

Blessings and Letting Go



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Most children in this age group will have no problem identifying blessings in their lives once they understand that blessings can be things that bring happiness and joy or can be a type of prayer. They will have varied experiences of letting go, ranging from still clinging to parents when they are dropped off at school to having experienced a major move or the death of a pet or family member. Offering hugs and assurances, as well as encouraging friendships, will help children as they face various times of transitions.

About this Exploration

Experiences of blessing and letting go are not new to us. We see them in the natural world, and we encounter 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, as well as how people are 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

Remember times of joy and times of transition in your life. Maybe you have a photo album, scrapbook, or journal you could look through. In a letter to the Ephesians, Paul includes a prayer for the Christians who will read the letter. Read Ephesians 3:14–21. Read it a second time, substituting your name for the pronouns “you” and “your,” as if Paul were writing the letter specifically for you. Read it a third time, as if you were saying this prayer for the children of your group. Know that God will be with you and the children as you experience this faith practice.

Prayer: God, as I prepare to lead these young children, keep me rooted and grounded in love. I know you can accomplish abundantly far more than I can ask or imagine. May all that I do in my role as leader give glory to you. 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 What Is A Blessing? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Print out and review the handout “What Is a Blessing?” Read Ephesians 3:18–19 in a Bible. Think about the many ways you have been blessed this week. What examples could you tell the children about?

Supplies:

- “What Is a Blessing?” Attachment: Activity 1

Ask the children if they have ever heard the words “bless” or “blessing.” Ask them what they think a blessing is. Acknowledge all answers in a positive way. Use the definitions and examples on the handout “What Is a Blessing?” as well as your own ideas to talk about the idea of blessing.

Play a game of “Achoo, Achoo, Bless You!” This is similar to “Duck, Duck, Goose.” Pick one child to be the “blesser.” Have the rest of the children sit in a circle. The blesser walks around the circle tapping each child on the head. When a child is tapped, she or he must say “Achoo!” At random, the blesser will say “Bless you” when tapping the head of one child. That child jumps up and walks quickly around the circle with the blesser. When they return to the empty space, the blesser sits down and the new child becomes the blesser. Encourage the children to make sure that everyone has a turn being the blesser. You may want to vary the movement around the circle by telling the children to skip, hop, or walk backward.

2 Letting Go

Leader preparation: Think about times when you have had to let go of something or someone important to you. The children in your group probably have a favorite toy, blanket, or even article of clothing that they don’t like to let go of.

Make a copy of a family photo, tear it in two, and have it ready in a pocket or tote bag near you. Make sure that a roll of tape is visible to the children, but not in your immediate area.

Supplies:

- copy of a family photo, torn in two
- clear tape

Gather the children and tell them that you have a favorite photo to show them. As you take out the picture, express dismay that it is torn! Ask the children if they can help you fix it. No matter what they suggest or try, continue to hold onto the pieces, telling them how special it is to you. If one of them suggests taping the photo, hold the pieces slightly askew so that it still won’t be right. After several minutes of this ask everyone to stop, take a deep breath, and pray with you. Say something like this: *Dear God, please be with us as we work on this problem.*

Now ask the children what would make it easier to fix the photo. If they don’t suggest that you “let go” of the pieces, then you should. As you mend the photo, ask the children if they have something special that they like to hold on to. Tell them that there are times when all of us have to let go of things that are special to us.

- 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.

③ Nature's Blessings

Leader preparation: Sit outside or stand at a window and reflect on God's gift of nature. Think about where your group can go for a short nature walk near your facility. Will you need extra help? Notify parents and others that you will be leaving the building for a short time. Prepare the walking rope if you will use one. A walking rope is long enough for everyone in the group to hold onto as they walk in a single line. This helps keep the group together. Make sure the children are suitably dressed for the weather. It is a safe practice to have at least two adults accompany the young children. Another option is to make sure each child has a partner.

Supplies:

- (optional) walking rope: length of rope or bandanas knotted together
- (optional) nature pictures from calendars, books, photos

Have your group prepare to go outdoors by lining up and holding on to the walking rope (if you are using one). Tell the children that you are going outside to look for some of the wonderful things that God has created. As you walk around, point out different things, each time naming the thing by saying: *God blessed us with . . .* Encourage the children to help you find more things and to identify them by saying: *God blessed us with . . .* If possible, give each child an object to carry, such as a blade of grass, a stone, or a twig. At the end of your walk, form a circle and place all of these objects in the middle. Say a short prayer thanking God for these blessings.

If it is absolutely impossible to go outdoors, visit different windows around your facility to see what can be observed from each one, or look at nature pictures. Be sure to identify the objects by saying: *God blessed us with . . .*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ How Does It Feel? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13. Remember that David was the youngest of his brothers. It is not often that the youngest child is picked to be the leader.

Review the storytelling activity on the attachment, and think about how you will use this with your group. Children love dressing up, so you may want to include simple costumes in the storytelling. Strips of cloth or old ties will provide a suggestion of a costume if you have them on hand. Check the nursery or preschool room for a toy cow and sheep.

Supplies:

- “Samuel and David,” Attachment: Activity 4
- (optional) biblical costumes or ties and pieces of fabric for headbands and belts
- stuffed or plastic cow and sheep
- 8” square of paper rolled into a cone (for the horn of oil)
- 7 pieces of paper, labeled “Son #1” through “Son #7”

If you have costumes available, let the children dress up before you begin. Gather the children in a circle, and read the story. Then explain that they are going to act the story out. Assign parts and position the children accordingly.

After the story, gather in a circle and invite the children to join you in thinking about the following statements. Give them time to respond.

- I wonder how Samuel felt when God gave him a special job to do.
- I wonder how Jesse and his sons felt each time Samuel shook his head no.
- I wonder what David was thinking when Samuel anointed him.

5 What Is She Thinking?

Leader preparation: Locate a copy of “Christina’s World, 1948” by Andrew Wyeth. Jot down your thoughts and feelings as you look at the artwork. Display the picture where the children will be able to see it easily.

Supplies:

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

Gather the children and ask them to sit quietly with you and look at “Christina’s World, 1948.” After a quiet moment, ask them what they see in the picture. Ask them how the picture makes them feel. Tell children your feelings about this piece of art.

Tell the group that the name of the woman in the painting is Christina. If no one has mentioned it, ask if they think she might be saying goodbye to the house she has lived in. Ask them how they think Christina feels.

Distribute drawing paper and crayons or markers and invite each child to draw a picture about saying goodbye to someone.

6 In the Bulb There Is a Flower

Leader preparation: Review the words and the video for this song, using the links below. Decide if you are going to teach the children the song. For this age group, it will be enough to learn the first verse. Ask someone to help you if you are not comfortable singing. Arrange to sing the song for another group, the congregation, or the parents and caregivers.

Supplies:

- song: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower,” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower (also found in many church hymnals and songbooks); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Gather the children and explain that they are going to watch a short music video, but you want them to hear the words to the song first. Ask them to think of pic-

tures in their heads while you read the words to them. Enjoy the video. Ask the children what their favorite pictures were.

Teach the first verse of the song if you choose to do that. Perhaps you could sing the song for another group of children, for the parents and caregivers when the children are picked up, or for the congregation at a future date.

Say a short prayer thanking God for the blessing of music.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Blessing Candle (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read about the anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16:1–13. Think about how you have been blessed by God this week. Make a sample candle to show the children. Toilet-paper rolls will make the “candles” more stable, but construction paper can be rolled into a tube that it is about 1¼ inches in diameter.

Supplies:

- construction paper cut in 6" × 9" rectangles (one per child)
- 1½" tall flames cut from orange or yellow construction paper (one per child)
- clear tape
- stickers
- (optional) toilet-paper tubes (one per child)
- (optional) battery-operated candle

Show the children how to roll a construction-paper rectangle into a tube and secure it with tape. (If you are using toilet-paper tubes, tape the construction paper around the tubes.) Help the children make their tubes. Have them attach a flame with a bit of tape to the inside of the top. Encourage them to decorate their candles with stickers.

Invite the children to join you in a blessing circle. Have them place their candles on the floor in front of them and use either your sample candle or the battery operated one. Explain that you are going to ask God to bless each person in the circle. Pass the candle to the child on your left saying, “God bless [name].” Continue to have the children pass the candle and bless one another until it returns to you. Tell children that they can use the candles they have made to have a blessing circle like this at home.

Ask them to repeat each phrase of the following prayer after you.

Thank you, God,
for all you give us.
Help us to do our best each day.
We love you. Amen.

You can have them “blow” out the candle. You might want to close each session with this ritual.



8 Sending David

Leader preparation: Read 1 Samuel 16:14–23. Review the story on the attachment. Think about times when you might have been scared and excited or happy and sad about a new adventure all at the same time—perhaps you were moving to a new home, starting at a new school or job, or preparing for a mission trip.

Supplies:

- “Sending David,” Attachment: Activity 8

Gather the children and use the script on the attachment to tell the story “Sending David.”

After the story, ask the children how they would feel if they were David. Tell about one or two of your experiences of being scared and excited or sad and happy at the same time. Ask if they can think of a time when they were sad to be saying goodbye. Ask if they can think of a time when they were excited to be going somewhere new.

Pray, thanking God for being with you in sad times and happy times.



9 Growing Gifts

Leader preparation: Copy the attachment and cut out the gift cards, one per child. Decide if the children will leave the containers with you until they sprout or take them home today. Depending on the time of year, you might want to start large vegetable seeds in a glass jar to keep in your meeting area so that the children can see the stems and roots. Or you might want to try sprouting an avocado seed, (<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/children-in-the-garden/sprouting-avocado-pits-how-to-root-an-avocado-seed.htm>) or peach pit (http://www.ehow.com/how_4438889_grow-peach-tree-seed.html).

Supplies:

- Bible with bookmark at Ephesians 3:18–19
- variety of flower, vegetable, or herb seeds
- small plastic containers with lids, such as butter tubs or deli containers (one per child)
- permanent marker
- potting soil
- newspaper or plastic to cover work area
- spoon or scoop
- watering can with water
- “Gift Cards,” Attachment: Activity 9
- crayons or markers
- (optional) clear glass jar, bean seeds, paper towels

Tell the children that seeds are a blessing and a gift from God and that they are going to plant some seeds as a gift for someone else. Show them the variety of seeds you have. Ask them what they think will grow from each one. Explain that not all seeds sprout, which may be why God makes so many of them.

With a permanent marker, write each child’s name on his or her container. Then let the children fill the containers with potting soil and plant seeds according to the directions on the package. Plant a few more than recommended for the size container to help ensure that something sprouts. Help the children water the

seeds and set them in a sunny area or put the lids on if they will be taking them home.

Distribute gift cards and have children color them with crayons or markers. Then help each child tape his or her card onto the container. While the children work, tell them that when the apostle Paul wrote to the early Christians in the country of Ephesus he included a prayer asking that God would help these new Christians grow in their love and understanding of Christ. This is a good prayer for all Christians. Read Ephesians 3:18–19 to the group.

To be able to watch larger seeds sprout, stuff a clear glass jar with paper towels and insert corn or bean seeds between the toweling and the jar. Keep moist until growth begins. them in a sunny area or put the lids on if they will be taking them home.

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Reflect

How have you been blessed by this time with the children? Will it be hard to say goodbye when your time with them ends?



Attachment: Activity 1

What Is a Blessing?

Blessing (noun):

1. the act or prayer of one who blesses; invocation or benediction
2. a grace said before or after eating
3. the gift of divine favor
4. good wishes or approval
5. anything that gives happiness or prevents misfortune; a special benefit or favor

Here are a few examples that go with the definitions:

1. Saying a prayer for someone. Making the sign of the cross on someone's forehead or hand, perhaps using oil or water.
Asking God's blessing on someone as he or she leaves.
2. Saying a prayer said before or after a meal.
3. A special gift from God. This can be anything from being anointed king, as was David, to a smile from a child or the fragrance of a flower.
4. Parents or guardians saying it is okay to do something really important such as getting married, choosing a school or career path, or getting a pet.
5. The children in your group are—a blessing.



Attachment: Activity 4

Samuel Anoints David

The Setting

You can use from three to twelve children to act out the story as you read it. You definitely need a Samuel and a David. The other child or children can double up on parts as needed. David should be off to one side with a toy sheep, Samuel should be in the center, and everyone else should be off to the other side as the people in Bethlehem. The toy cow and the "horn of oil" should be near Samuel to pick up as needed. Use the numbered papers to designate each of the seven sons as they meet Samuel.

The Story

Saul was the king of the Hebrew people, but he stopped following God and was acting in wrong ways. God decided that someone else should be king, so God told the prophet Samuel to fill a ram's horn with olive oil and go see Jesse in Bethlehem. One of Jesse's sons was to be the new king.

Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will be very unhappy if he knows I am looking for a new king."

God told Samuel to take a young cow and to tell the leaders of Bethlehem that he had come to make a sacrifice to God. Samuel was to invite Jesse and his sons to the special ceremony and God would show Samuel what to do. (*Samuel picks up horn and cow and walks to Bethlehem.*)

Samuel set off on the long walk to Bethlehem. When the leaders of the town saw him, they were afraid and asked, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel said, "Yes, I come in peace. I have come to make a sacrifice to God. Please get ready to join me for this special ceremony. Jesse and his sons should get ready, too."

When everyone was gathered together Jesse brought his oldest son to meet Samuel. Samuel thought that surely he was the one God would want to be king. But God spoke to Samuel saying, "Do not think about how tall he is or how good looking. I have not chosen him. I do not look at the same things that people look at. I look at what is in a person's heart."

Jesse brought each of his seven older sons forward to meet Samuel, but each time God said to Samuel, "Not this one." (*Have each son come forward, using the numbered papers to keep track. Have Samuel shake his head no at each one.*)

Finally, Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more sons. Jesse said, "Only David, the youngest, who is taking care of the sheep."

Samuel told Jesse to send for David because they couldn't sit down and eat until he had arrived. So Jesse sent someone to bring David to them. (*David moves to the group.*)

When David got there, God told Samuel to take the horn of oil and anoint David with it. So Samuel took the horn of oil. (*Samuel picks up paper cone.*) Samuel poured some oil on David's head. This showed everyone that even though he was the youngest son, David was being given a special blessing by God and would do important things.

From that time on David was filled with the spirit of God and tried to do what was right.

Sending David (Based on 1 Samuel 16:14-23)

Sometimes King Saul didn't feel very good. He had headaches that were so bad he could not think straight, or stomachaches that made him feel angry with everyone and everything. One day his friends and advisors said, "Maybe some soothing music will help you feel better. Let us try to find someone who can play beautiful music. That might help you to rest and relax so that your head and stomach won't hurt so much."

King Saul thought that sounded like a good idea, so he told his friends and advisors to find a person who could do that for him. One of his advisors said, "I know just the person. He is the son of Jesse from Bethlehem. His name is David. He is strong and honest, and he doesn't talk too much. He can play the harp beautifully. And best of all, God's Spirit is with him. Surely David can help."

King Saul sent a message to Jesse, telling him all of the good things that he had heard about David. He asked Jesse to send David to him.

Jesse was sad to think about saying goodbye to his son, David, but he was happy to think that King Saul wanted his son to help him. Working for the king was a very great honor. So Jesse loaded up a donkey with fresh bread and other gifts for the king and sent David to Jerusalem.

David was sad to think about saying goodbye to his family and the sheep that he had been taking care of all of his life. But he was excited to be helping the king. He packed his best clothes and his harp, patted the sheep, hugged and kissed his family, took hold of the donkey's lead, and started off down the road.

It was a long dusty walk to Jerusalem. When David finally arrived, a servant took him to his room so that he could rest, get cleaned up, and have something to eat. Then David took his harp and went to meet King Saul.

David's beautiful music did help King Saul's headaches and stomachaches. The king wrote a letter to Jesse saying how much he liked having David around. He said that he wanted David to stay with him.

David missed his family. He missed the sheep. He missed being able to be outdoors all the time. But David was learning new and exciting things as he worked in the king's house. He was making new friends. And David was very happy to be able to help the king by playing his harp.

Gift Cards

A gift for you, from God

Keep soil moist until seeds have sprouted.

Provide bright light.

Water as needed after sprouting.

Transplant to garden or larger pot when seedlings are 2-3 feet tall.

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Keep soil moist until seeds have sprouted.

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Transplant to garden or larger pot when seedlings are 2-3 feet tall.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Some children in this age group may still have a hard time letting go of their parents or caregivers to stay with you and the group. They need to experience the blessing of your caring for them to make this easier. Brief periods of separation help to prepare them for longer periods. Play is how they practice and learn to bless others, to be a blessing, and to let go.

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 something else. 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

Watching children grow is similar to Moses guiding the Israelites to the promised land. We can only take them so far. We can see what they are in the process of becoming, but we can't be with them all the time. At some point we have to let them become their own persons and move forward on their own. Read the Bible Focus Passages. Pray for the children in your group and for someone you wouldn't normally include in your prayers.

Prayer: O God, it can be so hard to let go, whether it is letting go of a bad habit or of someone I love. Help me to move forward in my life. Let me be a blessing to these children in my care. 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.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Happy Face, Sad Face (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:43–48. Think about the things that make you happy and sad. Review the list of happy and sad things below, and add other things that might be appropriate for your group.

Draw a large happy face on one piece of construction paper and a large sad face on another piece of construction paper. Post them on opposite sides of your space.

Supplies:

- construction paper
- markers
- tape

Gather the children in the center of your area. Tell them that you are going to read a list of things and that for each one they should decide if that thing makes them happy or makes them sad. *If it makes you happy, stand by the happy face. If it makes you sad, stand by the sad face.* Reassure the children that not everyone may feel the same way about each thing and that is okay. Each person is different, and yet God loves each one of us the same.

Read the following items, one at a time, allowing time for children to move to the happy face or the sad face:

- standing in the sunshine
- eating ice cream
- hugs
- rain
- a puppy
- bedtime
- being yelled at
- sharing a cookie
- being told to wait
- playing with a friend
- getting in trouble
- breaking a toy
- staying home sick from school
- going to a birthday party
- riding a bike
- doing something wrong

Gather the group and invite children to explain why something might make them feel happy or sad. Offer a short prayer, thanking God for loving us each day, when we are happy and when we are sad.

Gather the group and invite children to explain why something might make them feel happy or sad. Offer a short prayer, thanking God for loving us each day, when we are happy and when we are sad.



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



2 Growing and Changing

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 2:11–15 and 3:1–6, Deuteronomy 34:9, and Matthew 3:13–17. Each of these texts addresses a time of transition. When have you been blessed by an event that changed your life, even in subtle ways?

Display “The Baptism of Jesus” where the children can see it. Label a piece of newsprint “Ways We Change and Grow” and put it near the artwork.

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
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- tape

Without telling children the title of the painting, invite them to look at “The Baptism of Jesus” and tell about what they see. Acknowledge all thoughts in a positive way. Tell them that this is a picture of Jesus at the time of his baptism. Explain that this was a time of growth and change for Jesus. After he was baptized, he stopped being a full-time carpenter and started spending all his time telling people about God and how God wants people to live.

Ask the children to think about all of the ways they have changed and grown. As they name ways, list their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard. Point out how each change can be a blessing (being able to do things on their own), but change also means letting go of the way things were (having someone feed them or tie their shoes). Invite the children to say thanks to God for all these changes.

3 Say Goodbye

Leader preparation: Saying goodbye, even for a short time, is a way of letting go. What words and rituals does your family use when you part from one another?

Supplies: None

Greet the children with different positive goodbye phrases and actions, choosing several from the following list:

Goodbye	Ciao
Bye-bye	Sayonara
So long	Adieu
Farewell	Bon voyage
See ya later	Auf wiedersehen
See ya later, alligator	Adios
After while crocodile	Peace be with you
Shalom	Have a good day
Aloha	

If children question what you are doing, explain that sometimes it is hard for a person to say goodbye, so practicing can help make it easier. If no one has questioned your goodbyes, gather children and explain that you are practicing your goodbyes.

Invite children to demonstrate the ways they say goodbye in their families. Describe the goodbye traditions in your family. Ask how children feel when they say goodbye to someone. *When is it easy? When is it hard?*

Have the children stand in a line. Give the first child a goodbye word or action to say to every other child as he or she walks to the end of the line. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to practice. Encourage handshakes, high fives, and gentle hugs, but don't force physical contact if a child is not comfortable with it.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 God Loves Everyone (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:43–48. Review the scenarios below and create figures for Susie, Jane, Mr. Green, and the minister by drawing circle faces, cutting them out, and taping each one to a toilet-paper tube or block.

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- construction paper
- markers or crayons
- scissors
- tape
- toilet paper tubes or large wooden building blocks

As you gather, sit in a circle with the children. Place the story figures where you can reach them easily. Tell the children that you are going to tell some stories and need their help in thinking of some endings. Read the scenarios below one at a time, using the figures to act out each one. Pause after each scenario to discuss the question. Encourage children to use the story figures to act out their suggestions.

Scenario 1

Dakota and Raven live next door to each other. They are friends and they like to play together. But sometimes they fight. What might Dakota and Raven do when they start fighting?

Scenario 2

Mr. Green lives next door to Dakota. He works hard to keep his yard looking nice. His garden has lots of flowers. He doesn't like it when Raven and Dakota are playing at Dakota's house and their ball comes rolling over into his yard. He gets especially mad if the ball breaks off some of his flowers. When the ball breaks off some of Mr. Green's flowers and he yells at them to keep the ball out of his yard, what might Dakota and Raven do?

Scenario 3

Dakota and Raven go to church together. One day the minister asks everyone to donate money and food to give to people in another state who lost their homes during a bad flood. What might Dakota and Raven do to help, even though they don't know the people who were in the flood?

After children have had a chance to act out some endings to the scenarios, read aloud Matthew 5:43–48 from a children’s Bible. Ask them what they think Jesus is teaching us to do when others don’t treat us nicely or when people we don’t know are in trouble.

5 Create, Let Go?

Leader preparation: Playing with blocks or play dough allows children the blessing of making something and also practice in letting go, since the creation cannot be saved. Decide if you will use building blocks or modeling clay.

Supplies:

- building blocks, enough for each child to have several, or playdough, enough for each child to have a golf-ball-sized piece
- (optional) digital camera

As children arrive, allow time for free play with building blocks or play dough.

Gather the children around a table and tell them that you are going to work together to build something. Give each child several blocks or a piece of modeling clay. You will begin by placing the first block or flattening the modeling clay to make a base. Have each child, in turn, add a block or piece of clay to the creation until everything has been used. Admire your creation. You might want to take a photo of it with the children and show the photo to them.

Talk about what a blessing it is to be able to work together to create something. Explain that now it is time to say goodbye to the creation. Have the children dismantle it one piece at a time. If there is time, allow some free play. When it is time to cleanup, thank the children for letting go of their creations and the blessing of working together.



6 Suitcase Relay

Leader preparation: Read Deuteronomy 34:1–12. Moses wasn’t allowed to finish the job he started. It was up to Joshua to take the Israelites into the promised land. Recall times in your life when you had to let go and let someone else carry on with the project or the work.

Plan how you might need to adapt the game for your group. Mark the starting line and finish line for each of the two teams. Starting lines should be about 10 feet apart, and each team should have enough space to move without getting in the way of the other team. Place empty suitcases and the items that will go in them at the starting lines.

Check for food allergies before serving the snack.

Supplies:

- “Endings and Beginnings,” Attachment: Activity 6
- 2 suitcases, backpacks, or large shopping bags
- 2 sets of clothing and assorted other items needed for a trip
- water or juice
- graham crackers
- cups and napkins

Gather the children together, and read the story “Endings and Beginnings” on the attachment. Then invite the children to go on a trip to help them remember



the trip that Moses and the Israelites took. Explain that each person will have a job to do—a job that is the person’s special gift or blessing to the group. When the job is done, he or she has to let the next person carry on.

Form two teams. Tell teams that members of a team will decide as a group who will do each of these jobs: pack the suitcase, carry the suitcase to the finish line, and unpack the suitcase. (If teams have more than three children, add the jobs of repacking the suitcase and carrying it back to the starting line.) Explain that when you say “go,” the packer will put everything into the suitcase and close it, the carrier will carry the suitcase to the finish line, and the unpacker will empty things out. As much as possible, have each child do only one job. The whole team moves as a group with the suitcase from point to point.

After the game, enjoy a snack of water or juice and graham crackers. As you eat, invite comments about how it felt to do just one of the jobs. Thank God for times to learn, play, and eat together.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Remember When (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a list of some of the ways, large and small, that people have helped you during the past week. If the children in your group are not yet writing, make a card for each one to complete, following the instructions below.

Supplies:

- white construction paper
- crayons or markers
- newsprint

Gather the children in a circle and invite them to tell about times that someone did something nice for them or with them. Tell them some stories from your own life, too. Talk about how being able to remember these things is a blessing and how thanking others for the nice things they do is a way to bless them.

Explain that the children are going to make “Remember when . . .” cards to give to another person as a way of saying “thank you.” On newsprint, print “Remember when . . .” and “Thank you!” for children to copy. Demonstrate how to fold a piece of construction paper to create a card, writing “Remember when . . .” on the front of the card and “Thank you!” on the inside.

Ask each child think of one person who recently did something nice for or with him or her. Have children draw a picture of this nice thing on the front of the card and sign their names to the inside of the card.

Say a short prayer thanking God for all of the people who have helped you in so many different ways. Remind the children to deliver or mail their cards.

8 Praying for Others

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:43–48. Reflect on how easy it is to pray for those you know and love. Think about those people who have hurt you or made

you angry in some way. What prayers can you say for them? Who are the people that the children in your group might find it hard to pray for?

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- slips of paper, two per child
- pencils
- basket or bowl

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48 from a children's Bible. Ask children to use their own words to tell what Jesus is teaching here.

Distribute slips of paper and pencils. Remind the group that God wants us to pray for people we love and for people we don't like very much, for people we know and people we don't know. Ask each child to think of someone he or she knows and would like to pray for and to write this name on a slip of paper. (Help with spelling and writing as needed.) Now ask each child to think of someone who would not be easy to pray for and write this name on a slip of paper.

Gather in a circle and explain that you are going to take turns saying a prayer. Ask one child to begin, saying "God bless and be with [Name] and [Name]"—speaking the names on the two slips of paper and then placing the slips of paper in a bowl or basket. Continue until everyone has had a turn. Close by naming each of the children in your group and asking God to help each of you be the best person you can.

Set the basket or bowl of the names aside, and remember to pray for these people at another session.

9. Singing Goodbye

Leader preparation: Preview the song "Shalom Chaverim." Practice the Hebrew words so that you can teach them to the children. Ask someone to help you teach the song to the children if you are not comfortable doing so. If possible, arrange to have the children sing this song to another group or to parents and caregivers when they come to pick them up.

Supplies:

- song: "Shalom Chaverim," traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnn>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Gather the children where they can comfortably view the music video of "Shalom Chaverim." Explain that this song is in the Hebrew language. It is a song for blessing and for saying goodbye. Teach the song to the children and sing it several times. Enjoy the blessing of the music and let the children dance and move freely to it.

Reflect

What activity did the children enjoy the most from this Exploration? What have you learned from the children during your time together? Remember that even when you are not seeing changes, you are planting seeds.



Endings and Beginnings

Based on Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Moses very old—he had lived a long time. Moses had done all the things that God had told him to do. With God’s help, he had freed the Israelites from being slaves. With God’s help, Moses had led the Israelites for forty years, guiding them through the wilderness towards the promised land. Now, at last, they were almost there.

When Moses stood on the top of Mount Nebo, he could see the Promised Land, the place where the Israelites could build homes and settle down. But Moses’ work was done. It was time for Joshua to take over. God had told Moses to give Joshua a special blessing in front of all of the people so that they would know that they should follow Joshua, just like they had followed Moses. Moses did this—Moses blessed Joshua. It was time for Moses to die.

After Moses died, the Israelites buried him. They cried and were sad for thirty days. Moses had been a great leader, and they had been blessed by leadership. Now it was time for them to move on with Joshua as their new leader.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are trusting by nature and look to the adults in their lives to keep them safe and secure. They are also generally more open to forgiveness. They will be fighting over a toy one minute and the best of friends the next. Actually asking for forgiveness may be a different matter. Being able to ask for forgiveness and being able to give it are different types of blessings. Both are also ways of letting go of past hurts. Asking for, giving, or receiving forgiveness graciously require a lot of practice. It is never too early to start.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Spend time studying the Bible Focus Passages. Just for this day, this hour, what can you do to show compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience to others? How can you show the children that you are trustworthy and that you trust in God?

Prayer: Creator God, help me to turn to you instead of relying on myself. Help me ask for forgiveness when I need to and forgive others as readily as you would like. Embolden me to act in ways that will show these children what your great love is like. Be with us during our time together. 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.



1 Ask for Help (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Proverbs 3:5–9. Recall the people in your life to whom you have turned when you needed help. When have you been blessed by someone who helped you without being asked? How often have you turned to God for help?

Make a mess of your space before the children arrive so that they can help you clean it up. Or “lose” your keys, cell phone, or items you might need for your session so that the children can help you find them.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible

As the children arrive, ask them to help you straighten the area or find your “missing” items. When everything is as it should be, gather the group in a circle and thank them for their help. Invite children to tell stories about times when they needed to ask for help. Affirm all answers and suggest others if needed (writing a name, tying shoes, fixing a snack). Ask the children to name the people to whom they usually go when they need help.

Read aloud Proverbs 3:5–9 from a children’s Bible. Talk with them about how God is always there for us and gives us the people we need to help us. Say a short prayer thanking God for the blessing of all the people who help you.

2 Naamah, Noah’s Wife

Leader preparation: Locate a copy of the children’s book *Noah’s Wife: The Story of Naamah* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. Think about the trust that Noah and Naamah placed in God. Think about all the blessings we have because of Noah and Naamah. Practice reading the book aloud. If your group is young, you may want to paraphrase some of the longer sections.

Supplies:

- children’s book: *Noah’s Wife: The Story of Naamah* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Jewish Lights, 2002); available at: <http://www.amazon.com> or <http://www.jewishlights.com/>
- children’s Bible

Gather the children where all can comfortably hear you. Read aloud Proverbs 3:5–9 from a children’s Bible. Wonder together about what it means to trust God.

Invite them to listen to a story about someone who trusted God, even when it didn’t seem to make sense. Read the book *Noah’s Wife: The Story of Naamah* to the children and then make the following “wonder” statements. Invite the children to respond with their own “wonder” statements.

- I wonder how Naamah felt when God talked to her.
- I wonder what it was like to gather all of those seeds.
- I wonder what the world would be like without any plants.

Say a short prayer asking God to help you grow in trusting God.

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



3 Forgiveness

Leader preparation: Locate the artwork “Forgiveness” by Thierry Ona. Spend time pondering it. How does this art make you feel? What do you notice in the picture? Display the picture where the children will be able to view it easily.

Supplies:

- 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>

Gather around “Forgiveness” and invite children to spend time looking at it. Do not tell them the title of the artwork. After a few moments, ask the children to tell what they think is happening in the picture. Accept all answers. Explain that the name of this picture is “Forgiveness.” If they have not already brought that up, ask if knowing the title helps them to see it differently. Point out the person kneeling and asking for forgiveness. Ask: *Why might this person want to be forgiven? What do you think the other person might do?*

Explain that kneeling is a way to let God or someone we have hurt know that we are truly sorry for something wrong that we have done. Invite children to kneel as you consider the following “wonder” statements, allowing time for thinking between each one.

- I wonder how it feels to have to ask someone to forgive you.
- I wonder how it feels to really forgive someone who has hurt you.

Encourage children to fold their hands and repeat each phrase of the following prayer after you:

Dear God,
Sometimes I do things that are wrong.
Please forgive me.
Help me to ask others to forgive me if I hurt their feelings.
Help me to forgive others.
Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Trust Walk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Proverbs 3:5–9. Think about times when you have had to trust other people to help you with something or to help you do the right thing. Was this easy or hard for you? How difficult is it to put your trust in God? Everyone has struggled with this, so don’t feel bad if you are unsure of your answer.

Set up a simple obstacle course using items in your space. Make sure there is room for two children to move through it at the same time.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- bandanas or strips of cloth for blindfolds

Read aloud Proverbs 3:5. Invite the children to repeat it after you in phrases and then try to recite the entire verse from memory.

Invite the children to take a trust walk with a partner. One child will be blindfolded and the other child will lead. Explain that they have to put their trust in the partner who is leading, just like we all need to put our trust in God.

Form pairs, putting a blindfold on one child in each pair. The blindfolded children should stand behind their partners with their hands on the shoulders of the person leading them. Remind the leaders that they need to make sure the person being helped is all the way past an obstacle before they change direction. As each pair finishes the course, give them a thumbs up. Have partners switch places so that everyone has a chance to lead and to be led.

Invite the children to recite Proverbs 3:5 again. Offer a simple prayer of thanks to God for caring leaders you can trust.

5 “I Can “ Charades

Leader preparation: Read Colossians 3:12–17 and reflect on verse 17. What things are you able to do? How often do you give thanks to God for these things? How often do you think about Jesus before you act or talk? How can you help the children to remember to live out verse 17?

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- scratch paper
- pencil

Gather the children in a circle. Ask them to list all the different things that they can do. Keep a list of their responses on scratch paper. For example: ride a bike, tie shoes, run, give a hug, sing, kick a soccer ball, sweep the garage, and so on. Remind them that each person can do different things and that the things that we are able to do are blessings from God. Read aloud Colossians 3:17. Tell them that they are going to play a game to act out different things that they can do and then say “thank you” to God.

Explain the game of “Charades.” In this game, one person acts something out so that others can guess what it is. The person who is acting cannot use any words or make any sounds about the action. The actor will say “I can,” mime the action, and then say “Thank you God!” Demonstrate with this example: “I can . . .” (*Run in place.*) “Thank you God!” Invite children to guess the action.

Invite the first child to come up and whisper one of the actions on your scratch paper. Tell him or her to say “I can,” mime the action, then say “Thank you God!” The first child to guess the action correctly can be the next actor. Make sure everyone gets a turn.

6 Forgiven Dance

Leader preparation: Read Colossians 3:12–17, reflecting on verse 13. How do you feel when you need to ask someone to forgive you? How does it feel when you are forgiven? How might you express those feelings through movement and music?

Create space in your area for the children to move around.

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- crepe paper or ribbon streamers, 2 per child
- rhythm instruments

Read aloud Colossians 3:13. Invite children to use their own words to tell what the Apostle Paul is teaching here. Affirm that Jesus came to give us God's forgiveness and that it is a blessing to ask God and other people to forgive us when we behave wrongly. Remind the children that because God has forgiven us, God says we can forgive one another.

Invite the children spread out in your space. Ask them to think about a time when they did something wrong and had to apologize. Tell them to move their bodies to show how that felt. Ask them to think about how they felt when an apology was accepted and they were forgiven. Have them move to show how that felt. Pass out the streamers, and have the children repeat the movements while waving the streamers. Collect the streamers and pass out the instruments. Have them use rhythm to express the same feelings. If there is time give them the choice of streamers or instruments and have a joyful dance of forgiveness.

Offer a short prayer thanking God for the gift of forgiveness and the love to forgive others.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 God with Me, God with You (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Recall words of blessing that others have spoken to you. What is powerful about speaking a blessing to another person?

Supplies: None

Tell the children that you are going to teach them a blessing prayer that they can use for themselves and others. Teach both of the following blessings. One will remind children that God is always with them. They can use the second to tell others that God is always with them, too. Have the children repeat the words and actions after you several times, until they are comfortable with them.

For self:

- God is above me. (*Point to the sky.*)
- God is beside me. (*Stretch arms to each side, as if around a person.*)
- God is below me. (*Point to or pat the ground.*)
- God is within me. (*Point to self.*)
- God is all around me. (*Turn in a circle.*)

For others:

- God is above you. (*Point to the sky. Point to person.*)
- God is beside you. (*Stretch arms to each side, as if around a person. Point to person.*)
- God is below you. (*Point to or pat the ground. Point to person.*)
- God is within you. (*Point to person.*)
- God is all around you. (*Point finger down and make a circle. Point to person.*)

Ask children to name some times that they might want to remind themselves or to tell others that God is with them. Examples include when sad, angry, scared, happy, trying something new, and going somewhere new.



8 Blessing Cloak

Leader preparation: Read Colossians 3:12–17. Review the directions for the blessing cloak on the handouts. Prepare the fabric and ribbon needed for each child. Fill in, copy, and cut apart the take-home card. Recruit a few older youth or adults to help with this activity.

Supplies:

- “Blessing Cloaks,” Attachment: Activity 8a
- supplies listed on the attachment “Blessing Cloaks”
- “Take Home Card,” Attachment: Activity 8b
- children’s Bible

Read aloud Colossians 3:12–17. Invite children to imagine that just like we put on our clothes in the morning, God wants us to put on certain ways of acting toward others. God wants us to wear love for one another every day. Tell the children that they are going to make blessing cloaks to take home to help them remember how to treat others so that they will be a blessing to them.

Follow the instructions on Attachment: Activity 8a to make blessing cloaks. Be sure children take a copy of the “Take Home Card” to explain the colors to their families.

9 Honoring God Paintings

Leader preparation: Wear old clothes or a full apron, ask a few older youth or adults to help, relax, and enjoy this activity. Cover work and drying areas with protective coverings and have all supplies ready before you begin. If you choose to have only a couple of children paint at a time, you will need to have books, puzzles, or some kind of quiet activity for others to do while they wait.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- washable finger paint in a variety of colors
- finger painting paper or freezer paper
- pen
- paint aprons or art shirts
- protective coverings for work area
- 2 basins of water, one soapy and one plain
- towels

Read aloud Proverbs 3:9 from a children’s Bible. Explain that creating something beautiful and saying thank you is a way of honoring God. Tell the children that they are going to create pictures to honor God using paint and their hands.

If children are not familiar with finger painting you may have to demonstrate. Let each child pick one or two colors to use. Place a dollop of each one of their papers and let them have fun. When everyone is done, admire all of the creations. Have them wash up in the basins of water you brought.

Ask the children to join you in a prayer. Raise your hands in the air and shout, *We love you God! Thank you for all the blessings you have given us!*

When the paint is dry, display artwork for others to see papers and let them have fun. When everyone is done, admire all of the creations. Have them wash up in the basins of water you brought.

Ask the children to join you in a prayer. Raise your hands in the air and shout, "We love you God! Thank you for all the blessings you have given us!"

When it is dry, display art work for others to see

Reflect

What did you observe that suggests the children are growing in their sense of how important it is to ask for forgiveness? In what ways did you and the children experience God's love during your time together?

Attachment: Activity 8a

Blessing Cloaks

Supplies:

- blue fabric or felt
- 7 different colors of wide ribbon (not blue)
- scissors
- ruler
- pen
- “Take-Home Card,” Attachment: Activity 8b, with colors filled in, copied and cut apart (one per child)

The blue fabric equals the love that binds everything together. The other actions or attitudes can be represented by whatever colors you can find.

Procedure;

1. Cut the fabric or felt into strips approximately 42" × 15" (one per child)
2. Cut the ribbon into 12" lengths (two of each color per child)
3. Make 14 more-or-less evenly spaced ½" slits 1" above the long side of the fabric strip

The children will insert the ribbon through the slits, pull halfway through, and tie a knot.

(Option) When using narrow ribbon or yarn, make 7 slits along each short end and have the children tie one of each color on each end

Attachment: Activity 8b

Take Home Card

Blessing Cloaks

Colossians 3:12-17

What God wants us to wear:

Color

Blue

Attitude

Love

Compassion, caring

Kindness

Humility—don't be proud

Meekness or gentleness

Patience

Bear with, tolerate, put up with

Forgiveness

Blessing Cloaks

Colossians 3:12-17

What God wants us to wear:

Color

Blue

Attitude

Love

Compassion, caring

Kindness

Humility—don't be proud

Meekness or gentleness

Patience

Bear with, tolerate, put up with

Forgiveness

Blessing Cloaks

Colossians 3:12-17

What God wants us to wear:

Color

Blue

Attitude

Love

Compassion, caring

Kindness

Humility—don't be proud

Meekness or gentleness

Patience

Bear with, tolerate, put up with

Forgiveness

Blessing Cloaks

Colossians 3:12-17

What God wants us to wear:

Color

Blue

Attitude

Love

Compassion, caring

Kindness

Humility—don't be proud

Meekness or gentleness

Patience

Bear with, tolerate, put up with

Forgiveness

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Young children radiate a joy for life. Praising God for all creation comes naturally to them. Understanding the finality of death is a little harder. Some of them will have experienced the death of a pet or family member. Others won't have any idea what it means to have to let go of a loved one in this way.

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

In Acts 10:1–48, almost everyone finds that they have to give up their old ways of looking at things. At the same time, they experience the blessings of new friends and new ways of doing things. Generally, children are far more open to new experiences and new ways to do things than adults are. These activities can be used to help explain different traditions of the church to young children and, at the same time, may offer you new ways of experiencing those traditions.

Prayer: *Gracious God, help me to be more open to new ways of doing things. I want to be a good example for these children. Be with each of us as we learn and grow together. 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 All: Praise the Lord! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 148. Make sure there is space in your area for the children to respond enthusiastically without hurting each other.

Supplies:

- “Praise the Lord!” Attachment: Activity 1

Have the children spread out so that they have room to move. Explain that when the people in your church gather for worship, praising God is one of the things they do. Tell the group that you are going to praise God by doing a chant. Their part is to say, “Praise the Lord!” Explain that you will wave at them when they are to say this. Whenever they say the words, they are to use joyful voices and clap, jump, twirl, or wave their arms. Have them practice once or twice. Remember to wave when they are to speak their part. Use the litany on the attachment “Praise the Lord!”



2 St. Francis and the Birds

Leader preparation: Locate the artwork “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds.” For more background on St. Francis, see the online article “St. Francis and the Birds,” <http://www.americancatholic.org/e-News/FriarJack/fj092607.asp>. Place the artwork where the children can easily view it. Collect pictures of a variety of birds from books, calendar pages, or the Internet.

Supplies:

- artwork: “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” by Giotto di Bondone, <http://www.art.com/products/p11724653-sa-i1350212/giotto-di-bondone-st-francis-of-assisipreaching-to-the-birds.htm?sorig=cat&origid=0&dimvals=0&ui=b2c89647ba56409d894161743bb14f5d&searchstring=st.+francis+feeding+the+birds>
- “St Francis and the Birds,” Attachment: Activity 2
- a variety of pictures of birds from magazines, calendars, or the Internet

Gather the children where all can see the “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds,” and ask them to count how many different kinds of birds they see. Help them to name a variety of birds, showing them the pictures you have gathered.

Read aloud the story “St. Francis and the Birds” on the attachment, which is based on St. Bonaventure’s *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*.

3 Old Life, New Life

Leader preparation: Locate a copy of the children’s book *Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney. Your church library or pastor may have a copy. If not, this is an excellent resource to have on hand. Some of the children in your group will have experienced the death of a family member or pet, others will not. The focus here is that life changes and we keep moving on. You may want to alert parents and caregivers to this activity’s discussion.

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

Supplies:

- children's book: *Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney (Pilgrim Press, 2010), available from <http://www.ucc.org/the-pilgrim-press/>

Gather the children where all can see and hear the story. Explain that you are going to read a story about going from an old way of life to a new way of life. Read *Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children to the children*. Then ask:

- What do you think is good about being a water bug? A dragonfly?
- How do you think the water bug felt when it climbed the stem?
- How might the dragonfly feel about not being able to go back?
- What are some other things that change? (Examples: chrysalis to butterfly, seed to plant, egg to chick, puppy to dog, baby to child to adult)

Offer a short prayer thanking our wise God for the changes in our lives.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Blessing of Hearing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review Acts 10:1–48, focusing on verses 44–48. Spend time listening to the sounds around you in different places. If there are children in your group who have hearing difficulties, adapt this activity appropriately.

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- (optional) recordings of instrumental music and of adults and children singing
- (optional) device for playing music

Read aloud Acts 10:44–48 from a children's Bible. Ask the children to describe the things that Peter and the other people in the crowd might have heard that day. Depending on the translation you used, you might need to explain that "speaking in tongues" is like speaking in different languages.

Affirm that being able to hear is a blessing. Invite children to name their favorite things to listen to and their favorite sounds to hear. Then ask everyone to sit quietly for one minute and listen for how many different sounds they can hear. When time is up, work together to name everything that was heard. Try this again in a different area in your facility.

Option: Listen to some recorded music, and invite children to identify the various sounds, instruments, and voices.

Sing a favorite church school song and thank God for the ability to hear.

5 Blessing of the Animals

Leader preparation: Review the information below about a simple ceremony for blessing animals. Check with your pastor about any traditions or special concerns regarding such a blessing ceremony. Decide if you want the children to bring in their pets, pictures of them, or stuffed animals. Send home a notice a week or two in advance. You might want to make reminder phone calls the day before. Have some stuffed animals or pictures for those children who might be visiting or who didn't know about this activity. If your church wants to have community-wide Blessing of the Animals service, an outline can be found on the website of the United Church of Christ, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worshiping-into-gods-future/pdf/blessing-god-s-creatures.pdf>.

If it is not possible for children to bring pets or stuffed animals, invite the children to just tell stories about their pets and close with a prayer thanking God for all of them.

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- extra stuffed animals or pictures of animals

Welcome children and their pets or stuffed animals. Lead the group in blessing the animals, following this outline:

Leader: Welcome to our Blessing of the Animals time. Let us listen to the Word of God.

Reader 1: Genesis 1:20-23

Reader 2: Genesis 1:24-25

Leader: We are thankful that God gave us all of the birds, fish, and creatures in this world. We are especially thankful for our pets who mean so much to us.

Give each child a chance to tell why his or her pet is important and special. Go to each child and lightly place your hand on the pet's head or the child's shoulder and say:

Creator God, be with [Pet's name] and [Child's name]. Let them find joy in each other's company. Let them grow together in strength and friendship. Let them know your love and peace. Amen.

If a child mentions a pet that died, you might offer this prayer:

Creator God, thank you for letting [Child's name] have the blessing of [Pet's name] even if it was just for a short time. We know our pets can't be with us forever, but we miss them when they are gone. They are so important to us. Let [Child's name] know your peace and love. Amen.



6 The Blessing of Water

Leader preparation: Read the activities on the attachment "Water, Water Everywhere," and decide which ones you will use. Gather the necessary supplies. You might want to use this activity on a Sunday when a baptism is taking place in worship.

Supplies:

- “Water, Water Everywhere,” Attachment: Activity 6
- supplies listed for activities
- Bible
- protective covering for work area
- (optional) aprons or art shirts
- towels for drying hands and cleanup

As you and the children enjoy the water activities you have chosen, talk about the many different ways water is used. Your discussion could include times and places when there is too much or not enough water. Say a prayer thanking God for the blessing of water.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Blessing of the Earth (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 1:26–31 and 2:15, and Psalm 148. Read the activities on the attachment “Blessing of the Earth,” and decide which activity you will use. If you take the walk, make sure you have extra help to watch the children, and let the parents and caregivers know that you will not be in your regular space. You may want to use this activity in connection with Stewardship Sunday or Earth Day.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- “Blessing of the Earth,” Attachment: Activity 7

Read aloud Genesis 1:26–31, Genesis 2:15, and Psalm 148:1–2 with the children. Tell them that taking care of the earth is a way of praising God and saying thank you for this blessing. Explain the activity you have chosen to do, and enjoy your time together.



8 Blessing of Bedtime

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:2–3. Being able to rest at night is a blessing. Going to sleep is a way of letting go and turning things over to God for the night. Make copies on cardstock of the prayer on the attachment “Traditional Bedtime Prayer.” Check your church or local library for books of children’s prayers.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- “Traditional Bedtime Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 8 on cardstock (one per child)
- crayons or markers
- star stickers
- (optional) children’s books of prayers

Invite the children to tell about or to demonstrate the bedtime rituals they follow. If no one mentions bedtime prayers, ask if any of them pray at bedtime. Tell them that being able to sleep and rest is a blessing from God. It helps our bodies to grow and gives us energy for the next day. Let them know that even God rested after creating the world. Read aloud Genesis 2:2–3. Tell them that going to sleep is

a way to let go of all the things that happened during the day. Bedtime is a special time to talk with God about all of the good and worrisome parts of our day.

Distribute copies of “Traditional Bedtime Prayer,” and invite the children to repeat it phrase by phrase after you. If you have books of prayers, read a few of them to the group. Have children decorate their prayer cards with star stickers and crayons or markers and take them home.

9 Remembering

Leader preparation: Locate any windows, furniture, hymnals, or other objects in your facility that were given as memorial gifts. Is there someone you can invite to talk with the group about the person or persons being memorialized? Is there a cemetery connected to your facility that you could visit? If you will be leaving your normal space, be sure to let parents and other appropriate people know where you will be. You may want to connect this activity to Memorial Day or All Saints’ Day services.

Supplies:

- cemetery pictures from books, magazines, or the Internet
- graham crackers, juice (check for allergies)
- napkins, cups, tablecloth
- (optional) invited guest

Explain to the children that a memorial is a way of remembering someone who has died. Visit the places you have selected to see items that were given to your church as memorial gifts. Introduce your guest and listen to her or his stories about the people remembered in these memorials.

If possible, visit a cemetery connected with your church or show the pictures you located. Explain that people visit cemeteries and place flowers or other items on the graves as a way to remember their loved ones who have died. Let the children know that it is a blessing to be able to remember the people who were important to us but have now died. Allow the children to tell about times they have been in a cemetery and to ask questions. Answer them as simply and honestly as you can.

As you share a snack of graham crackers and juice, remind the children that Jesus told us to remember him every time we shared a special meal together. Ask them to recall something that they know about Jesus. As you end your time together, remind the children that Jesus promises us we will live forever with God.

Reflect

Which activities did the children enjoy the most? Which did you enjoy? What traditions of your congregation did the children explore?

Praise the Lord!

Based on Psalm 148

Leader: All together we say . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: The heavens and the angels . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: The sun and the moon and the stars . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: The rain and the clouds . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: The Lord gave the command and all things were created . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: The Lord set them in their place and made the laws of nature . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Let all the earth . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Sea creatures from the deepest oceans . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Storms and lightning, hail, wind, and snow . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Mountains and hills, rivers and valleys . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Fruit trees and evergreens, flowers and ferns . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Wild animals and farm animals . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Small animals and flying birds . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Leaders and kings of all nations . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Men and women, children and old people . . .

All: **Praise the Lord!**

Leader: Let every living thing on earth . . .

All: **Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!**

Attachment: Activity 2

St Francis and the Birds

Brother Francis spent his life traveling around the countryside and teaching people about God and Jesus. As the years went by, Francis was growing tired. For days he had thought about retiring so that he could just stay in one place and pray. He thought and thought, but he just couldn't decide. He wasn't sure what God wanted him to do.

Brother Francis thought that Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare might be able to give him some good advice, so he sent some friends to talk to them. When his friends returned they said, "Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare both say that you should keep on teaching about God's love." Without a second thought, Brother Francis jumped right up and headed out the door.

As Francis was walking down the road, he came to a large flock of birds. There were all kinds of birds just sitting together in the field. Brother Francis walked over to the birds and started talking to them about God. Usually birds will fly away when someone comes near to them, but these birds sat there and listened to Brother Francis. He told them how much God cared for them. He told them that God had given them wings and feathers of beautiful colors, pure air to fly in, and plenty of food to eat. And he told them that because of all of this, they should praise God in every way they could. The birds were so happy to hear what Brother Francis was saying that they stretched out their necks, opened and closed their beaks, and flapped their wings. It was just like they were clapping their hands and saying, "Amen!" As long as Brother Francis talked, the birds stayed and listened to him. They didn't fly away until he raised his hand, saying a final prayer and giving them permission to leave.

Brother Francis returned to his friends who were waiting by the road. He looked at them and said, "How silly of me not to have thought about preaching to the birds before now."

From then on Brother Francis would take time to share God's word with all animals, telling them to praise and love the Creator who made us all.

Attachment: Activity 6

Water, Water Everywhere

Genesis 1: 9-10
Psalms 148:4-8

Types of Water

Supplies:

- glass or plastic containers with lids
- permanent marker
- magnifying glass

Collect water from as many different sources as possible and label them. Sources might include tap water, rainwater, dish water, and samples from a stream, lake, pond, puddle, or ocean. As the children observe the different samples of water, ask questions such as these.

- In what ways does the water in these different containers look different?
- What can we see if we look at the water in these different containers with a magnifying glass?
- Which water is safe to drink?
- How can you tell if water is safe to drink?

Soil and Water

Supplies:

- large bowl of water
- soil
- large spoon
- 2 clear drinking glasses
- small mesh strainer
- ladle
- coffee filter
- rubber band

Mix enough soil into the bowl of water to make it look dark and cloudy. Place the strainer over the top of one drinking glass. Place a coffee filter over the other drinking glass, allowing it to droop slightly into the glass. Hold the filter in place with a rubber band.

Stir the water so that the dirt is swirling through it and then ladle some into the strainer into the first drinking glass. Ask: *How*

much dirt did the strainer catch? How does the water in the glass look? Would you want to drink it?

Now slowly pour the water from the first drinking glass into the second drinking glass with the coffee filter. Ask: *Is there anything in the filter? How does the water look now? Would you want to drink this?*

Explain to the children that cities and bottling companies have special ways of treating water to remove anything that would not be good for people to drink. Remind them that they should only drink water from places where they know it is clean.

Oil and Water

Supplies:

- large bowl of water
- vegetable oil
- pieces of old panty hose
- cotton balls
- paper
- coffee filters
- dish detergent
- ground black pepper

Pour oil into the water until there is a thick layer of oil. Ask: *Would you want to play in or drink this water? Would fish or ducks be able to live in it?*

Have children try using the panty hose, cotton balls, paper, and coffee filters to clean up the oil. Ask: *How well do the different things work?*

Sprinkle pepper in the bowl along one side. What happens? (The pepper should help to contain the oil.) Add some dish detergent to the oil. What happens? (The dish detergent helps to break up the oil.)

Together discuss: *Why do we need to be careful not to pollute rivers, lakes, or the ocean?*

Attachment: Activity 7

Blessing of the Earth

Stewardship Walk

Supplies:

- Bible
- trash bags
- (optional) disposable plastic gloves

Take a walk around the grounds of your facility. Pick up any trash or pull weeds and dispose of these things properly. Talk about what a wonderful blessing God has given us in all the amazing parts of creation. We have everything we need, and it is our job to take care of this blessing so that it will last a long time. Have the children repeat Psalm 148:1-2 after you, ending with a final “Praise the Lord!” If the weather is inclement, perhaps you could walk around your facility and pick up any stray papers, coffee cups, or aluminum cans.

Room Recycle

Supplies:

- Bible
- boxes or clean waste baskets
- markers
- paper
- tape

With the children, think of ways you could be doing more recycling during your time together: Is there a box for scrap paper or other unwanted paper? Are snacks and drinks served in plastic that can be recycled?

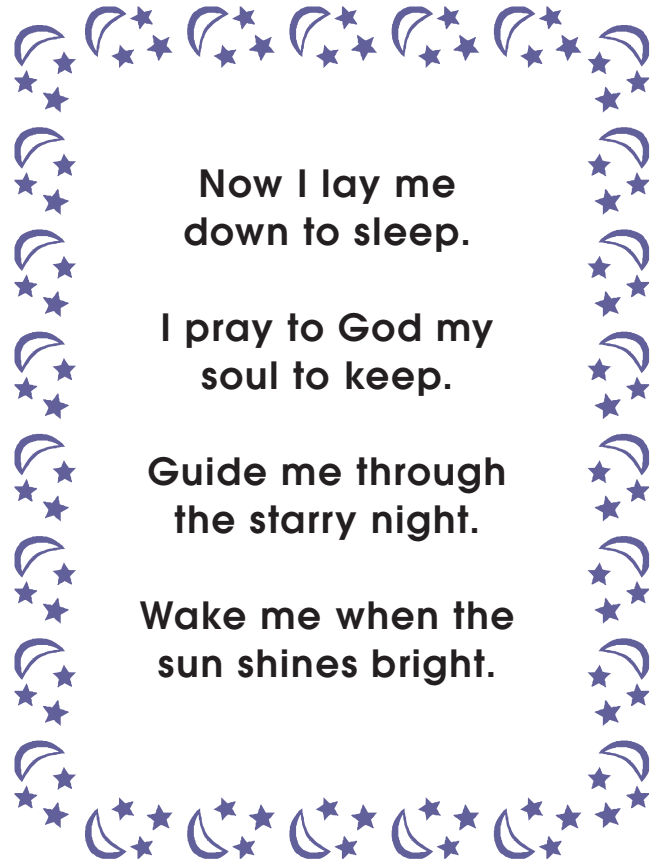
Talk with the children about ways to have less waste when you are together. Designate boxes or trash cans for different recycling items and let the children label them with signs to help them remember what items go in each container.

Talk about what a wonderful blessing God has given us in all the amazing parts of creation. We have everything we need, and it is our job to take care of this blessing so that it will last a long time. Ask if they can think of other ways we can care for the earth. Add the following items as is helpful:

- Turn off lights when you leave a room. This includes restrooms.
- Don't leave the water running when you brush your teeth.
- Walk or ride your bike whenever you can instead of using a car.
- Don't use more paper towels than you need.
- Color or write on both sides of your paper.
- Give toys or clothes that are in good shape to thrift shops or shelters instead of throwing them away.

Have the children repeat Psalm 148:1-2 after you, ending with a final “Praise the Lord!”

Traditional Bedtime Prayer



Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Children in this age group are naturally loving and compassionate. They are usually quick to tell when someone is hurt or sad, and they want to help. They also want to help the adults in their lives do all kinds of things. Practicing helping others strengthens their ability to be a blessing to others. It will also help them to learn what it means to let go of their own needs in order to better address the needs of others.

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

You probably are bombarded daily with pleas for help. It seems like everyone wants a donation of your time or money for something, but you can't give to every good cause. You have answered God's call to action by leading this group of children. What led you to make this decision? In what other ways can you be a blessing to others? What do you need to let go in order to serve better? Regular communication with God will help you sort through these things.

Prayer: Challenging God, thank you for the opportunity to work with this group of children. Help me to encourage them to address the needs of others, what it means to put others first. Help me dig into your work here on earth. 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 Being a Blessing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 12:1–5. Reflect on verse 2. How has your understanding of this verse changed over the years? Review the definitions and examples of "blessing" to use with the children on the attachment "What Is a Blessing?" This activity may help children find ways in which they can be a blessing to others.

Supplies:

- "What Is a Blessing?" Attachment: Activity 1
- children's Bible or Bible storybook
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Print the word "blessing" on the whiteboard or newsprint. Invite children to read the word with you and to tell what they think this word means. Affirm all responses. As is helpful, add key points to the conversation from the attachment "What Is a Blessing?"

Read aloud the story of God calling Abram and Sarai, Genesis 12:1–9, from a children's Bible or Bible storybook. Invite children to tell the story in their own words. Read Genesis 12:2 again and ask:

- What did God tell Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham) about God's blessing? (God was blessing him so he could be a blessing to others.)
- How can a person be a blessing to someone else?

Spend a few minutes brainstorming ways that you and the children can be a blessing to others. List your ideas on the whiteboard or newsprint.

Invite the children to join you in the following litany prayer. Teach them their line, "I can be a blessing," and tell them you will wave at them when they are to say this line.

Leader: God blessed me so that . . .

All: I can be a blessing!

Leader: When I . . . (For each petition, point to and say one of the ways of being a blessing on the list made earlier.)

All: I can be a blessing!

(Repeat the petition above for each item on the list.)

Leader: Thank you, God, for blessing us. Because of your love and care,

All: I can be a blessing!



2 Where in the World Is Paul

Leader preparation: Read Romans 15:22–29 and the story on the attachment "Paul's Mission Work." Find out six places where your congregation or denomination supports mission work, and locate these places on the world map. Decide if you will use votive candles in glass holders or battery-operated tea lights. If possible, darken your meeting space for this activity.

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

Supplies:

- world map to lay flat on table or floor
- 10 votive candles in glass holders and matches
- (optional) 10 battery-operated tea lights
- “Paul’s Mission Work,” Attachment: Activity 2

Spread out the world map on a table, or the floor and gather the children around it. Read the story of Paul below, asking a volunteer to help you put a lighted candle on the places he visited as you get to them in the story.

Tell the children about some of the different missions that your church or denomination participates in, placing candles on each of those locations. Take a moment of silence to look at the glow of the candles. Say: *God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others—people here in our town and people all over the world.* Say a short prayer, thanking God for the privilege of being a blessing.

3 Blessing of Mealtime

Leader preparation: Even when they were busy on their travels, Abram and Paul remembered to praise God and thank God for their blessings. In what ways do you praise and thank God each day? Be aware of any food allergies as you decide what snack to prepare. Choose a snack that children can help prepare and serve.

Supplies:

- simple, healthy snack
- water or juice
- plates, napkins, cups as needed
- (optional) hand sanitizer

Take time for children to wash their hands, or have them use a hand sanitizer. Remind them that you all will wait to eat until everyone has been served and a prayer has been said.

Invite the children to help you prepare and serve the snack. Ask if anyone has a prayer that he or she says before eating a meal. Let everyone who knows a table prayer say it. If no one knows a table prayer, offer this one: *God is great. God is good, and we thank God for this food. By God’s hands we all are fed. Thank you, God, for daily bread. Amen.*

As you eat, enjoy a conversation with the children about high points in their lives during the past week.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 God in the Silence (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 12:1–5. Where and when have you heard God’s voice? Where and when have you felt God’s presence? Set up three or four quiet activities in various areas of your meeting space. Being silent may be a challenge for some children, as children today often have few opportunities to experience silence and quiet times of wonder.

Supplies:

- 3 or 4 quiet activities, such as Bible storybooks, puzzles, crayons and



drawing paper, beads to string

- bell
- clock or watch

Ask the children to describe what they think God sounds like. Accept all answers. Tell them that there are many stories in the Bible where God talks to people. God talks to people today, too.

Sometimes God's voice is something we hear in our heads. Sometimes it is a feeling deep in our hearts. Sometimes it is an idea we get from something that we read or a song that we sing. Sometimes God speaks to us through what other people say and do. The problem is that sometimes we are so busy doing other things that we don't pay attention to what God might be telling us.

Invite the children to practice being quiet. Have them spend one minute sitting quietly. Then you will ring the bell, and they may go to one of the activities and play. During playtime, they are to keep quiet—no words. Start the time of silence by saying "God be with us." If someone starts to talk, tap her or him on the shoulder and put your finger to your lips as a reminder. After five minutes of quiet play, ring the bell again and quietly call the group together. Invite the children to tell about what it was like to be quiet for that long. Say a short prayer, thanking God for the blessing of quiet times.



5 "Sisters in the Wind"

Leader preparation: Locate the artwork "Sisters in the Wind" and a recording of wind sounds. Spend a moment reflecting on the image of the sisters. To what extent does it remind you of your own struggles? Read Genesis 12:1–5 and Romans 15:22–29. Think about the possible difficulties and joys of the journeys that Abram and his family and Paul made. Display the artwork where the children can see it easily.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Sisters in the Wind," by Ethan Hubbard, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- recording of wind sounds, such as the one at <http://soundbible.com/1810-Wind.html>
- device for playing the recording of wind sounds

Gather the children where they can see "Sisters in the Wind" and ask them to sit quietly and look at it. Play the recording of wind sounds as they view the picture. After a few moments, invite children to describe the feelings they have as they look at this picture and listen to the wind. Invite them to tell a story about what they think is happening in the picture.

Tell the group that this artwork is a photo of two sisters in Australia. They were journeying across Australia with their family to return to their home. They stayed in camps that they made by the road. Have the children imagine that they are taking such a journey themselves, traveling for several weeks by foot or car and camping by the side of the road. Discuss:

- What would you need to take with you on such a trip?
- What would you have to leave behind (let go of) in order to go on this trip?
- What might be fun and exciting (a blessing) about such a trip?

6 Global Blessing

Leader preparation: Visit the website for the “Build a Village” project of the Church World Service. There you will find general information, stories, games, and coloring pictures. Choose a story, a game, and a coloring page that seem appropriate for your group and prepare to lead them. Print the website address on an index card to send home with each family.

Supplies:

- website: “Build a Village,”
<http://www.churchworldservice.org/buildavillage/index.html>
- computer with Internet connection
- supplies as needed for activities selected from site
- index cards with website address for each family

Show the website for “Build a Village” to the children, and explore a few of the areas with them. Lead them in the story, the game, and the coloring page that you selected.

Have the children repeat each phrase of the following prayer after you:

*God,
Thank you
for loving people
all around the world.
Open our eyes
to the needs of others
and give us strong hands
to help.
Amen.*

Send home an index card with the “Build a Village” website address so that families might explore this site together.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Going on a Mission Trip (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: When teams from congregations go on a mission trip, they take along things they will need to do their work, such as medical supplies, tools, lumber, paint, or gifts of clothing, Bibles, and other books. If possible, invite a person who has been on a church mission trip to come and talk to the children about why he or she decided to go, the experience, and the things he or she took on the trip. It would be great if this person could bring some photos to show the group.

Supplies:

- world map or globe
- (optional) visitor who has been on a church mission trip

Ask the children if they have heard about mission trips, and to tell what they know about them. Tell about any mission trips that groups in your congregation or a neighboring church have taken—where the people went (point out locations on the globe or map) and what they did there. Wonder together about why some Christians are willing to go on such mission trips. If it is not mentioned, explain that these people are eager to help others because they feel they have been

blessed by God and because they want to be a blessing to others. They are also responding to Jesus' teachings about helping others and telling about God's love. If you have invited a visitor, ask him or her to tell about the mission trip that he or she took.

Invite children to dream of mission trips they would like to take: where they would go and what they would do. Examples might include cleaning up after a flood, rebuilding following a tornado, digging water wells, or visiting an orphanage to deliver clothing and school supplies. Brainstorm the kinds of things you would need to take on such a trip.

Gather in a circle to play a game. Begin by saying, "I am going on a mission trip, and in my suitcase I packed . . ." Mention one item you would take. The person on your right repeats what you said and adds something else. Continue around the circle, with each child adding to the list. If you have a very young group, you may need to help them or just let each child say one thing.

8 Visible Blessing

Leader preparation: The children in your group are a blessing to your congregation, but sometimes they need to be a more visible blessing. Find out if there is something your group can do on Sunday morning that would bless the congregation. Could they serve as greeters, pass out bulletins, or help with coffee hour in some way? If nothing like this is possible, they can create art for a bulletin cover or newsletter or make cheer cards for members who are in the hospital or homebound.

Supplies:

- (optional) list of members in the hospital or homebound, construction paper, crayons or markers, stickers

Explain to the children how they will be a blessing by serving the congregation in the way that you planned. Use this time to practice any skills they need for the job, such as shaking hands and saying hello, passing out bulletins, or clearing and wiping tables.

If the group is going to make cheer cards, explain who will be receiving the cards. Show how to fold construction paper into a card. Have each one write "God loves you" on the inside of the card. Encourage creativity in making the cards look cheerful with drawings and stickers. Make arrangements to mail or deliver the cards immediately after the activity.

9 Blessing Others

Leader preparation: Consult with leaders in your congregation to see if it is appropriate to support one of the mission projects of Church World Service (<http://www.churchworldservice.org>), or if there is an existing mission project in your congregation that families can support. This is a two-part activity. You will explain the mission project and the special offering during the first meeting. You will receive the special offering during the second meeting. If possible, include the rest of the congregation in this special offering. Print key information about the special offering in fairly large letters (name of project, date of offering, what and where to donate) and make copies that children can glue to the poster they make and also take home.



Supplies:

- copies of printed information about the selected mission project (name of project, date of offering, what/where to donate)
- construction paper or poster board
- crayons or markers
- glue sticks

Tell children about the selected mission project. Answer any questions they have about what you will be collecting and how these funds or materials will be used. Distribute copies of the key information.

Demonstrate how to make a poster by gluing a copy of the key information to a piece of construction paper and then adding illustrations about the project. Have each child make a poster. As a group, walk around your facility and put up the posters to remind themselves and others about this special offering.

Help the children compose a prayer asking God to bless the money or donations that will be collected, those who will give it, and those who will receive it. Send home a copy of the printed information about the project. As is appropriate, give a copy to the church office so that the special offering can be publicized in newsletters or bulletins.

On the day of the special offering, marvel at people's generosity, at people's desire to be a blessing to others. Have the children help you count the money or box up the donations. Gather everyone around the gifts and offer a prayer of thanks. Make sure that the money or donations are delivered promptly and appropriately.

Reflect

What have the children learned about be a blessing to others? When have you sensed that they are growing in their understanding of how letting go of some things can lead to experiencing other things? How has working with group been a blessing to you?

Attachment: Activity 1

What Is a Blessing?

From *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (4th Edition)

Blessing (noun):

1. the act or prayer of one who blesses; invocation or benediction
2. a grace said before or after eating
3. the gift of divine favor
4. good wishes or approval
5. anything that gives happiness or prevents misfortune; a special benefit or favor

Here are a few examples that go with the definitions:

1. Saying a prayer for someone. Making the sign of the cross on someone's forehead or hand, perhaps using oil or water. Asking God's blessing on someone as he or she leaves.
2. Any prayer said before or after a meal.
3. A special gift from God. This can be anything from being anointed king, as was David, to a smile from a child or the fragrance of a flower.
4. Parents or guardians saying it is okay to do something really important such as getting married, choosing a school or career path, or getting a pet.
5. The children in your group are a blessing.

Attachment: Activity 2

Paul's Mission Work

(Based on Romans 15:22-29)

Paul followed Jesus' teachings and God's ways. He was a missionary in the early days of the Christian church—he traveled near and far, telling everyone about Jesus Christ and starting new churches. Back in those days, people traveled by walking, riding a horse, or riding on boats that used sails or oars. It took a long time to get to faraway places.

As Paul traveled, he wrote letters to people he had met and churches he had started. Paul's letters reminded Jesus' followers that God had blessed them and encouraged them to keep being a blessing to others. Paul taught them about what it means to live as a group of Jesus' followers in the church. Sometimes the new churches would give money to Paul to take back to Jerusalem to help Christians there who were hungry or in prison. *(Have a child help you place a candle on Jerusalem.)*

One day Paul wrote a letter to the church in Rome. *(Have a child help you place a candle on Italy.)* Paul told them he was in Macedonia. *(Have a child help you place a candle on Greece.)* Paul told the Christians that he wanted to visit them, but first he needed to go to Jerusalem to help some Christians there who were in trouble. And Paul said that after his visited Rome, he wanted to go to Spain to tell people there about God's great love. *(Have a child help you place a candle on Spain.)*

Paul worked his whole life long to be a blessing to other people—telling them about Jesus Christ and helping them when they were in trouble or hungry. God blessed Paul, and Paul was a blessing to others. Christians today are still blessed by Paul's letters, which are in the Bible for us to read. We can learn from Paul about how to be a blessing.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

For children in this age group the future is in five minutes, dinner in two hours is forever, and a friend coming to play tomorrow is an eternity away. They are good at living in the here and now. Learning to practice their faith daily will give them the skills they need to cope with the future.

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

Take a moment to read and reflect on Jeremiah 29:1–14 and Luke 2:22–38. Our lives are a constant cycle of blessing and letting go. In the Jeremiah passage God’s word to the people of Judah is to let go of the past and live in the present, making Babylon the best place they can while they are there. By working with these children, teaching them how to practice their faith, you are investing in the future of God’s realm.

Prayer: Loving God, guide me as I work with these young children. Help me nurture their growing faith and be of model of what it means to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. 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 Dance with Abandon (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Letting go can mean releasing our inner inhibitions or forgetting our preconceived notions about things. Look around your space and see what items might be used as musical instruments, such as tapping on a table or chair or rubbing two blocks together. Don’t forget things like clapping hands. Make sure you have open space for everyone to move.

Supplies:

- recording of joyful instrumental music
- device for playing recorded music
- (optional) 3’ pieces of ribbon or crepe paper streamer

Tell the children that all of you are going to enjoy the blessing of moving to the music. Hand out the streamers, if you brought some, and suggest that everyone start by swaying slowly to the music and then progressing to more energetic movement. Ask them to look around your space for things they can use as instruments to play along with the music. Give suggestions as needed.

After several minutes, invite the group to return to slow swaying as a way to wind down. Gather in a huddle and say a short prayer, thanking God for the blessing of music and the blessing of being able to dance.

2 Jesus and the Children

Leader preparation: Read Luke 2:22–38 and Mark 10:13–16. Jesus was blessed as an infant at the temple. He, in turn, blessed the children who were brought to him. Spend time studying the artwork “Jesus Among the Children.” What would you like to say to Jesus? Display the artwork where the children will be able to see it.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Christ Among the Children,” by Emil Nolde, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- children’s Bible

Gather the children around the picture. Do not tell them the title of the painting. Invite the children to tell about what they see: *Who are these people? What is going on? What are they saying to each other?* Affirm all responses.

Read aloud Mark 10:13–16 from a children’s Bible. Tell them that the title of this painting is “Christ Among the Children.” Ask:

- Now that you know the title of the picture, do you have any different ideas about it?
- If you were in this picture, where would you be? What would you like to say to Jesus?
- What do you think Jesus would say to you?

Remind children that they can talk to Jesus any time. Take a quiet moment for children to softly say something to Jesus. Bless each child by name at the end of the activity, saying: *Jesus loves you, [Name]. God bless you this week.*

- 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.

3 Bubbles to God

Leader preparation: Talking to God helps us realize our blessings and gives us a way to let go of our hurts and fears. Decide if you will be able to go outdoors for this activity. If you need to stay inside, you will need to exercise more control over the activity, perhaps blowing bubbles into a sink or over a plastic tablecloth on the floor.

Supplies:

- bubble solution (see recipe at: <http://bubbleblowers.com/homemade.html>)
- bubble wands, either purchased or made from pipe cleaners or florist wire
- small cups or containers for bubble solution
- (optional) plastic tablecloth

Explain to the children that prayer is a way of talking to God. Invite the children to tell about times that they have prayed. Affirm that when we pray, we can say thank you to God for all of the good blessings in our lives, and we can tell God about things that are bothering us or problems that we're facing.

Tell the children that today you are going to try a new way of talking to God, by blowing bubbles. Have the children blow bubbles, and, as they do, invite them to think of things that they want to tell God. Each bubble can be like a little prayer. Give each child a bubble wand and a cup of bubble solution. (If you are inside, you may want to hold the container of solution and let them take turns.) Give learners plenty of time to blow bubbles and think of things they want to say to God.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Where Is God? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Jeremiah 29:1–14, reflecting on verses 11–14. When have you sensed God's good plan for your life? Where do you find God at work in your daily life?

Supplies:

- children's Bible

Gather the children and sit in a circle. Read aloud Jeremiah 29:11–13 from a children's Bible. Tell children that God had his messenger, Jeremiah, say these words to a group of people who had just lost a war and had been forced to leave their homes. Read the verses again, and invite children to state Jeremiah's message in their own words. Wonder together about how the people might have felt when they heard Jeremiah's words.

Invite a conversation about where to find God at work around us. Add your ideas and observations, based on what is currently happening in your community. Take a moment after each of the following questions for learners to offer their ideas before giving the responses in parentheses:

- Where is God when there is a flood? (In the words of those who pray, in the hands of those who help rescue people and rebuild homes)
- Where is God in the grocery store? (In the work of the farmers who grew the food, in the care shown by workers who can or prepare the food, in the helpful words of the workers at the store)

- Where is God when I fight with my brother or sister or friend? (In my words when I apologize, in my arms when I forgive and hug)
- Where is God in the drug store? (In the brains of the people who discover the medicines that help sick people, in the hands of people who make the medicines, in the words of the workers at the drug store who tell us how to use the medicines safely)
- Where is God when there is a wildfire? (In the courage of the firefighters who battle the flames, in the new growth to plants that comes after the fire stops)

Offer a short prayer thanking God for being in our lives in so many ways.

5 Baby Blessing

Leader preparation: Read Luke 2:22–40, and reflect on the people who have blessed you and helped you grow in faith.

Does anyone in your group have a new sibling that could come for a visit, or do you know parents in the church with a new baby? Invite the parent(s) to bring the baby for a visit. Ask ahead of time if children might lightly touch the baby's arm or leg and offer a blessing. If there is no baby available for a visit during this activity, bring a life-sized baby doll.

Supplies:

- children's Bible
- visiting baby
- hand sanitizer
- (optional) life-sized baby doll

Read aloud Luke 2:22, 25–34 from a children's Bible. Invite a conversation about the blessings that Simeon gave to baby Jesus and his family. Ask learners to recall times that they have seen people in the church speaking words of blessing to a baby.

Introduce the baby and parent(s) who are visiting. Ask the parent to tell about the things that babies need. If the baby has an older sibling in your group, ask him or her to tell about the ways that he or she helps to take care of the new baby. Tell children that it is important for the baby to grow in trusting and loving God. Discuss ways they can help the baby and other young children learn about God's great love for each person. Examples include singing and telling stories about God to the baby, praying for the baby, and caring for the baby in loving ways.

Take a moment for children to use a hand sanitizer, and then, with the parent's permission, invite each child to lightly touch the baby's arm or leg and say, "I promise to help you learn about God." Join hands in a circle around the baby, and say a short prayer asking God to bless the baby and family.

If no baby is available for a visit, you can do these activities with a life-sized baby doll, pretending it is a baby.

6 Still My Grandma

Leader preparation: Locate a copy of the children's book *Still My Grandma* by Véronique Van den Abeele, and prepare to read it aloud to the children. Think about the ways the grandmother changed and how Camille adapted to these changes, letting go of the way things had been. If there are any children in your group who may be experiencing a similar situation, how might they react to this story?

Supplies:

- children’s book: *Still My Grandma*, by Véronique Van den Abeele, ill. Claude K. Dubois (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers).

Gather the children where all can comfortably hear and see the story. Read the book aloud, showing the pictures. Offer the following “wonder” statements to invite a time of wondering. Welcome responses, but do not insist upon them.

- I wonder how Grandma felt when she couldn’t remember things.
- I wonder how Camille felt when things were not the same with Grandma.
- I wonder how Camille felt when she was able to come up with new ideas.
- I wonder how I would care for someone who has trouble remembering.

Say a short prayer thanking God for the people we love and for being able to find new ways of doing things.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Imagine the World (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Jeremiah 29:1–14, and imagine the shape, color, smell, and texture of such hope.

This activity can be done with markers and paper, or you might consider creating the artwork outdoors with sidewalk chalk.

Supplies:

- children’s Bible
- drawing paper and markers
- (optional) sidewalk chalk

Read aloud Jeremiah 29:4–8, 11 from a children’s Bible. Invite the children to name things that Jeremiah tells God’s people to do. (For example, work and pray together to make the world a better place.) Spend a moment imagining together what the world would be like if everyone knew the blessing of God’s love—if people could let go of fighting and meanness and live together in peace. To prime their creativity, ask:

- What colors might we see in such a world?
- What would we see people doing in such a world?
- What shapes or movement might we see in such a world?

Read aloud Jeremiah 29:4–8, 11 from a children’s Bible. Invite the children to name things that Jeremiah tells God’s people to do. (For example, work and pray together to make the world a better place.) Spend a moment imagining together what the world would be like if everyone knew the blessing of God’s love—if people could let go of fighting and meanness and live together in peace. To prime their creativity, ask:

- What colors might we see in such a world?
- What would we see people doing in such a world?
- What shapes or movement might we see in such a world?

Provide drawing paper and markers for children to use to create their pictures of a world where everyone knows the blessing of God's love. Or, go outdoors and create these pictures on the sidewalk for church members to enjoy as they leave worship.

8 “Go, My Children, with My Blessing”

Leader preparation: Listen to the hymn “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” and read the lyrics. Check to see if this song is in your church hymnal or songbook. What comfort do you find in the promises in these words?

If you are not comfortable singing, invite a church musician to come and sing “Go, My Children, with My Blessing.”

Supplies:

- song: “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” by Jaroslav J. Vajda (tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos), <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/gomychild.htm> (also found in many hymnals and church songbooks)

Ask children to relax and listen as you or a guest sings “Go, My Children, with My Blessing.” Tell them to listen as if it is God singing to them, and not you. After the song, invite children to recall any words that they remember. Read aloud the words to the song slowly, giving the children time to feel the importance of them. Ask them what they heard in the words. One line of the song says “grow in love and love by serving.” Ask: *How might a person do that?*

Sing the first verse of the song line by line, having the children repeat the lines after you. Sing it several times, until children are comfortable with it.

9 Eating Our Words

Leader preparation: How are you affected by the things people say? To what extent are you able to let go of the negative things? When do you bless others with your kind words? Plan on having two colors of icing. If a sugary icing is problematic, you could use softened cream cheese tinted with food coloring instead. Be sure to check for food allergies.

Supplies:

- two colors of icing—purchased in tubes or homemade in cake decorating bags
- two plates
- hand sanitizer
- graham crackers
- water or juice
- napkins, cups
- plastic knives

Gather the children around the table. Take one color of icing and a plate. Ask the children to tell you some words that are mean and hurtful. As they say each word or phrase, squeeze a little icing onto the plate or write the words one on top of the other. (Don't let this go on too long before you just empty the tube.) Comment on the pile of mean words. Use a plastic knife to try to put the icing back into the tube. When that won't work, explain to the children that the words we say are like this icing—once we say them, it is hard to take them back. The words have already made someone feel bad.

Using the second color of icing, following the same process, only having children say kind and loving words. Demonstrate that these words can't be taken back either, but that they make people feel good, so that's OK. Ask:

- What do you feel inside when someone says mean or hateful words to you and when you say things like this to someone?
- What do you feel inside when someone says kind or caring words to you and when you say things like this to someone?

Have children clean their hands and spread some icing on a graham cracker. Say a prayer thanking God for the food and asking for help in being a blessing by saying kind things to others. Enjoy the snack.

Reflect

What did children do or say that suggests to you that they are gaining a sense of how to make the world a better place? What blessings do you hope for in your future?