that arrives from home unannounced.



Tell the group this Americanized and significantly abridged version of “The Frog Prince,” originally told by the Brothers Grimm:

Once upon a time, there was a spoiled princess. While out playing one day, she accidentally dropped her golden ball into a pond. The spoiled princess began to cry and was comforted by a large ugly frog. The frog offered his assistance, but wanted something in return. He refused all of the princess’ jewels and other finery, telling her that if she would take him into the castle to live with her and be his true friend and companion, then he would get her golden ball from the bottom of the pond. Desperate to have her ball back, the princess agreed, but it quickly became apparent that she did not intend to uphold her side of the agreement. But after appealing to her father, the King, the frog won the right to move into the castle. Reluctantly, the princess kissed the frog, which was immediately freed from a spell and turned into a prince. The two of them lived happily ever after.

Point out that you do not need to be ordained to bless someone. You simply need to be attentive to that person’s situation and be willing to respond out of kindness and compassion.

Invite the group to brainstorm situations in which people might need to receive a blessing and list these situations on newsprint or a whiteboard. Then, next to each situation, brainstorm the blessings that could be offered for that situation. Encourage each member of the group to choose a blessing to offer to someone during the upcoming week.

9 Baby Steps

Leader preparation: Borrowed from the popular challenge-course activity “Ants on a Log,” this activity challenges young adults to take on new experiences slowly, consciously, and thoughtfully rather than rushing through them.

Choose an open space indoors or outdoors. If you are doing this activity outdoors and want a greater challenge, soak the ground under the board with water so that stepping off the board is really discouraged!

Supplies:

- 2' × 4' × 8' wooden board

Before the group arrives, set the board in the middle of the room and clear the area of furniture or objects that may provide safety hazards. Gather the group on either side of the board, leaving plenty of space at the ends for “landing zones.”

When one has made the decision to move forward, there is a lot of excitement and energy. A combination of the blessings of loved ones and fear of the unknown may seem like great momentum behind you, propelling you into the future at a high rate of speed. But there are risks to allowing that to happen. Like someone trying to cross an unstable bridge, a trek into the future takes a bit of calculated planning and clear-headed execution.

Your task here is simple. Make it across this board in as little time as possible, but if your foot touches the floor, you have to start all over. Perhaps moving into the future is not so hard when it is just you and the goal is simple, but in life there are obstacles and other people on their own journeys. The task this time is the same: make it across this board in as little time as possible. This time, however, there will be two of you to get across at the same time, and if anyone’s foot touches the floor, you both have to start all over.



Reflect

As group members were interacting, how supportive were they of one another? In what ways did they bless one another with insight, encouragement, resources, or compassion?

Have the members of the group try this activity one at a time, moving from one end of the board to another. Then form two teams. Position one team at one end of the board and the other team at the other end. One person from each team begins to move across the board at the same time. If the two players get stuck in the middle, encourage their teammates to advise them on how to keep moving toward their goal. After both teams have crossed the board, discuss the activity.

- When trying to get across the board by yourself, what techniques worked best for you?
- What made the team activity difficult for you? How did you solve these problems? How helpful was it to have teammates offer advice?



Attachment: Activity 7

Scenarios

1. Julieta finds herself unhappy at college, just six weeks after arriving. She is homesick and tired, and she's overwhelmed by all the changes in her life. What should she do?
2. Two weeks after the wedding, Taylor is not sure that she made the right choice by marrying her childhood sweetheart, Anthony. What was cute when they were kids is now very irritating. What should she do?
3. Feeling bloated and sick, Rachel is no longer excited about the possibility of being a mother. In fact, if she were honest, she's not sure that she is ready to be a mother. What should she do?
4. Two years into getting his college degree in business, James is wrestling with an ethical dilemma. He is not certain that he has what it takes to be a business owner, but his father is counting on him to take over the family business. What should he do?
5. After a fight with his wife, Tomas finds himself at a local tavern face to face with his high school girlfriend who is . . . no longer the little girl he knew. It occurs to Tomas that he can't remember why they ever broke up. What should he do?
6. Jordan has always been a "man's man"—rugged, confident, athletic, and very popular with the ladies. Because of tight finances, he is sharing an apartment with two other guys. Last night, he learned that one of them is gay. What should he do?

Attachment: Activity 7 *(Continued)*

7. Madison never thought of herself as being bright enough for college. But a position recently opened up in the company where she works, and it requires a college degree. Madison is sure she would be perfect for the job. What should she do?

8. Lucas received a telephone call from his girlfriend twenty-three minutes ago. She told him she was diagnosed with a STD. What should he do?

9. Waking up naked in her own bed with a vicious hangover, Nicole cannot remember how she got home from the club last night and has no clear recollection of anything after the second beer. When Nicole goes to the kitchen to get some coffee, she finds a pair of men's underwear hanging on one of the kitchen chairs. What should she do?

10. Even though Isaiah is a young adult, he has the power-of-attorney for his mother, who is terminally ill with cancer. The doctor called, wanting to know if Isaiah would consider hospice care. What should he do?

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The lives of most young adults are filled with adventure. There are new opportunities to explore, new things to try, and new responsibilities to embrace. Without a foundational story of identity, however, this adventure can quickly become overwhelming, frightful, and even dangerous. Our faith story in scripture provides a solid spiritual base from which personal ethics can be formed—personal ethics that inform how, why, and when we let go, as well as when we embrace the benefit of blessing.

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

At the edge of the Promised Land, the people of God were prepared for life in a new land led by a new leader. It was time, God determined, for a complete overhaul. The people of God experienced many layers of grieving all at once. This was the second generation in the wilderness—they grew up wandering and following Moses. So as difficult as it was to say farewell to their founding leader, it was also difficult to let go of their sojourning way of life. They were transformed from being the second generation of wanderers to being the first generation to abide in the Promised Land. They were the founding generation of the new, settled people of God! What would be the values of their society? How would they define themselves in contrast to other societies?

The Gospel according to Matthew was written in a time when the church was on a similar edge, needing to differentiate itself from the Jewish synagogue. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out the Way before the crowd, offering them the foundational values of following him as opposed to following the “Law of Moses.” Jesus specifically addresses the issue of who is to be blessed. The answer is “everyone,” even our enemies.

Prayer: God of transitions, great and small, nourish me with your Word and wisdom, so that I may enter the Promised Land that you have prepared for me. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Biblical Way of Blessing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Everyone needs a blessing, “an infusion” of divine will, acceptance, approval, hope, and specialness (according to a Wikipedia definition). When Jacob stole Esau’s birthright blessing, Esau “burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me—me too, my father!’” (Genesis 27:36, NIV). This activity introduces young adults to the biblical tradition of blessing, emphasizing that all blessing begins and ends with the ultimate blessing of God.

Before the activity, write each of the following references on a separate slip of paper: Genesis 1:26–31; Genesis 32:22–29; Genesis 12:1–3; Psalm 139:1–14.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- slips of paper, pen

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles. Tell the group you will be studying a number of Bible passages that talk about the importance of blessing. Offer the definition of blessing from Leader preparation above. Ask participants to name ways they have been blessed.

Ask for four volunteers to read aloud, and give each of them one of the slips of paper with a Bible reference. Give them a moment to look up the passage, and then ask each one to read aloud the passage. After each passage is read, pause and ask the group what that text reveals about the nature of blessing.

Ask everyone to read Numbers 23:13–26 silently. Discuss what this text reveals about blessing. Note that Balaam is not an Israelite, and so this reveals that God is quite willing and able to work through those outside the community of faith. Further, this text makes it clear: God’s blessing is the ultimate blessing; it cannot be revoked.

In closing, read Romans 8:31–39 in unison and end with the word “Amen.”

2 My Ancestor Was a Wandering Aramean

Leader preparation: From its inception, the beloved community of God was a people “on the move,” and the faith that is given to us adapts to fit all kinds of situations, cultures, and circumstances. This activity introduces young adults to the mobility and, thus, portability of our faith.

Prepare the space by draping a central table with fabric, placing a lighted candle on the table, and playing meditative instrumental music for reflection. If available, place a copy of the painting “The Departure of the Israelites” by David Roberts on the table.

Locate a map of Palestine in Jesus’ time, possibly from a study Bible or Bible atlas.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- meditative instrumental music and device for playing it



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

- map of Palestine in Jesus’ time that includes: Gennesaret, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon, Sea of Galilee, Region of Decapolis, Dalmanutha
- (optional) artwork: “The Departure of the Israelites” by David Roberts, http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_235541/David-Roberts/The-Departure-of-the-Israelites%2C-1829
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

As the group gathers, invite participants to sit quietly and recall times that they have been aware of being on their own journey. Encourage participants to take a look at the painting “The Departure of the Israelites,” if it is available.

After a few quiet moments, collect the group with an Irish blessing: *May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, and the rains fall soft upon your fields. And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Distribute Bibles. Invite the participants to read two scriptures that talk about the movement of the people of God, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. As you read each text, try to visualize the scene in your mind and see if you can imagine what significance the movement might have had on the people of God and on the people into whose territory the people of God were entering.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 34:1–12. If you have it, refer to “The Departure of the Israelites.” Many of the people who left Egypt and followed Moses into the wilderness were not the same people who arrived at the Promised Land. The people on the verge of the Promised Land were the children and grandchildren of the Exodus. All they knew was wandering in the wilderness. Discuss.

- What do you think the significance of this lifelong movement was for the people of God?
- How do you think the wandering impacted their view of the Promised Land and their anticipation of moving into the Promised Land?

Ask three volunteers to read aloud Mark 6:30–43, Mark 6:45–56, and Mark 7:31, 8:1–10. Show the map of Palestine, or ask them to look at this map in their Bibles and point out the cities in the texts in order to show movement around the area. Ask:

- What do you think is the significance of the movement around this area?
- Why do you think Jesus fed two crowds?

The Jewish people stayed in the Promised Land, but there were other people known as the Gentiles on the “other side of the lake.” Jesus’ message may have started out for the Jews, but Jesus took his “show on the road,” and many more people received it! Ask: *How is this journeying in Jesus’ story important for our lives today?*

3 Do Not Cling to Me

Leader preparation: Being blessed feels good! But the point of being blessed is not to hold onto it or hoard it; blessings are to be shared with others. This activity addresses the “temporary” nature of blessing in the sense that it begs to be passed on. Be aware that this activity may dredge up deep feelings of grief, especially if participants have recently experienced a significant death in their lives. Be prepared to address this at another time or refer participants to your pastor.

**Supplies:**

- song video: “Here Comes Goodbye” by Rascal Flatts, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17VudJ6lr4k>; lyrics, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/here-comes-goodbye-lyrics-rascal-flatts.html>
- device with Internet access
- Bibles

When the group is gathered, show the song video “Here Comes Goodbye.” Discuss the intended meaning of the song reflected in the video, which might be a surprise to those who had assumed the song was written about a romantic breakup.

We are blessed with special people in our lives, but because we are human, those blessings are temporary. When these human blessings leave, there is pain. We can choose, though, to move on and bless others in our loved ones’ memory.

Distribute Bibles. Ask for volunteers to read aloud the following passages: Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 5:1–20; John 20:10–18. After hearing the scriptures, discuss.

- What blessings did the disciples, the demon-possessed man, and Mary receive in these passages?
- What were their reactions to these blessings? What did they want to do?
- What did Jesus tell them to do instead? Why do you think he gave those instructions?

Gather in a circle. Close with the following or a similar prayer, allowing at least thirty seconds of silence at the marked pause.

Holy and ever-present God, we are thankful for people who have been a blessing to us. As much as we want to cling to them and perpetually receive that blessing, we know that we cannot. In the silence of this space, receive our grieving and grant us the courage to pass their blessing to others as lovingly as it was bestowed upon us. *(Pause)* Merciful God, give us power to be a blessing in the lives of others. Do not desert us in our despair, but lift us up with the hope of the resurrection. We pray in the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 It’s Up to Me Now (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: With many people deciding to wait until their 30s to begin having families, more and more people will find themselves caring for both aging parents and children. This reality means a greater sense of being the primary generation. The following activity is designed to reassure young adults that they are not the first generation to experience this burden of responsibility, or to face the tasks at hand unprepared. As did their ancestors in faith on the verge of the Promised Land, they have a promise of God’s abiding presence and help.

Note: Some of the verses in this activity have long and difficult biblical names. Because we are not focused on the names or their meanings, it is acceptable to substitute difficult names with more common names. For example, Shelumiel could be Sharon, and Eliasaph could be Eli.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

As the group gathers, ask for five volunteers to read aloud. Distribute Bibles.

When people set their minds to read the Bible from cover to cover, they usually do fine with Genesis and Exodus because they are books filled with familiar stories, and the Commandments are somewhat interesting. But when they get to the book of Numbers, people tend to get bogged down in all the numbers—this many thousands of that family and that many thousands of this family. In between those parts of Numbers, though, are the details of the wilderness experience.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 10:11–36 (substituting names as suggested in the Leader preparation). Explain that this was the people of the Exodus moving from the base of Mount Sinai toward the Promised Land.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Numbers 14:1–23. Ask: *If these people will not be going into the Promised Land, who will continue God's promise?*

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Numbers 20:2–13. Ask: *Why will Moses not be leading the community into the Promised Land? What did he do wrong?*

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Numbers 26:63–63. Explain that the census taken in chapter 26 is the second generation (the children and grandchildren). These will be the people of the Promised Land led by Joshua instead of Moses.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 34:1–12. Then discuss all these texts.

- The children and grandchildren of the people of the Exodus were the generations to enter the Promised Land. What might have been their concerns or fears about being the first generation to enter the Promised Land? What might have been their hopes?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation, poised to “take over” responsibility of something? How did it make you feel? What were your concerns? What were your hopes?

Just as God was with the people of the Promised Land, so we are also heirs to the promises of God. God abides with us each day as we stand on the verge of a new day.

**5 I Am**

Leader preparation: Although adolescence is notoriously the time of differentiation from previous generations, young adults continue to decide how much influence previous generations will have on the decisions they make. Similarly, the church of Jesus Christ also had to differentiate itself from its “parent.” Using the Sermon on the Mount as a model, this activity encourages young adults to claim, “You have heard it said . . . but I say . . .”

Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Ill-Emental” by I.a.M.m.E, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gj9rH2MAIZg&feature=youtu.be>
- Bibles



- 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>

After the group gathers, introduce I.aM.mE (Inspire, Motivate and Energize) as a hip-hop dance crew from Houston, Texas, and winner of America’s Best Dance Crew (ABDC). On their promotional Facebook page, they describe themselves as a “Crew dedicated to inspiring, Motivating, and energizing every individual to be themselves and find what makes them who they are.” In the Last Chance Challenge of ABDC Season 6, I.aM.mE performed their signature routine that introduced their “mission statement.” Watch the video together, and then discuss.

- What is their “mission statement”?
- How did their dance routine introduce the diversity of each individual dancer?
- How does their dance routine motivate people in the audience to claim their own identities?
- In what ways have you claimed your own identity? What makes you different from your peers, your siblings, and your parents?

From the very beginning, the church of Jesus Christ claimed to be different from its “parent” organization, the Jewish temple. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Distribute Bibles. Read aloud Matthew 5:17–20. Ask: *How did Jesus intend to show that Christians were different?*

Invite group members to take turns reading aloud these passages: Matthew 5:21–26, Matthew 5:27–30, Matthew 5:31–32, Matthew 5:33–37, Matthew 5:38–41, Matthew 5:43–48. After the readings, invite participants to identify and discuss any patterns in these verses. As is helpful, point out that Jesus repeats “You have heard it said . . . but I say.” Each time, he sets a higher standard for Christians to follow.

- What traditions and rules from your upbringing do you still follow?
- What did you think of those rules and traditions then, and what do you think about them now? Why were they set? What benefit did you get from them?
- To what extent do those rules and traditions apply to your life today? Why have you kept them or replaced them? Are your rules more strict or more lenient, and why?

Take a quiet moment to look at the painting “Christina’s World, 1948” by Andrew Wyeth. It has been said that Wyeth’s painting is “in homage to the indomitable spirit” (from a description at www.art.com). It might look like the woman in the painting is simply reclining in a field, but the painting is actually “inspired by [Wyeth’s] polio-afflicted neighbor as she determinedly dragged herself toward her house.” Our identity as individuals is what determines how we will handle the most difficult moments of our lives.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for our individual gifts and strengths that not only set us apart and make us unique, but fortify us for the journey into the future. Continue to bless us as we let go of what does not work and as we receive from you the resources for the journey. Amen.



6 Spiritual ID Card

Leader preparation: With compounding adventures of education, vocation and relationship, young adults need a solid foundation from which to face challenges. This activity encourages young adults to solidify their own biblical identity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Bible concordance, or device with Internet access
- index cards
- pens

Distribute index cards and pens. Ask each participant to put his or her name at the top of an index card. If group members choose, they can also put some basic information about themselves on the card. This will be their (at least temporary) spiritual ID card.

A spiritual ID card is much like any other identification card. It tells whoever reads it about you. Sometimes an identification card can even be a reminder for you! After all, how many of you know your driver's license number without looking? A spiritual ID card gives the reader specific information about what inspires you, what keeps you going, what motivates you. This may not be so important to carry for someone else to read, but in times of challenge or struggle it can remind you of what keeps you going!

Encourage participants to select specific verses of scripture that are of comfort or inspiration to them. These verses may have been memorized in childhood. They may be "favorite" verses. If the participants have trouble remembering full verses, direct them to use a concordance or website such as "Bible Gateway" (www.biblegateway.com) to help find them. Some verses to consider include Psalm 22, Psalm 23, Psalm 137, Psalm 139, Genesis 1:26–31, Ephesians 1:3–14, Romans 8:31–39, John 3:16–17, and Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

Because index cards are small, participants may not be able to write full verses, but encourage them to write down key phrases and text references. When they are finished, invite participants to reveal their verse choices. Encourage them to carry the cards in a wallet, purse, or backpack.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Scripture Speaks (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In the Old Testament, when a significant incident happened, the place of the incident often was marked and named with a meaningful name. This activity introduces young adults to the act of blessing important spaces and places in their lives.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- plain paper
- markers

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles and ask for volunteers to read aloud. Have volunteers read aloud the following texts, explaining the meaning of each place name after the reading:



- Genesis 11:1–9 (Babel sounds like the Hebrew word for “confused.”)
- Exodus 17:1–7 (Massah means “testing,” and Meribah means “quarreling.”)
- Numbers 11:1–3 (Taberah means “burning.”)

Distribute paper and markers. Comment that naming a place can be very important even today. Tell about two residents living on either end of a hallway in a senior apartment complex who decided to name their apartments “The Ranch” and “The Back 40,” because that made their apartments feel more like home. The resident director encouraged them by hanging a framed directional sign on the wall between their apartments. Ask: *What are other reasons one might choose to give a place a special name today?*

Invite the participants to think about a place that holds particular meaning for them.

Think of a place where something significant (good or bad) happened, an event you wish to remember. Write the location on one side of the paper. Now think of a name that you would give to that place to remind you of what happened there. It could describe the incident, or what you believe God’s purpose was for that incident. It could symbolize what you learned in that place, or it could simply memorialize a feeling you have when you think about that place. It could be in English or another language. Make a sign with that name on the other side of the paper.

Allow ten minutes for creating signs. Encourage conversation among participants as they work, especially to offer ideas to those who are having trouble thinking of a place name.

After signs are finished, gather in a circle and put the signs in center. Offer this or a similar prayer: *God, we lift up these places for your blessing. Exorcize demons, take away pain, celebrate memories, and honor holiness. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*



8 Letting Go of Baggage

Leader preparation: Perhaps nothing is harder than letting go of “baggage”—issues that seem to follow us wherever we go. The heaviest “baggage” of all is grudges held from ugly encounters and wrongs done. This activity is designed to help young adults let go of this “baggage” so that their journey is more enjoyable.

Check in the hymnal or songbook your church uses for the hymn “Go, My Children, with My Blessing.” If it is there, bring hymnals or songbooks for participants to use.

Down the left hand side of a piece of newsprint, list wellness coach Elizabeth Scott’s five strategies for forgiveness: (1) Express yourself, (2) Look for the positive, (3) Cultivate empathy, (4) Protect yourself and move on, (5) Get help if you need it. (From an article of May 14, 2011, entitled “How to Forgive,” http://stress.about.com/od/relationships/a/how_to_forgive.htm)

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- 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>



- 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 with Internet access
- hymnals or song books your church uses

Invite group members to consider the grudges that they carry—the situations that have disturbed them and that have not been resolved; the people who have wronged them and have not been forgiven. Assure them that they will not have to reveal details about these situations.

Distribute Bibles. Science has proven that holding grudges can cause poor sleep, high blood pressure, and chronic pain, and creates an increase in toxins in the body. In short, science has proven what the Bible has said for centuries: forgiveness is one of the most important things you can do to be truly and fully human. But how? Explain that wellness coach Elizabeth Scott suggests five strategies: (1) Express yourself, (2) Look for the positive, (3) Cultivate empathy, (4) Protect yourself and move on, (5) Get help if you need it. Then turn the discussion to some biblical principles.

Post the newsprint with the list of strategies and distribute Bibles. For each of the following texts, ask a volunteer to read the verses aloud, and then invite the group to discuss the verses.

- **John 1:8–10.** *What is always the first step toward forgiveness? Write “confession” on the right side of the newsprint, across from “express yourself.” To whom do we confess when we have been wronged? What might we confess if we feel we have done nothing wrong, but are still holding a grudge? Note that repentance is one step further than confession. Confession is something we say; repentance is something we do—“repentance” literally means “turn around.”*
- **Romans 12:9–13.** Write “rejoice in hope” on the right side of the newsprint, across from “look for the positive.” *What are specific ways that we can follow these exhortations from the apostle Paul?*
- **Romans 12:14–21.** Write “love our enemies” on the right side of the newsprint, across from “cultivate empathy.” *What are specific ways that we can love our enemies? Why would loving our enemies “heap burning coals on their heads?”*
- **Philippians 4:8–9.** Write “keep on doing” on the right side of the newsprint, across from “protect yourself and move on.” *How does our focus affect our attitude? Certainly we do not leave ourselves completely vulnerable, but what happens when we move the focus off of the issues and grudges?*
- **Hebrews 10:23–25.** Write “provoke one another to love and good deeds” on the right side of the newsprint, across from “get help if you need it.” *Whose help would you seek, if you needed it? If you do not know, how would you find help?*

Gather group members to take a moment to look at the artwork “Forgiveness” while thinking of the grudges they are carrying. Pray aloud: *O God, you hear not only what we are willing to speak, but what we hold in places deep with grief and anger. Help us to let go of the sins of others as you free and heal us from our own sins. We pray this and all things in the name of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Sing or listen to “Go, My Children, with My Blessing.”



9 How to Bless Someone

Leader preparation: In 1986, Gary Smalley and John Trent cowrote a book called *The Blessing* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993) that outlined five steps to blessing someone. Then they wrote a book called *The Blessing Workbook* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993) based on the same steps. More recently, John Trent has created the Blessing Challenge, an online initiative, at <http://theblessing.com/>. Trent is calling one million people to choose to change the life of one child by giving “The Blessing” to them. The idea is simple. Studies recorded in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that children who receive blessings are happier, more emotionally stable, and achieve more personal and professional success. This activity uses the biblical passages that inform Smalley and Trent’s five steps to teach young adults about the art of blessing.

Copy “Blessing,” Attachment: Activity 9, and cut apart the strips.

Supplies:

- “Blessing,” Attachment: Activity 9
- scissors
- Bibles
- writing paper, pens

Reflect

What insights did you gain about blessing and letting go from the scripture you studied in this Exploration? What blessings have you received and who will you bless?

As the group gathers, form five pairs or small groups. Give each of the groups one of the strips from the attachment “Blessing.” (If your group is small, you might give more than one strip to a pair or small group.) Ask each group to read the passage given on the paper, discuss the questions, and prepare to report to the entire group. Allow about ten minutes for groups to work.

Gather the group for a reporting time. Close with a prayer for all of those people the group lifted up in their discussion.



Attachment: Activity 9

Blessing

Read: **Mark 10:13-16**

Discuss:

- What role does touch play in the blessing Jesus gives?
- When have you been blessed by a caring touch? Who blessed you in this way?

Read: **Numbers 6:22-27**

Discuss:

- Why do you think God commands that this blessing be spoken to the people?
- When have you received a spoken blessing like this? Who blessed you in this way?

Read: **Philippians 1:3-11**

Discuss:

- What words in this reading tell you what Paul values about the Christians at Philippi?
- When have you been blessed by being told of your value as a person? Who blessed you in this way?

Read: **Jeremiah 1:4-10**

Discuss:

- What words in this reading describe the future to which God is calling and blessing Jeremiah?
- When have you been blessed by a challenge or a vision for the future? Who blessed you in this way?

Read: **Ruth 1:16-17**

Discuss:

- In what ways are Ruth's words to Naomi a blessing?
- When have you been blessed by another person's commitment to your well-being? Who blessed you in this way?

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

When we were children, the diversity to which we were exposed was largely determined by our nuclear community—the members of our family, the neighborhood in which we grew up, and the schools that we attended. But as we reach adulthood, that relatively small world expands to include people of different cultures and mores. Undoubtedly, young adults quickly learn that old attitudes and relationships must also change, expand, or in some cases, die. At the same time that we are blessing and letting go of the old to make room for the new, we have the opportunity to be a blessing for and receive the blessing of new insight and companionship.

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

Proverbs 3:5–8 warns of the dangers of reliance upon human strength, wisdom, and wealth, advocating instead reliance upon the power and promise of God. Too often, human judgment leads one away from discipleship and toward injustice. Instead, Christian discipleship is lived in a community that is “clothed” in righteous relationships of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and peace. Whether we are dealing with our parents, our partners, or our children, we are called to a spirit of maturing Christian love.

Prayer: Loving God, through your example of Jesus Christ challenge me to embrace all of your human creation and to promote peace and justice in all of my relationships. 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 To Be or Not To Be Literal (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Bible is a divinely inspired and human-penned book about people trying to be faithful to God in all their humanness. Although it is “true and can be trusted,” the Bible’s specific context cannot be denied, and that context is thousands of years old! This activity examines two Old Testament laws for relevancy today. Be sensitive to those who are vegetarian and vegan by moral choice. Invite them to explain their choices and encourage respectfulness.

Supplies:

- Bibles

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles. Ask for a show of hands in response to this question: *How many of you have purchased or used mold and mildew remover for your house or apartment or dorm in the past year?*

Ooh, you might be in trouble! Ask one volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 28:20–22 and another to read aloud Leviticus 14:33–42. Ask: *Do you believe that it is immoral to have mold or mildew in your house? Why or why not?*

Have a participant read aloud Leviticus 11:1–23. Ask: *According to Leviticus, have you ever eaten anything that is unclean? Do you believe that it is immoral to eat pork or shellfish? Why or why not?*

Jews and Christians are still not of one mind when it comes to some of these ancient rules. Some people read the Bible literally—the same rules apply now that applied to the people of Israel. This can be problematic because often people who read the Bible literally allow compromise on what they deem to be minor rules; for example, some despise homosexuality for Leviticus reasons, but they eat pork BBQ. Other people read the Bible contextually. This can be problematic, too, because many modern issues are not directly addressed in scripture. Already this was a problem for the apostle Paul.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 14:10–23. After a moment, close with this or a similar prayer: *Gracious and Loving God, we are not of one mind on the relevancy of your Holy Word. Send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we might not be a stumbling block, but a blessing for those whom we encounter with your gospel. Amen.*



2 Calling All Disciples

Leader preparation: It is easy for church members to take for granted that everyone understands what it means to be a disciple. Jesus did not call people around him to be his personal secretary or to be his programmer, to build elaborate shrines or to coordinate palatable political campaigns; he called people around him to go out and make disciples. This activity redefines discipleship and encourages young adults to “plant” the gospel in whatever “field” they find themselves.

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



- 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.

- video: “This Is Discipling,” created by Kelly and Niki Tshibaka for the Foursquare Church, <http://vimeo.com/24570032> (permission to use granted)
- device with Internet access
- Bibles

As the group gathers, invite them to look at “The Baptism of Jesus.” Ask:

- Who introduced you to faith in Jesus?
- Were you raised in the Christian faith? If so, in what ways?
- Who has the biggest influence on your life as a Christian?

Explain that whether you were baptized as an infant, a child, a youth or an adult, your baptism was not a graduation. It was a beginning, an invitation to an active lifelong journey of discipleship.” Play the video “This Is Discipling.” Ask:

- What frustrations does this video express about the way church is “done”? To what extent do you share those frustrations?
- What does discipleship involve, according to this video? How much do you agree?

Sometimes the church is so worried and distracted by many things, that we forget Jesus’ Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Form four groups and assign each group one of the following readings: Luke 8:4–15; Luke 9:23–27; Luke 9:57–62; Luke 10:1–20. Ask groups to read the assigned scriptures and report on what the verses say about being one of Jesus’ disciples.

Again, draw attention to the artwork “The Baptism of Jesus.” Invite the participants to use this as an image for reflection, a temporary icon. During a few moments of silence, consider your task as a disciple, a follower of Jesus. After a few minutes of reflection, say, “Amen.”

3 Discipleship as a Blessing

Leader preparation: Much has been written about the power of mentoring. In the 1990s, the National Mentoring Partnership discovered a statistically significant drop in risky behaviors among youth who had mentors. Since then other studies have shown the benefits of mentoring in marriage, in business, and in the church (also known as “discipling” among some Christian denominations). This activity helps young adults consider how they have been blessed by mentoring and challenges them to consider blessing others in this way.

Supplies:

- song: “You Raise Me Up,” by Rolf Løvland, performed by Celtic Women, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faKFcfytlxU&feature=youtu.be>
- device with Internet access
- song: “The Blessing,” Celtic Women, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ym8pZhOPDI&feature=youtu.be>; lyrics <http://www.metrolyrics.com/the-blessing-lyrics-celtic-woman.html>



As the group gathers, play the video “You Raise Me Up” performed by Celtic Women. Ask:

- Have there been people who have raised you up, as described in the video?
- Who were those people?
- What did they inspire you to do?

Invite participants to name people who have mentored them in faith or have been examples of true disciples of Jesus. Discuss the characteristics that made them true disciples and the ways that disciples mentor others to be disciples. Ask: *Which of these characteristics do you have? How could you mentor others to be disciples?*

Close by showing the video “The Blessing” by Celtic Women. Invite the group to listen carefully and consider extending the blessing of faith that they have received to others.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Good Enough for God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In current American culture, many are neither accustomed to nor comfortable with the Ten Commandments. Our response as fiercely independent people is to meet every “Thou shalt not” with “Just watch me!” This activity helps young adults interpret the Ten Commandments in their own “language,” thereby encouraging obedience, even given our free will.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles. Ask: *When is the last time someone told you what to do or where to go, and you reacted badly? Why is it often so hard to do what other people tell us to do?*

Explain that sometimes we react poorly to being told what to do. After all, we are fairly intelligent, independent, adult people—we don’t like being treated like we are children. But most of the time, when this happens, all we really need is some reason, some logic behind it. It would be helpful if instead of people simply telling us not to do something because “we say so” that they would explain the disadvantages or dangers of doing what they do not want us to do.

Invite the group to take a look at a famous list of commands and to rewrite them with some logical reasons. That way, maybe we will be more willing to listen and consider the Commandments to be a blessing to treasure instead of an unreasonable demand to be disregarded.

Ask participants to open their Bibles to Exodus 20:1–17. Read each commandment separately, and after each one, discuss why that commandment was important for the Israelites to follow and why it is important for people today. Consider what could happen if people didn’t obey that commandment. On newsprint or a whiteboard, record all suggestions of ways to communicate each commandment in a way that might be better received (and thus followed) by young adults.



Read Proverbs 3:5–9 aloud. God, unlike human beings, does not have a self-serving agenda, and can always be trusted to have our best interests at heart. God’s commandments protect all human beings from injustice.

To close, read the group’s version of the Ten Commandments from the newsprint or whiteboard and say, “Amen.”

5 Where Is God?

Leader preparation: In recent years, some have suggested that religion and the sciences are incompatible. People have taken sides about this, diminishing the other point of view as nonsense. Yet at the core of our faith is the understanding that God created all processes as well as the human capacity to be curious, to explore, to discover, and to wonder. This activity challenges young adults to consider the presence of God in worldly experiences and experiments.

Print the following list of issues and topics on newsprint before the activity:

nuclear science
 fashion design
 cancer/disease research
 global warming
 terrorism
 evolution
 space exploration
 spas and massage
 cell phones, smart phones

Supplies:

- song: “Earth and All Stars,” http://youtu.be/rdqB_bcxRuk or <http://youtu.be/akHwpw1R1oo>
- (optional) hymnals or songbooks that contain “Earth and All Stars”
- Bible
- markers and newsprint

Ask two volunteers to read aloud Psalm 148, alternating verses. Christians confess that they believe that God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—has created all things, from the smallest particle to the largest planet. God’s presence is not always obvious, though, nor are all things overtly covered in the Bible. Invite the group to look at several issues and topics and to identify how God is involved and how faith might intersect with these issues.

Invite participants to choose topics for discussion from the prepared newsprint. Encourage a respectful exchange of ideas.

Close by singing or listening to the hymn “Earth and All Stars.”



6 Zimbabwean Discipleship Prayer

Leader preparation: Martyrdom for the faith underscores that being a Christian is not for the faint of heart! Forces of evil continue to try to tempt us away from the difficult task of discipleship. This activity encourages young adults to let go of the things that have led them away from discipleship and to find courage to be a blessing to others.



Make copies of the attachment on cardstock, and cut apart the prayers. Make one for each person.

Spend time at the website [Persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org), and bring a few stories to tell to the group.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Discipleship Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 6
- website: “Persecution” (current stories of Christians facing persecution), <http://www.persecution.org/>

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 10:35–40. Comment that it is not always easy to be a Christian. Sometimes it feels like we have literally picked up a very large cross and are dragging it around. In some places, it is dangerous. Tell a few of the stories you found at [Persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org). Invite group members to add any other stories or examples that they know.

Distribute copies of the prayer from the attachment. Give participants a moment to read it silently. Discuss:

- What do you think the person praying this prayer experienced that led him or her to pray like this?
- What decisions has this person made (other than being Christ’s disciple)? What are they willing to let go of in order to be Christ’s disciple?
- How challenging has it been for you to be a Christian? What trials have you faced?
- What would it take for you to make the same commitment to discipleship that the writer of this prayer has? What would you have to let go of in order to have the kind of passion this person has?

Close by praying this prayer in unison.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 The “E-pistle” (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Apostle Paul used epistles (letters) to communicate solutions to ethical issues of his day to people who had “come to Jesus” through him. This activity challenges young adults to create an “e-pistle,” offering solutions to ethical issues that they have encountered.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- writing paper, pens

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles, writing paper, and pens. The apostle Paul used epistles—letters—to communicate solutions to ethical issues of his day to people who had come to Jesus through him. Invite the group to turn to Philemon as an example. Ask a volunteer to read this epistle aloud. Ask:



- What ethical issue(s) was Paul addressing?
- What solution did Paul suggest?

Challenge group members to write some “e-pistles” of their own. Brainstorm current issues or questions that concern group members and their peers. Lead the activity with the following instructions.

1. Find a partner.
2. With your partner, choose one issue or question and write it at the top of a sheet of paper.
3. You and your partner pass your paper to the next pair on the left.
4. Pairs then write a Christian response or solution to the question or issue on the paper received.
5. After two minutes, pairs pass their papers one pair to the left.
6. You and your partner will read the question or issue and the first response and then add your own response to the sheet. (Even if they agree with the first response, the new pair should say it in a different way.)
7. Stop when the papers are back with the original writers.

Close with prayer: *Merciful God, abide with us as a community of faith and help us to bless one another with encouragement in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

8 Love Our Enemies—But How?

Leader preparation: As you listen to the news these days, it is easy to identify “enemies”—those with different political views, terrorists, those who seem a threat to the moral fabric of society. This activity does not try to convince young adults about who is “our enemy,” but rather how Jesus has instructed us to deal with all of those with whom we struggle.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- local newspapers
- sticky notes
- pens

As the group gathers, distribute local newspapers, sticky notes, and pens. Instruct participants to go through the newspapers and look for stories about people who are “enemies” according to current events. Have them write the name of each “enemy” they find on a separate sticky note. Post all the sticky notes in one area of the room, creating a “wall of enemies.”

Look together at the “wall of enemies.” If any enemies seem to be missing, ask a participant to create a sticky note for each one and add it to the wall.

Distribute Bibles. Form three groups and assign each group one of the following readings: Matthew 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–36; Romans 12:14–21. Ask groups to read their assigned texts and prepare to tell the entire group what they learn about responding to “enemies” as Christian disciples. Give the small groups five minutes to work and then have each one report to the entire group.

To close, draw the group’s attention to the “wall of enemies.” Ask the group to send a silent blessing upon these “enemies,” praying that God may touch their hearts and our hearts as we continue to love them as Jesus told us. End the silent prayer time by saying “Amen.”



9 Virtual Community of Faith

Leader preparation: Obviously, Jesus did not have access to the Internet, and social networking was done in person. Yet if we believe that the principles of our faith are still true and relevant, then there is a way to apply those principles to our virtual relationships. This activity encourages young adults to imagine setting up a social networking group (a blog, a bulletin board, a Facebook group, and so forth) where biblical principals are relevant to rules of conduct. You may even want to operate this social networking group on a temporary basis.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) device with Internet access

As the group gathers, invite participants to tell about their experiences with social networking, including which ones they use, how often they are online, and the good and bad things that have happened to them because of these experiences.

Comment that when the church thinks of discipleship, we usually think of face to face direct contact. But that is no longer the only possibility. Ask: *If we were going to form a virtual community of faith, what social networking platform would work best?* Receive all suggestions, find consensus, and write that on the newsprint or a whiteboard.

Distribute Bibles and ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 4:14–21. Ask: *How would this passage inform our virtual community?* Record ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Luke 24:13–35. Ask: *How would this passage inform our virtual community?* Record ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud John 15:12–17. Ask: *How would this passage inform our virtual community?* Record ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35. Ask: *How would these passages inform our virtual community?* Record ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Colossians 3:12–17. Ask: *How would this passage inform our virtual community?* Record ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Work as a group to summarize key principles that would shape and direct their virtual community. If participants are interested, encourage them to actually set up this virtual community. Assign tasks and roles, as necessary. Commit to participation for a defined amount of time and then gather again to evaluate the experience.

Reflect

How has discipleship been a blessing to you? How has your discipleship been a blessing to others?

Close with a time of blessing for this new virtual community: *Ever-present and ever-creative God, we thank you for our ability to apply our faith in new ways. Bless our discipleship on this new journey with the power of the Holy Spirit and your Word of Truth. Amen.*



Attachment: Activity 6

Discipleship Prayer

Zimbabwean Discipleship Prayer

Lord, I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made; I am your disciple. I won't look back, let up, bow down, back away or be still. I am finished with sight-walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, low-living, cheap living, and dwarfed goals. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of despair, ponder at the pool of popularity, nor meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stored up, prayed up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. Amen.

—From <http://www.magnetic-church.com/>

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Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Young adults are an extremely diverse group when it comes to experiencing traditions. Some are respectful of traditions and have attempted to re-create them in their adult context. Others have developed their own traditions, embracing the readily available plethora of cultures. Still others have moved into new settings and have adapted traditions to suit their needs. Although it is true that moments that call for blessing and letting go can motivate young adults to dig deep into their past for traditions that will be helpful, today's young adults also have access to a wide range of traditions that can inform their response to such moments. This Exploration seeks to provide some opportunities to make this discernment process more conscious.

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

Tradition is an important informant for all human beings. If your mother and her mother and *her* mother made meatloaf in the same way, then meatloaf made in a different way can taste strange at best and offensive at worst. Tradition can ground us in truth as the world around us spins out of control, but tradition can also limit one's worldview, creating unnecessary and unjust biases. So it is with Peter, who is called by God to share the gospel with an unlikely disciple. God prepares him by confronting his assumptions about what is clean and unclean and declaring, "What I have made clean, you must not call profane [unclean]" (Acts 10:15). As we make choices about what to hold and what to let go, what to bless and what not to bless, we need to be ever-attentive to our personal biases based on traditions.

As you prepare for these activities, consider what traditions have been meaningful to you. Are there childhood traditions that you still retain as an adult? What is significant about them? Are there childhood traditions that you have let go or replaced with others as your circumstances have changed? How did you let them go and why? What traditions have you incorporated into your life that once were strange to you but now fill your life with meaning?

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 A Potluck of Culture (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: *The Presbyterian Handbook*, a "whimsical yet informative" resource about being Presbyterian (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2006), has a section that provides advice about "What to Bring to a Church Potluck (by Region)." Amusing as this section is, it highlights some of each region's traditional foods. This activity is designed to help young adults discover the blessing of a diversity of traditions that exist in the United States. To make this activity personal to your group, consider polling the group for their ethnic backgrounds and base a similar activity on foods that represent their ethnicities.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Comment to the group that traditions are not created in a vacuum but are based upon need, availability, and culture. Invite participants to imagine designing an All-American potluck, with food that represents the five regions of the United States: West Coast, East Coast, Midwest, Deep South, and Southwest. Form groups of three, and give each group newsprint and markers. Tell groups that you are going to read them some information, and then give them time to discuss and write on their newsprint their ideas for a potluck meal. Pause after each of the following steps:

1. According to a staff writer for "Divine Caroline," West Coast food is "local, fresh and fusioned," and usually includes avocados, salmon, shellfish, wine, and cheese. Much of it is Asian-influenced. So what food would your group include in your potluck to represent the West Coast?
2. According to the same writer, the East Coast is all about "comfort food" that often comes in a pot (chowders, baked beans, pot pies). East Coast food is classic and is influenced by Western European culture. So what food would your group include in your potluck to represent the East Coast?
3. According to Wikipedia, the Midwest is "the breadbasket of America" and is known for beef and pork processing. Much Midwest food is influenced by Northern or Eastern European culture. So what food would your group include in your potluck to represent the Midwest?
4. According to Wikipedia, food of the Deep South is influenced by French (as in Cajun), Caribbean, and African culture. So what food would your group include in your potluck to represent the South?
5. Finally, Southwest food is influenced by Mexico and South America and Native American culture. So what food would your group include in your potluck to represent the Southwest?

Ask each small group to present its menu to the entire group. Discuss:

- Given just a bit of information, you were able to think of food that represented each region. How did you know what foods went with what cultural group? For example, if you are not ethnically Asian, how do you know what "Asian-influenced" means?
- Why do you think there is diversity among regions? Why is East Coast food often made in a pot? How have patterns of immigration influenced the food we eat in America?

Blessing and Letting Go



Prayer: *God of glorious pageantry and silent meditation, of festivity and of fasting, unite my heart with those of other believers, so that all we think and do may praise your gift of creativity and diversity. 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 category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

- Why is the Midwest called “the breadbasket”? How has geography influenced the food we eat in America?
- How is the diversity of cultures been a blessing in America?

2 Passing Through

Leader preparation: Rites of passage are ritual blessings that mark a person’s progress from one status or stage of life to another. Noted French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep suggested that these rites have three phases: separation (a time of actual or symbolic detachment), transition (a time of ambiguity), and reincorporation (the consummation of a new identity usually symbolized with a cord or a knot in the form of a belt, ring, bracelet or crown). The purpose of this activity is to help the young adults identify rites of passage that they may have experienced, whether or not these moments have been recognized as such. Encourage members of the group to explain any unfamiliar cultural rites of passage that may arise.

Supplies:

- song: “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry,” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic&feature=related> (also in many church hymnals and songbooks)
- device with Internet access

Gather the group, and provide the information about “rites of passage” from the Leader preparation above. Ask:

- Given this definition of a rite of passage, what rites of passage have you experienced? (If this does not come easily, brainstorm about different periods of transition or times of ambiguity, such as puberty, coming of age, marriage, death.)
- What separation was part of this rite of passage?
- Was this time of transition celebrated in some way with other people? If not, how could have the transition been celebrated in a meaningful way?

Close by singing or listening to the song “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry.” Then pray aloud: *God of all time, thank you for walking this journey with us. Abide with us through all the times of challenge and bring us to a new day. Amen.*

3 Christmas Pageant

Leader preparation: One of the most sacred traditions in many churches is the annual children’s Christmas pageant. Many lifelong members find a blessing of comfort and peace in its consistent message and youthful portrayal. This tradition often includes pieces of two Gospels, Matthew and Luke. In this activity, young adults are encouraged to “dissect” a traditional children’s Christmas pageant to learn both what this tradition highlights of the birth of Jesus and what it fails to communicate.

Supplies:

- three or four copies of a traditional Christmas pageant that includes shepherds and wise men, such as the free one available online at <http://www.doubleestudios.com/christmaspageant/>
- Bibles
- highlighter pens



As young adults gather, form two groups, a “Matthew” group and a “Luke” group. Distribute Bibles and give each group one or two copies of the pageant script.

- Direct the “Matthew” group to read Matthew 1:18–2:12 and highlight portions of the script that pertain to these verses. Have them note what information or events from these verses are missing from the script.
- Direct the “Luke” group to read Luke 1:26–2:20 and highlight portions of the script that pertain to these verses. Have them note what information or events from these verses are missing from the script.

Give groups about fifteen minutes to work, and then ask them to report their findings to the entire group. Discuss:

- Why do you think there is a difference between the Gospels and the script?
- Why is some information left out of the pageant? What messages are congregations missing because those parts of the stories are missing?
- Why are details added to the script that are not in the Gospels? (The number of wise men, for example) How important are these details to the meaning of the story?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to having a tradition that combines the two Gospel stories?
- To whom does the traditional children’s Christmas pageant offer a blessing? If the missing information were added, would it still be a blessing?

As time allows (or as an additional activity), ask each of the two groups to create a children’s Christmas pageant script that reflects only the information and events actually in its assigned Gospel.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 A “Normal” Christmas (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Perhaps no other tradition is as potentially meaningful, or as potentially ingrown, as the family Christmas celebration. Each family, it seems, has unwritten and unspoken “rules” about everything from the food that is served and who makes it to how wrappings are disposed. There are informal ceremonies of welcome, of gift giving, of present opening, and of departure. Changes in these ceremonies can create gentle awkwardness, at best, and deep woundedness, at worst. This activity encourages young adults to name some of these traditions and to practice compromising and synchronizing traditions so that everyone is blessed.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint
- (optional) recorded instrumental Christmas music and device to play it

As the group gathers, encourage everyone to think about his or her family’s Christmas celebration. Tell them that they will be asked to talk about the traditions that are most important or meaningful to them. Allow some quiet time (perhaps with some instrumental Christmas music playing in the background) for thought.



Invite the group to plan a Christmas celebration that includes all of their families' traditions. To make this easier, separate the preparation for Christmas from the actual Christmas day activities.

On one piece of newsprint, print "Getting Ready," and then solicit traditions related to preparing for the Christmas activities. Topics to include:

- Who gets presents, who buys them, and why?
- When do we get together (day and time), and why?
- What do we cook, and who cooks it, and why?
- What decorations do we put up, and why?

On another piece of newsprint, print "The Event," and then solicit traditions related to the actual Christmas celebration. Topics to include:

- Is the day organized or chaotic, and why?
- What is the schedule or agenda and why?
- Does the schedule or agenda involve religious activities? Why or why not?
- How do we open presents and why?

Have the group work together to imagine a single common tradition through which everyone in the group would be blessed.



5 The Important Moments

Leader preparation: All young adults go through multiple and varied experiences of "coming of age"—getting one's drivers' license, graduations, registering to vote or registering for the draft, getting a new job or a promotion, having a baby, renting a first apartment, or making a major purchase such as a house or a car. Even though as individuals these moments of transition are nothing short of historical in significance, they often happen without recognition, especially in or by the church. The purpose of this activity is to challenge young adults to develop a blessing ritual for the church to use in the event of some such occasions.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint
- assorted hymnals and worship books
- "Ritual for a Rite of Passage," Attachment: Activity 5

Gather the group and work together to list ordinary experiences of "coming of age" (such as those listed in Leader preparation). Talk about why these experiences were significant and in what ways, if any, they were celebrated or recognized by the family and by the church.

Form groups of three or four participants and give each group newsprint and a marker. Ask each small group to choose one of the "coming of age" experiences named by the group and to create a ritual for this rite of passage. Ask each group to check first in hymnals and worship books to see if a celebration or blessing ritual exists for this life experience. If there is one, group members may wish to include elements of it in the ritual they create. Distribute the attachment as a guide for their planning.

Invite the groups to tell the entire group about the rituals they've created. Consider offering the rituals to worship leaders or the pastor in your church.



6 Leaving Behind Childish Ways

Leader preparation: While many of the traditions from childhood inform adult lives, at some point those traditions are replaced with other traditions that hold the same meaning, but meet the demands and circumstances of maturity. Thumb sucking, for example, is a method of self-comfort that is socially acceptable for children but not for adults. Therefore, adults must choose other methods of self-comfort, evaluating those methods for social acceptance and healthfulness. This activity is designed to help young adults acknowledge the passing of certain traditions, as well as give them a method for evaluating replacements.

Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: *Arthur* trailer, <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1810167411/trailer>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- song: “Shalom Chaverim,” traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnnnc>

Gather the group and view the trailer the movie *Arthur*. Ask the group to note all the childish traditions, beliefs, and values that the lead character Arthur still enjoys as an adult. List these childish traditions, beliefs, and values on newsprint or a whiteboard. Discuss:

- How does Arthur benefit from each of these traditions? What do they offer to him?
- In the movie, Arthur’s mother says “The time has come to set aside childish things.” What mature substitutes might replace each of these childish traditions?
- What traditions did you have as children or youth that no longer are appropriate?
- With what did you replace them (or with what could you replace them), now that you are an adult?
- What helps to ease the pain of letting go of traditions that are no longer appropriate?

Sing or listen to “Shalom Chaverim.”

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Transitions (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Each community or culture has traditions related to moments of transition. For example, when a family moves into the neighborhood, a neighbor might personally greet the new family with a homemade pie or a packet of information about local amenities. These traditions do not only communicate hospitality; they are also informal rituals of blessing: the blessing of new relationships, the blessing of shared resources, and the blessing of shared space. The purpose of this activity is to challenge participants to design simple rituals that bless neighbors in moments of transition.

Supplies: None



As a group, consider the following moments of transition within a residential or church community, and brainstorm ways to offer a blessing to those affected:

- Graduation (Example: Covertly plant a “Congratulation Flamingo” in the yard of each graduate on the night before graduation.)
- Birth (Example: Bless each new mom with a homemade blanket and a “coupon” for one free hour of babysitting.)
- New Job or Promotion (Example: Give a stress ball imprinted with the name of the church.)

If there is time, consider other moments of transition (loss of a job, moving) and brainstorm traditions that might offer blessing for those occasions. Choose one or two of these moments of transition that are particularly applicable to your church, and make a commitment to start these traditions or to present them to the appropriate church committee.



8 Tradition or Habit?

Leader preparation: According to Wikipedia, a tradition is “a ritual, belief or object passed down within a society, still maintained in the present, with origins in the past.” This definition implies meaning and intention. Unlike tradition, a habit is “an acquired pattern of behavior that often occurs automatically.” This activity engages young adults in an examination of their church’s “traditions” to see if, indeed, they are still providing meaning, or if they have become habits.

Check in your church’s hymnal or worship book to see if there is guidance for singing or chanting the psalms. If there is, bring hymnals or worship books for participants to use.

Invite a worship leader from your church to join you for this activity and add to the conversation about worship traditions.

Supplies:

- hymnals or worship books or recording of Psalm 148 being chanted, <http://www.llpb.us/MP3Hymns/OTCanticles-Psalms/261%20Ps%20148a.MP3>
- (optional) device with Internet access
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- worship leader as a guest
- 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>

As the group gathers, distribute hymnals or worship books, if those resources include help for chanting or singing the psalms. Otherwise, prepare to play the recording of the chanted psalm. The psalms were the hymns of ancient worship. In early times, they were sung antiphonally, that is, with the leader and the congregation alternating verses, or a cantor singing the psalm with the congregation singing a response. Invite the group to honor that ancient tradition as they join in on Psalm 148. Offer instructions as needed for your hymnal or worship book. Or simply listen to the recording. Ask:



- What do you think about this ancient tradition?
- Is this something that you have experienced before, or was this a first time?
- In what ways might this tradition create challenges in our church?
- In what ways might this tradition bless the people of our church?

Review the Wikipedia definition of “tradition” from the Leader preparation above. Work together to list the worship traditions of your church, and record these on newsprint or a whiteboard. Examples include the use of paraments, candles, or other “sacred” objects, the use of programs or bulletins, the choosing of the liturgy, and the order and placement of the music. Discuss these with the worship leader or pastor you invited, exchanging information about the history of these traditions and why they are important to the congregation.

Review the definitions of “tradition” and “habit” given in Leader preparation. Determine together what things on the list or worship traditions remain a tradition and what seems to have become a habit. For the traditions, ask: *How do these traditions still remain a blessing, even though they have been done repeatedly for a long time?* For the habits, ask: *With what new traditions could these habits be replaced? What rituals might be done to officially and respectfully let them go?*

Close with a reflection on “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds.” The artist, Giotto, let go of the tradition of his day and created a new form of art that included naturalism, perspective, and three-dimensionality. His art established new traditions in painting during the Renaissance and inspired artists such as Michelangelo. Those habits that you replace with new traditions may become the blessing of inspiration for others in the future.

9 A Blessing of a Different Kind

Leader preparation: Many religious traditions may seem strange, but as God told Peter, we are not to declare profane or unclean the things that God created clean. In fact, even the Christian traditions that we know and love, such as the sacraments of communion and baptism, have come, in part, from other cultures and faiths. In this activity young adults are encouraged to explore the traditions of others, to note the similarities (and thus the God-created unity of all human-kind), and to learn to respect the differences.

This activity recommends a follow-up activity, either a speaker from or a visit to another congregation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) telephone Yellow Pages

Distribute Bibles, and ask for volunteers to read sections of Acts 10:1–48. Discuss the following:

- Cornelius was the first Gentile convert to Christianity. Why do you think he was nervous when the Lord spoke to him?
- In Peter’s dream, why was Peter reluctant to eat the animals on the sheet? What is the significance of this dream?
- Why were the circumcised believers (Jews) astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles?
- What do you think is significant about this story for disciples today? What do you think we should be or do in response to this story?



Reflect

After doing the activities with the young adults, do your personal traditions continue to be a blessing to you or do you feel a need to reexamine and possibly replace some? How will you fortify those traditions that are a blessing? How will you let go of the traditions that are not helpful?

In the spirit of Acts 10:15, invite the group to explore a church, faith, or spiritual discipline that is different from our own. Talk about some options such as the following.

- Go to a Christian church of a different denomination, culture, or language. (You could use the Yellow Pages or an Internet search engine to explore options in your area.)
- Visit a congregation of a different faith, such as Jewish, Islam, Taoist, Buddhist, or Hindi.

After the group has narrowed the options and come to a consensus, make appropriate arrangements and proceed with the experience, encouraging the group to note the similarities and differences between those traditions and their own. After your visit, talk about what was meaningful about the experience and how the experience might influence their personal spiritual lives.



Attachment: Activity 5

Ritual for a Rite of Passage

Think about a rite of passage, such as getting one's drivers' license, graduations, registering to vote or registering for the draft, getting a new job or a promotion, having a baby, renting a first apartment, or buying a first car or house. How was that experience celebrated in your family? How did relatives or friends acknowledge this significant event?

With others in your group, choose a rite of passage and create a ritual for acknowledging and blessing that event within a congregation. Use the following questions as a guide.

- Why was this experience significant? What did it mean in terms of your faith? From this, develop your introduction.
- What questions did this experience raise for you? What struggles do you anticipate? What do you pray for? From this, develop a prayer.
- What blessing did you desire or require? From this, develop a blessing.
- What symbolic gestures will be included in your ritual, such as the presentation of a certificate or a gift? For example, if you were recognizing the purchase of a car or a house, you might want to include a presentation of the keys.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

The church is seeing increased interest in mission in the current generation of young adults. For this generation, actions speak megadecibels louder than words. Blessings, therefore, are meaningful only as they affect life in a real way. The Exploration will help young adults explore the potential impact of blessing and letting go, both on the one who is giving the blessing and the one who is receiving the blessing.

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

Nestled in a review of his itinerary, Paul advises the Romans that enthusiastic moral support and pious spiritual blessings are not sufficient in the ministry of Christ. These ethereal comforts are to be accompanied by a more material witness—the sharing of one’s resources. In order to truly bless others, one must sacrifice something of oneself, letting go of pride and selfishness in a spirit of mutual abundance. Inevitably, the experience of sacrifice to the benefit of someone else feels as significant as if one were giving up one’s homeland (in the case of Abram) or one’s very life (in the case of Christ), especially if available resources seem scarce. Young adults need to be encouraged that even when one can offer only a little, the act of giving yields further blessing for the giver.

Prayer: God, pour your Spirit upon me so that my cup overflows with abundance. Bless me so that I might share these blessings with those who are in need. 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 Serv-

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Talent Show (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Most young adults see themselves as adequately gifted or talented for their daily tasks, plus they enjoy hobbies and interests in which they willingly participate with like-minded people. But how does an interest in something like NASCAR “translate” to church life? And is amateur bartending really a good skill to offer in church? This activity helps young adults consider how their unique talents and gifts can be a blessing to others through the church.

Supplies:

- index cards
- pens
- Bibles

As the group gathers, ask each one to think about one wild, strange, or unique talent that he or she has and is willing to talk about in front of the group. After the group settles, have each participant introduce himself or herself by first name and his or her one wild, strange, or unique talent.

Challenge the participants to consider how these talents might be used in the church. Distribute index cards and pens. Invite participants to list all their talents—things they are good at and things they enjoy doing.

Distribute Bibles and ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 12:4–26. Comment that, at least in theory, all of our talents are needed in the church. If we belong to a sports team, not only could we organize a church bowling team or lead the youth group in a basketball game, but our skills as a team member can be useful on a church committee. If we like to host or go to parties, we can help create awesome fellowship events or fun programs for certain groups in the church. Paul makes it clear that our gifts are not just given for our own purposes, but our gifts are given so that we may use them to be a blessing to others.

Form pairs, and ask partners to exchange index cards and discuss how these talents can be useful in church life and how, through using them in the church, they can be a blessing to others. After about ten minutes, direct each pair to join with another, exchange talent lists, and discuss again.

Gather the group and talk about this activity. How might you encourage one another to use your talents for the sake of the mission of the church?

2 Do I Have Time for This?

Leader preparation: Given the demands of family, career, and education, many young adults barely have time for a social life, no less a spiritual life. This activity explores their busy schedules and points out how time might be carved out for spiritual things.

Supplies

- video: *Alice In Wonderland*, Rabbit House scene, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2CVDCdoTNo>
- device with Internet access



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

- song video: “How Can I Keep from Singing?” by Robert Lowry (tune: How Can I Keep from Singing), <http://youtu.be/MM8mOKfxmWw>

As the group gathers, show the video. Invite participants to tell about the most recent time they felt like the rabbit. Isn’t that always the way? We are running late and a terribly unwelcome and unhelpful monster shows up! Invite the participants to look at time, how much of it we have, and how we use it. Invite those who have their schedules on their phones to log into them.

Ask participants to look at or recall their schedules and note all the activities that are related to work or career (including education). Then ask the participants to note all the activities that are related to family and friends. Then note the times related to their faith. Finally, have participants look at the open times. Ask:

- Excluding time to sleep, what open time is available in your schedule this month?
- How will you use this “free” time? What do those activities say about your priorities?
- Where does your schedule include time for worship or spiritual discipline? Why or why not?
- If you were to set aside more time for spiritual “work,” when would be the ideal time for that? What would you do?

Close by showing the song video “How Can I Keep from Singing?” Invite participants to ponder the meaning of the words and the importance of faith in challenging times.

3 Savvy Consumers

Leader preparation: It seems our world is filled with businesses wanting to sell us something; their advertisements are a constant temptation to purchase things that we may or may not need. Young adults, even those who have steady jobs, do not always have a lot of disposable income. They may feel like they do not have enough resources to bless others through their giving. In order to have enough to both cover their needs and to share with others, what little they have must be spent wisely. This activity helps young adults ponder the difference between needs and wants and to recognize the benefit of being a blessing to others.

Supplies:

- variety of mail order catalogs or store sale flyers
- variety of magazines that have ads
- “play” money
- paper and pens
- Bible

Spread the catalogs and magazines on a table in the middle of the room. Gather around the table and look over the ads. Selling products is the sole focus of all catalogs and advertisements. Although there is no accurate statistic on the average number of mail order catalogs and sale flyers each family receives per year, they seem to come often.

Give a significant amount of “play” money to each participant. Tell the group that this amount is what is left after all of their bills are paid. Also distribute paper and pens. Encourage participants to look through the catalogs and advertisements on the table and make a list of things that they need and things that they want, noting the price of each item. After about ten minutes, gather the group for discussion. Ask:



- If you were to purchase all the things that you want and need, how much money would you have left?
- If you were to purchase just the things that you need, how much money would you have left?

Often we take our blessings for granted, which leads to waste. In appreciating God's bountiful blessings—and then responding with thoughtful, intentional planning—we will have enough to meet our needs and enough to pass on the blessings. Read aloud Romans 15:22–29. Ask:

- How does Paul use the Macedonians and Achaians to urge the Romans to share their blessings?
- What would encourage you to give some of your money to those who are in need?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Ten Percent of What? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: With new financial responsibilities, many young adults get their introduction to budgets like a baptism by fire. This sometimes leads to panicked neglect of their financial stewardship. This activity introduces the concept of tithing as a biblical standard for stewardship.

Supplies:

- Bible

Distribute Bibles. Invite participants to talk about tithing as a way to organize our material blessing of others. A tithe is simply one tenth of something, but it usually refers to a voluntary monetary contribution of 10 percent to a religious organization. Look at some biblical verses that talk about tithes.

- Deuteronomy 14:22–28: When was a tithe to be given?
- Deuteronomy 24:19–22: What did the widow, orphan, and alien receive?
- Deuteronomy 26:1–10: What was included in the liturgy when tithes were given?

Comment that not everyone is a farmer, and even farming is very different because we have an economy where we exchange money for goods and services. Discuss:

- If we were to tithe, what would be our “first fruits”?
- In what ways might our tithe be a blessing to others through the mission of our church?
- In today's economy, is it practical to expect people to tithe? Could you do it?

Tithing often begins with a small step, say 1–2 percent. Invite the group to adopt a practice of setting aside at least 1 percent a week. Increase that amount each week until you reach 10 percent. Challenge the group to try tithing over the next month and consider ways to report back to the group on their experience.



5 Taking Inventory

Leader preparation: We can acquire an enormous amount of things in a surprisingly short period of time. This activity is designed to encourage young adults to take inventory and give up things that are not needed—not just to de-clutter but also to bless and benefit those who may need what we have to give.

Supplies:

- several decks of cards
- “Playing Card Values,” Attachment: Activity 5
- Bible

Distribute copies of the attachment, telling the group they will use these in a card game you are going to play. The object of the game is to collect one of each of these cards. In this game, which is like the children’s game “Go Fish,” a player is discouraged from having more than one, because that would mean the person would have an abundance and might be hoarding. Direct the play according to the following instructions.

1. Form groups of three or four participants.
2. Give each group a deck of cards. Appoint a dealer to shuffle and deal seven cards to each player, and place the rest on a pile in the middle of the group.
3. Have each player lay out one card per value (no matter the suit), so that each is holding only cards with duplicate value. A player may have no cards, but that does not mean that person stops playing.
4. Select a starting player and then proceed in a clockwise manner.
5. The play begins with the starting player asking any other player for a card that is missing from their “house” on the table. For example, “Player 3, do you have a ‘2’?” If the other player has that card in his or her hand, it must be given to the player. If the other player either has no cards in his or her hand or does not have that card, he or she says, “Go Shop.” The asking player then takes a card from the pile. (Similar to “Go Fish.”)
6. Play continues until someone completes his or her “house” on the table with one of every card value. The first player to do that is the winner.

After playing, read aloud Genesis 12:1–5. Ask:

- What did Abraham and his family give up as they set out on their journey?
- What motivated them to give up those things?
- Think about your belongings. What do you have that you do not or no longer need?
- What would be required for you to let them go?
- To whom might these things be a blessing?

Challenge participants take inventory when they return home, deciding what they have in abundance and what they no longer need. Each should consider donating, giving away, or letting go of these items as a blessing to others.

6 Not Just Leftovers

Leader preparation: Often when we are asked to give material things, we are tempted to offer our “leftovers.” This activity challenges young adults to think beyond “leftovers” to the things that actually meet people’s needs. In order to get the supplies for this activity, you can either “borrow” canned food collected



by your church or purchase the canned goods. Make sure, though, to include a couple items that are strange, not commonly used, or not liked within your particular community and culture.

Supplies:

- variety of nonperishable foods, including a few items that are strange, not commonly used, or not liked within your particular community and culture
- 2 empty cardboard boxes, large enough to contain the food.

Spread out all the food on a table in the middle of the room. Ask participants to imagine that this is their own pantry at home. Ask:

- What are you most likely to eat?
- What are you allergic to, cannot eat, or do not like?

Form two groups and send one out of the room for five minutes. Ask the group that remains to separate the food into two boxes: one for food to donate and one for food to eat themselves. When the second group returns, point to the box of food for donation and say: "This is what this group decided they want to donate to you." Have the second group look through the box and discuss their thoughts and feelings about what was included and what was not included.

Ask the first group to explain why they donated what they donated. Discuss the following questions:

- When we bless people with a donation, what are some things we need to think about?
- Under what circumstances might the recipients of blessings simply be happy about what they receive?
- Under what circumstances might the recipients be given a choice about what they receive?

Close with this or a similar prayer: *God of the rich and of the poor, as we give out of our abundance, may both the giver and the receiver be blessed. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Mission Fair (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Too often the church assumes that young adults are too busy to serve. While it is true that many young adults have busy lives with many responsibilities, the lack of an invitation from their spiritual community often translates as a lack of interest in them and in their participation. This activity invites young adults to take the initiative to get involved in the mission of the church.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- copies of a church brochure, annual report, or list of serving opportunities in and through the church



Ask participants to list on the newsprint or whiteboard the opportunities for mission and serving in your church. After a few moments, distribute the copies of church information you gathered. Invite participants to browse through these, adding any additional serving or mission opportunities to the newsprint list.

Together, review the list, addressing each opportunity and asking group members to offer details about that opportunity (date, time, purpose, the way it is organized or executed). Find out who might already be involved in this mission.

Discuss possible commitments to these opportunities. Brainstorm opportunities that might be missing from the list. Encourage all participants to make contact with people responsible for organizing these mission and serving projects, or contact the pastor about starting a new mission.

8 Donation Fashion Show

Leader preparation: One challenge faced by many clothing closets and “thrift stores” is donations that are in unacceptable condition. This activity gives young adults an opportunity to have hands-on experience with a clothing drive and to understand the importance of donor discretion. To get the supplies for this activity, you may either “borrow” donations of clothing gathered by your church, or “create” donations, but make sure that the donations include items that would not be in acceptable condition.

Supplies:

- one or two bags of old clothing collected for donation, including some items that are torn, stained, dirty, or otherwise unacceptable in your community or culture
- (optional) “runway” music and an appropriate playing device. Suggestions include “New Attitude” by Patti LaBelle; “Supermodel” by RuPaul; and, of course, the fun and ever-popular “I’m Too Sexy” by Right Said Fred (The version on YouTube, <http://youtu.be/X8Bai7T4crs>, might be more appropriate than the version with the words.)
- sharp scissors

Spread the donations on a table. Tell the group that these items have been donated to a local clothing closet, but before they are donated, they need to be sorted for acceptability. Ask:

- What would make a piece of clothing acceptable or not acceptable for donation?
- Why is it important for clothing that is donated to be acceptable?
- For people who cannot afford to go shopping in the mall or even a discount store, donated clothing is a blessing. However, ripped or torn, worn out or dirty clothing is not a blessing for anyone. Why not?

After the group sorts the clothing, direct the group’s attention to the clothing that is deemed unacceptable. Ask: *Why do you think this was donated?*

Invite each group member to select a piece or an outfit that they would be willing to “model”—to show it off to the rest of the group. Have the group help you create a “runway” and then have each participant “walk the catwalk” (heavy drama and a little optional music makes this more fun). Encourage the group to try to “emcee” each model! End with applause for everyone!



Donate the acceptable items to a clothing closet of your choice. Cut the rest into rags and divide them among group members.

9 What Do You Say?

Leader preparation: Ironically, in an age of instant international communication, the art of saying thank you for a blessing has been archived with the art of penning a personal note. This activity resurrects the simple thank-you note as a way to remind young adults that gratitude expressed is always in style.

Supplies:

- song video: “Thank You” by Ray Boltz, <http://youtu.be/mgCIInn5dr4g>
- device with Internet access
- Bible
- blank note cards or thank-you notes, pens
- (optional) meditative instrumental music and appropriate player

When the group gathers, play the song video “Thank You” by Ray Boltz. Although this video is clearly “retro,” the song is very powerful in its expression of the deepest gratitude for blessing. Ask group members to recall blessings that they have received.

- Who blessed you?
- How did they bless you?
- What happened because they blessed you?
- What was your response to that blessing?

Reflect

Beyond leading these sessions, how are you extending personal blessings to others, using your time, your talent and your treasure? What are you willing to let go so that others may know the blessings that God offers?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 17:11–19. Invite the group to take a moment for a “retro” activity, writing personal thank you notes to people who have blessed you. Distribute note cards or thank you notes and pens. Direct the participants to choose one person who has blessed them in some way and then to write a short personal note, sincerely thanking that person for what she or he did. If desired, play meditative instrumental music in the background while the group works on the notes. Encourage the participants to mail or give their notes to the appropriate people as soon as possible.

Pray aloud: *Thank you, God, for all those who continue to bless us with invaluable gifts of advice or assistance or support. Bless them the way they have blessed us and keep us all in your tender mercies. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*



Attachment: Activity 5

Playing Card Values

Ace = accessories

King = shirts

Queen = dresses/suits

Jack = pants/skirts

10 = shoes

9 = electronics

8 = kitchen gadgets

7 = lamps/lights

6 = furniture

5 = computer equipment

4 = toys

3 = tools

2 = lawn equipment

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

Transitions do not happen in a vacuum, nor do they come in a neat and orderly fashion. They come in season—like groupings, piled one atop another, creating a tempest of stress and anxiety. It is no wonder that one of our most beloved images of Christ is the solid rock amidst a storm! Young adults, who are perhaps new to the processes of discernment, can be particularly caught up in this tempest, and from a clinging position, the future looks decidedly uncertain. This Exploration gives voice to both the anxiety and the assurance that God is present with us in the midst of transition.

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

Leader Preparation

How amazed Mary and Joseph must have been to hear that their child was to be the salvation, the redemption of Jerusalem! What a marvelous blessing! But surely, even as they left that temple, hearts bursting with pride, they must have known that forces would challenge that prophecy. Simeon warned them that many would fall, that many would oppose, that many would be exposed in the process. They must have known that this prophecy would not only bring them joy, but pain as well. Had not Simeon warned that Mary's soul would be pierced? Like Simeon, the prophet Jeremiah gave a double edged prophecy to God's people. Yes, they were in exile because of their disobedience, but within the context of upheaval, the people were to be a blessing to their captors, relying on the promises of God.

Prayer: God of exiles and sojourners, people on the move and people on the run, I am amazed by the complexity of life. Slow me down with the comforting reassurance of your presence in all situations and teach me to look toward you for guidance. 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Tic Tac Stress (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Things happen. Stress comes in all kind of packages, good and bad, easy to handle and difficult to bear. Although we may have little control over things that happen, we do control how we respond, how we "play the game." This activity simulates the intersection of fate and control, helping young adults to understand that no matter what the future brings, they have the power to make choices that create blessing or curse.

On a sheet of newsprint, draw a Tic-Tac-Toe grid with the spaces large enough for index cards.

Supplies:

- one die
- index cards
- pens
- marker and newsprint

As participants gather, have them work together to make game cards from index cards by writing eight "good stress" situations (one per card) and eight "bad stress" situations (one per card). Ask participants to write these in the first person, such as "I lost my job" or "I am getting married next week." On the other side of each "good stress" card, put an "O." On the other side of each "bad stress" card, put an "X."

Place the newsprint with the Tic-Tac-Toe grid on the table. Describe the game.

The object is to place three "Xs" or "Os" in a row before your opponent blocks you. But this game is played in a slightly different way. Take turns rolling the die. If a 1, 3, or 5 is rolled, the player takes an "X" card, reads it out loud, and then decides where on the grid to put that "X." If a 2, 4, or 6 is rolled, the player takes an "O" card, reads it out loud, and then decides where on the grid to put that "O." As in a regular game of Tic-Tac-Toe, you are encouraged to block the creation of a row of three. Unlike a regular game, though, here you have no control over whether you are playing an "X" or an "O." Once you get three in a row, the game is over and the cards are reshuffled.

Play the game several times, until everyone who wants a chance has had one. Then discuss the following questions:

- How did it feel to have no control over which type of mark you were playing?
- What are ways that you can weather "good stress" seasons?
- What are ways that you can weather "bad stress" seasons?
- Is handling "good stress" different from handling "bad stress?" If so, how?

Close with prayer: *Compassionate God, still our troubles and ease our anxiety. Give us your peace in stressful times. Amen.*



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

2 Because of the Past

Leader preparation: Experience is an influential teacher. Although some lessons learned are useful—it’s still a good idea to look both ways when crossing the street—other lessons learned might limit our ability to move forward. This activity uses an endearing children’s film to encourage young adults to let go of the things that hold them back.

There may be participants who are not familiar with the movie *Finding Nemo*. If desired, you may choose to watch this movie in its entirety at a separate time or expand your time to accommodate the film.

Supplies:

- video: “Full Whale Scene” from *Finding Nemo*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSWxXz3sN4w>
- device with Internet access

Gather the group to watch the video. Discuss:

- Where were Marlin and Dory going? To do what? How did they expect to get there?
- What were Marlin’s and Dory’s perspectives on being inside the whale?
- What had to happen for Marlin and Dory to continue on their journey?
- What was Marlin afraid of, and why was he so afraid?
- Because Marlin takes a risk and chooses to trust, they are transported to the very place they’ve been searching for. How is letting go important in your life?

Invite a time of silent prayer for participants to name the things that prevent them from continuing their journey, and ask God to help remove those barriers. After a few moments, end by saying “Amen.”

3 The X Factor

Leader preparation: Life will be going as planned and then there is a surprise, a twist in the plan that seems to rock your world. This activity invites young adults to anticipate these unexpected changes and to receive them as blessings in disguise.

Arrange to use the kitchen and oven for this activity.

Supplies:

- ingredients for chocolate chip cookies, following the recipe on the bag of chocolate chips (but do not bring chopped nuts)
- additional ingredients: almond and/or orange extract, food coloring, a few unshelled walnuts or pecans
- mixing bowl, mixing spoon, measuring cups and spoons, cookie sheet
- napkins, plastic sandwich bags

Ask group members to wash hands and meet you in the kitchen. Ask them to work together to make the cookies, following the recipe on the bag of chocolate chips.



Interrupt the group five times, exclaiming “X Factor!” and announce the following changes:

- X Factor 1: No 1-cup measure allowed!
- X Factor 2: No vanilla extract allowed!
- X Factor 3: The customer wants something colorful!
- X Factor 4: No pre-chopped nuts allowed!
- X Factor 5: The mixing spoon is broken!

When the cookies are finally in the oven baking, discuss the experience.

- How long did it take for you to get used to the X Factors? How did the X Factors help or hinder the process?
- What are the X Factors in life? How do you deal with them?
- How might X Factors in life be a blessing? What is required to see the X Factors in life to be a blessing?

Eat your X Factor cookies. You might think about how the X Factor cookies might be a blessing to someone else and share some.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 What’s the Plan? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Anyone can simply allow fate to take its course. Even people who trust God to lead them need to plan to move when God calls! This activity helps young adults understand that planning is an important part of facing the future with courage and confidence.

Supplies:

- Bibles

As the group gathers, form pairs. For this activity, one partner will be “Empty Head” and the other will be “I’ve Got the Plan.” Decide which one of you will be which. Give each pair a task to perform.

It is Empty Head’s job to do this task, but you, of course, have a completely empty head. So you are cooperative, but you don’t know how to do anything. It is I’ve Got the Plan’s job to decide how the task needs to be done and to describe for Empty Head how to do it.

Give each pair a simple task to perform, such as open the door and walk through the doorway; move to the table and pick up a pencil; move to the window and open it; approach another pair, introduce yourselves, and shake hands.

After each pair has completed a task, have the partners switch roles and give each pair a new task.

Then gather the group.

Naturally, you are not really empty headed, but in order to move forward into the future, you have to set goals and boldly follow the steps to see them



through. Even when a goal is much more complicated than opening a door, breaking the goal into manageable steps is a good way to prevent getting overwhelmed.

Choose five actors: Narrator, Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna. Have the actors read and act out Luke 2:22–38. Discuss:

- As they left the temple, what thoughts and feelings do you think Joseph and Mary had about Jesus’ destiny? What did they hope and fear? What plans do you think they made to deal with Jesus’ destiny?
- How did Mary deal with Simeon’s comment about a sword piercing her soul? If you were in her place, what plans would you have made to be prepared?

Close with prayer: *O God, sometimes your call is overwhelming and we struggle to comprehend how we are going to meet your demands. Bless us with courage and confidence as we move forward into your future. Amen.*

5 Be Careful What You Pray For

Leader preparation: It feels good to succeed, but every success comes with a consequence. This activity helps young adults think about the cost of success.

Supplies:

- index cards
- pens

As the group gathers, have everyone take an index card and write down something for which they have prayed or that they want to pray for now, using this format, “Dear God, please bless me with . . .” Collect the cards and read them aloud, without indicating who wrote each card. For each one, discuss as a group:

- Why is this important? Why would receiving this be a blessing?
- If you were to receive this blessing, what might be some consequences or complications to receiving it?
- How might you deal with those consequences or complications?

Close with prayer: *God, thank you for blessing us in such abundance. Teach us not only to pray for the things that we need, but also to receive them with dignity and to use them with wisdom. Amen.*



6 Armed and Ready

Leader preparation: Given all the unknown factors and challenges that await us in the future, it is important to be prepared as a warrior is prepared for battle. These preparations, however, are not only for our protection from the world but also the means by which we can bless the world. This activity helps young adults discern this for themselves.

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
- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard



As group members gather, have them look at “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard. After a few moments, point out that the girls appear to be facing the future (and in one case, actually climbing up to see it), but that the wind is blowing in their faces. Wonder together why both girls have their hands up toward their faces.

Distribute Bibles and ask participants to look up Ephesians 6:10–17. Ask a volunteer reads the text aloud, on the newsprint or whiteboard list the parts of armor and what they represent, leaving room underneath each one. Then address each part of armor.

- How can this piece of armor be used to protect ourselves from the world?
- How can this piece of armor be used to bless the world?

Close with prayer: *Assist us as we prepare to meet the challenges of the future. Give us courage as we contemplate the battles in which we will be engaged. But also, O God, give us the wisdom to know how to use these gifts with compassion and mercy, with justice and love, to be a blessing for the world so that it might not be conquered, but saved in your name. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Mirror, Mirror on the Wall (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Some things about the future are certain—time will pass, things will happen, we will become older, and we will die. But the rest is up to us and God. This activity invites young adults to face the future, realistically and hopefully.

Supplies:

- small mirrors
- (optional) video: “Man in the Mirror” recorded at the 2009 Nobel Peace Concert, <http://youtu.be/NYLBNrsd828>
- device with Internet access

As the group gathers, distribute the mirrors or invite participants to look at their reflections. Ask: *What do you see?* Repeat the question at least three times so that participants begin to look deeper.

Instruct the participants to try to imagine themselves in the future. Invite a group discussion, using the following questions.

- What do you hope will be true about yourself five years from now?
- What do you hope will be true about yourself ten years from now?
- What do you hope will be true when you retire?
- What do you hope will be true about yourself when you are in your eighties?
- Based on your family history, what realities do you assume will be true? (Health issues, habits, cultural mores, financial resources)
- How might some of the negative realities be avoided?

Explain that you and God are in control of your future. God’s plan for you is that you will be in relationship with God. Each person must face the day-to-day challenges and realities in order to make that happen. If desired, show the song video “Man in the Mirror.”



Pray responsively, with the group repeating each line:

God, my future is in your hands, *(Group repeats.)*
But I am your servant. *(Group repeats.)*
So bless me as I walk with you. *(Group repeats.)*
And together, your will be done. *(Group repeats.)*
Amen.

8 Fear Under Fire

Leader preparation: Fear is the ultimate pathway to paralysis. People who are afraid of heights will never see the beauty of a great vista from above if their fear is not faced. Although this contemplative and liturgical activity will not cure the fear of the future, it may give young adults the courage to face their fears with the knowledge that God is present with them always. If there is a concern about open flames in your church, do this activity outdoors.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- small pieces of scrap paper
- pens
- urn or bucket that can withstand burning (if necessary, put urn or pot on a trivet to protect surfaces)
- container with water, for safety purposes
- candle
- matches or lighter
- meditative instrumental music and appropriate player

Light the candle and play meditative instrumental music as the group gathers. Encourage participants to find a comfortable seat in the room, but not to lounge. Allow several minutes of quiet time.

Decrease the volume of the music and distribute scrap paper and pens. Explain that of all the things that can hold us back from moving forward into the future, fear is perhaps the greatest. The phrase “Do not fear” appears fifty-five times in the Bible (NRSV) and “Do not be afraid” appears sixty-seven times! God knows that fear is often the greatest enemy of progress because it creates a natural paralysis, mostly emotional but sometimes even physical. There is no absolute preventative for fear, but there is an antidote—facing it with the knowledge that God is with you always.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 28:16–20. When Jesus sent the disciples out to baptize the nations, he knew that he needed to do more than just instruct them to go. He knew that he needed to tell them that they would not be alone. The Gospel of Luke says, “Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.” When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, a tongue of fire touched every one of them and they knew, for sure, that God would be with them always. Invite the participants to use fire to remind us that God is with us, taking care of our fears.

Instruct the participants to use the scrap paper and pens to write down (in a few words) the thing that they fear most about the future. Assure them that no one will see these. Instruct participants to fold the papers in half once when



they are done and to place the papers in the urn or pot to burn. Play meditative instrumental music during this time and during the burning.

Silently ignite the pieces of paper in the urn or pot. (Use water to extinguish the fire if necessary.) Tend the fire so that all papers are burned, as utmost safety and tranquility is maintained. After all the papers are burned, extinguish the embers with water. Say: *The Holy Spirit has come with tongues of fire to release your fears, cleanse your soul, and prepare you with all the gifts you need to move into the future. Go in peace.*

🕒 Eyes on the Prize

Leader preparation: This activity uses advanced technology to simulate the adventure of seeking God's future. To make the game effective, it must be played in an area that is large enough to make it a challenge. GPS units can be borrowed from schools or scouting organizations or purchased online or at stores that sell hiking equipment. Many cell phones have GPS capability.

Before the activity, prepare and hide the cache and not the GPS coordinates. Or ask someone with geocaching experience to do this for you. More information about geocaching is available online at www.geocaching.com.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- geocaching units or smart phones
- the cache or prize—a hard plastic storage container with lid that contains a nonperishable prize for each person and a written verse: Jeremiah 29:4–14

Reflect

What does your future look like? What changes do you anticipate “down the road?” How are you expecting God to bless you? What is preventing you from being blessed?

As the group gathers, distribute Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 12:1–3. Invite participants to seek God's future, using geocaching equipment. Distribute unit(s). Explain that these units are set to coordinates where participants will find a “cache” with a prize inside. Follow the unit to find the “cache” and then return with it to this home base.

Allow thirty minutes for this activity (assuming that you have not hidden these caches in a really obscure and faraway place). When all the participants have returned, have a participant read aloud Jeremiah 29:4–14. Pray: *God has a plan of blessing for you, to give you hope and a future. Amen.*