

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

We are on a lifelong journey of faith in a world of constant transition. Through joyful and painful experiences, our faith grows and changes. We come to know more of God's love and forgiveness in many places and times. We encounter God at church as well as in our daily life. In everyday living we discover what it means to follow Christ in our homes, in our communities, in our vocations, and in our play. The activities that follow invite us into the practice of blessing and letting go, a sacred rhythm set forth in creation and sustained by God's love, grace, and mercy.

About this Exploration

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



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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① Nature Speaks of Letting Go

Supplies:

- outdoor place for observing nature
- votive candle in a glass container
- candle lighter

One place we discover more about letting go is in the natural world. As a household or family, take a walk outdoors, or find a place to sit and observe. Be quiet and attentive. Do not rush, but allow nature to speak to you about letting go. Pay attention to the natural cycle of birth and death in nature, holding and releasing, embracing and letting go. Find something in nature that speaks to you about letting go, and bring it with you as you return home after about ten minutes. Show one another the items you chose, and describe how those items speak to you about letting go. Make a display of the objects. Include a votive candle in a glass container to prevent any fire hazard. Place this reminder where you gather for meals. Each time you gather, light the candle as a reminder of God's love that embraces us in the holy dance of embracing and letting go.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Growing and Changing

Supplies:

- favorite photos
- special keepsakes

As we journey through life, we do not remain the same. We grow and change in many ways. Invite members of your household to gather favorite photos and special keepsakes from an earlier period in their lives. Look together at what each member collected. Talk about the changes that have taken place in each person's life. What changes were welcomed? What experiences were difficult or painful? What events brought great joy and celebration? What kind of things do you find hard to leave behind? What are you looking forward to next? What do you wish would never change? What is the best thing about growing and changing? As we grow and change, we move forward into a new adventure, held by God's faithfulness and love.

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Anointed by God

Supplies:

- olive oil or baby oil
- Bible or Bible storybook
- (optional) costumes

Bible stories help us discover how others learned to let go, opening space for something new to emerge in their lives. Read the story of the anointing of David and the beginning of his service to Saul in 1 Samuel 16:1–23. If there are children in your gathering, you may wish to read the story from a children’s Bible storybook, or you may choose to read the story from the Bible and invite the children to dramatize it as you read. After hearing the story, reflect together:

- What notions about kings did Samuel let go of when David was chosen?
- What did David let go of when he became king?
- What blessing came to David?
- What might it mean to look at other people through God’s eyes?
- What difference might it make in our perspective and relationships?

Recall how David was anointed with oil as a symbol that God was with him and had chosen him to serve. Offer a blessing to one another. Make the sign of the cross with oil as you say, “You are God’s chosen child. God loves you, cares for you, and wants good things for you.”

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Life Transitions

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>

Artist Andrew Wyeth finished this painting in 1948. The inspiration for the work was a woman named Christina Olson who suffered from polio, a degenerative muscular disorder. By the time Wyeth met her, Olson was unable to walk. Rather than use a wheelchair, she preferred to crawl from place to place.

Christina Olson was fifty-five years old when the painting was finished, considerably older than the young woman depicted in the work. According to a widely reported story, Wyeth was inspired to begin the painting when he observed Olson edging her way back to her home after visiting the graves of her parents, which were located on adjacent family-owned property.

Life is full of hellos and goodbyes, embracing and releasing, transitions and change. These transitions include changes in our relationships, health, work, family, where we live, and so on. As we wrestle with releasing and embracing, we may feel a whirl of emotions from excruciating pain to joyous expectation. Sit quietly with the painting “Christina’s World” by Andrew Wyeth. Begin with prayer, opening yourself to God’s Spirit. Use these questions, or your own, to reflect. Write your thoughts in a journal.

- What strikes you about this artwork?
- What might Christina be thinking and feeling?
- What expression do you imagine on her face?

- What do you think is happening in her life at this time?
- Is Christina moving toward something or someone, moving away from something or someone, or remaining relatively quiet and still? Why do you have that impression?
- Who or what might the house represent?
- What thoughts and emotions are evoked for you as you look at the painting?
- In what ways do you connect with in this artwork?
- When have you been in Christina's position—literally or figuratively?
- What might God be calling you to embrace or release at this stage in your journey?
- What gifts from God might you ask for in order to receive the freedom to embrace or release?

Write a prayer, poem, or letter to God about your world of embracing and releasing. Then write a poem, prayer, or letter to God about your world of transitions.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Time Line

Supplies:

- piece of paper at least 18" long, perhaps from roll of freezer paper, brown wrapping paper, or mural paper
- art supplies such as: markers, paints, pastels, pencil crayons, sticky notes, construction paper, glue stick, scissors

Throughout our lives, we experience both challenges and joys. While we don't always choose what comes into our lives, we choose how we will respond, and that makes all the difference. In every experience we can find hope in God's faithful love, grace, and mercy. Create a time line to illustrate your lifelong journey of challenges and joys. Draw a straight line, and divide the line into segments to represent years. As you think of events in your life, put the challenges below the main line and the joys above the main line. Connect these events to the main line with curved, straight, or jagged lines. Consider using different colors for the joys and the challenges. Use art supplies that you enjoy. Then consider your time line, reflecting on these questions:

- Where you have found blessing in both the challenges and the joys of life?
- What unexpected gifts of renewal and hope have you found in the difficult valleys?
- Where have challenges opened space for something new in your life?

Thank God for God's loving and faithful journeying presence with you through all the joys and challenges of life.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Go with a Blessing

Supplies:

- hymn: "Go, My Children, with My Blessing" Jaroslav J. Vajda (tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos), <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/gomychild.htm>

Each day is a fresh invitation to let go of our cares and turn our attention to God's blessings. In both the joys and difficulties of life, we are God's cherished and loved children. This knowledge grounds us and gives us hope as we continue on. Listen to the hymn "Go, My Children, with My Blessing" and read the lyrics. Listen to this hymn a second time, receiving it as God's blessing and promise to you. Choose one phrase in the hymn that encourages you. Repeat it throughout your day as a reminder that you are blessed by God.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 I Will Pray for You

Supplies:

- Bible
- index cards or sticky notes

As followers of Christ we offer gifts of blessing to one another through our words and actions. Ephesians 3:14–20 is a prayer of blessing. Just as Paul prayed for the churches that he served and to which he wrote, we, too, pray for those whom we serve and interact at work and in our communal life. We invite God's loving presence to be with others. Read Ephesians 3:14–20. Choose one phrase such as "I pray that . . . Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (vv. 16, 17) or "I pray that you . . . may be filled with all the fullness of God" (vv. 18, 19). Copy this phrase onto an index card or sticky note. Post it in a place where you will see it often, perhaps by your computer screen at work or on the refrigerator at home. Pray these words for those who come to mind as you go about your day. Consider giving the card or sticky note to a colleague, friend, your boss, the cleaning person, or a neighbor. How might you be changed as you pray for others? How might they be changed?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Learning from Others

Supplies: None

Everyone has a sacred story to tell of blessing and letting go. Set aside 15–20 minutes to get together with one or two people at work, in your neighborhood, or in your faith community over coffee or tea. Invite them to tell you about their journey of blessing and/or letting go. If they are comfortable doing so, ask them to talk about a time of embracing or releasing in their life.

- What did they let go?
- What enabled them to let go?
- What did they embrace?
- What enabled them to embrace something new?
- How did this releasing open space for something new to emerge in their lives?
- What blessings have they found in both the challenges and joys of life?
- What can you learn from them to strengthen you on your journey?



Sending & Serving Activity

9 Being Attentive

Supplies:

- notepaper, pen
- items for a homemade gift basket

As we work and go about our daily activities, sometimes we become wrapped up in our own lives and oblivious to the lives of others. Take time to be attentive to what is happening to those around you. What are the needs of others in your midst, at work or in the neighborhood? What are others letting go of in their lives? Is there someone who is sick or going through loss? What are the blessings in which others are rejoicing? Is there someone celebrating an important milestone or event? Ask God to bring someone to mind. Create a homemade gift basket specifically suited for this person, and write a personal note of encouragement. Deliver the gift as an act of blessing.

Reflect

What new insights you have gained about blessing and letting go through these activities? Which activities drew you deeper into your relationship with God? Rest in God's love and grace that accompanies you on your ongoing journey of living anew.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

As we go about our daily lives, we look to scripture to help us make sense of life. We find ourselves in the stories of God's people, and their stories become our stories. Every day, whether at home or work or play, we have opportunities to let go and move on to new ways of living. In so doing, we discover God's rich gift of blessing. The activities that follow encourage us to explore ways to live as people of God, guided by sacred story.

About this Exploration

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

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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

1 Saying Goodbye

Supplies:

- Bible
- smooth stones
- permanent markers

Read about the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:1–8. The Hebrew people say goodbye to their leader and mourn his death. We, too, say goodbye to loved ones. Rituals help us say goodbye. Invite members of your household to recall times when loved ones or pets died. In some cultures stones are used to build memorials as a way of saying goodbye to loved ones. Invite each person to write the name of a loved one or pet on a stone, using permanent marker. People might want to make more than one stone. Take turns placing the stones on a pile, perhaps sharing a fond memory about the person or pet named on each stone as it is placed. Offer a prayer of thanks for God’s healing comfort and peace in times of saying goodbye.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Promise of New Life

Supplies:

- song: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- Bible
- seeds or bulbs, potting soil, pot, water

Read the story of the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:1–12) from a favorite Bible. The people mourned for Moses’ passing, but they continued on their journey in the hope of the land of God’s promise. In the life of a family or household, each individual also experiences losses. Christ’s resurrection gives hope in such times. Death is not an end, but a beginning.

Listen to the song “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Reflect on the way seeds or bulbs “let go” in order to become plants or flowers. Recall times of loss and times of hopefulness in your life. Then plant a bulb or seeds as testimony to the promise that new life emerges from what seems to be dead.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Free to Love and Pray

Supplies:

- yarn or ribbon
- scissors
- Bible
- colorful beads

Sometimes we allow anger or hurt to take over our lives, tying us up inside. Gather the members of your household. Using yarn or ribbon, loosely tie each person's wrists together. Then challenge each person to perform a simple task such as tying a shoelace or writing his or her name on a piece of paper. Together, talk about what it is like to perform a task when your wrists are bound together.

Imagine the bindings on your wrists as grudges or hurts you have experienced. Talk about how refusing to ask for forgiveness or to offer it can bind spirits and bodies. Invite each person to quietly recall times when anger or hurt became binding. Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48, noting how Jesus invites his followers to live a new way by letting go: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (v. 44). Untie your wrists and invite everyone to make a prayer bracelet from their yarn or ribbon. Add beautiful beads as a reminder of people they will love and pray for, rather than holding a grudge against them.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

Living Fully

Supplies:

- stone or other small item to carry in your pocket

To live fully is to bless and be blessed. We bless others with loving words and actions. Mother Teresa said, "Let there be kindness in your face, in your eyes, in your smile, in the warmth of your greeting. Always have a cheerful smile. Don't only give your care, but give your heart as well."

(<http://www.bevscountrycottage.com/mother-teresa.html>)

Each day we have many opportunities to bless others and be blessed. Something as simple as a smile can be a blessing. When we take the time to greet others with a word of encouragement, we are offering a blessing. Carry a stone or another small item in your pocket today. Each time you reach into pocket, remember you are both blessed and called to be a blessing. Let the stone remind you to live fully in God's blessing.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

Loving All Creation

Supplies:

- artwork: "St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds" by Giotto di Bondone, <http://www.art.com/products/p11724653-sa-i1350212/giotto-di-bondone-st-francis-of-assisi-preaching-to-the-birds.htm?sorig=cat&origid=0&dimvals=0&ui=b2c89647ba56409d894161743bb14f5d&searchstring=st.+francis+feeding+the+birds>
- website: Wikipedia article on St. Francis, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi
- sticky notes or strips of paper and sticky tack

St. Francis of Assisi sought to embody Jesus' words of love in Matthew 5:43–48. When he was a young man, he left his wealthy family and began preaching to those who were poor. He showed love and compassion to everyone, especially to animals. Study the painting of St. Francis preaching to the birds. What do you think Francis let go of in order to pursue his calling from God? In what ways do you think Francis's life was blessed? Use sticky notes or strips of paper to record your thoughts and attach them to the artwork. Hang this artwork where it can inspire you to embrace a life of love and grace to all creation.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Opening the Door

Supplies: None

In the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5–7, Jesus called his disciples to let go of old understandings and embrace a way of life filled with love and grace. Letting go of such burdens can open the door to something new. Challenge yourself to try something new in the coming week. Think of one new venture you will undertake. It might be a new activity that stretches you beyond your comfort zone. It might be a new relationship to pursue. It might be a new mindset to embrace. What do you have to let go of in order to make room for this new activity? What courage do you need? What blessing and freedom might be yours? What is your prayer as you begin? You may wish to wear a ring on a different finger or your watch on the other wrist as a reminder of your commitment to pursue this new venture.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 In "Havruta"

Supplies:

- information about "havruta," http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Torah_Study/How_to_Study_Torah/Havruta_Learning_in_Pairs_.shtml
- "Saying Goodbye to Moses," Attachment: Activity 7
- Bible

There are many ways to study scripture. Sometimes we read it on our own to gain insight and direction. Sometimes we read it with others for encouragement and support. *Havruta* is a Hebrew word meaning "fellowship." *Havruta* comes from the word "haver," meaning friend. Jewish people today regularly study the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) in "havruta." Invite a neighbor, friend, or coworker to meet with you for 15–20 minutes. Read Deuteronomy 34:1–8 from your favorite Bible. Use the reflection questions on the attachment, and put yourselves in the shoes of Moses, the Hebrew people, and Joshua as you discuss the questions. Think about the blessings that come as you study scripture in "havruta."

Discerning & Deciding Activity

⑧ Remembering and Honoring Losses

Supplies:

- Bible
- tree, flowers, gift of money, or art supplies

To learn to live again after loss entails remembering. Read Deuteronomy 34:1–8 from your favorite Bible. Consider how the Hebrew people spent thirty days remembering and mourning the loss of their leader, Moses. Remembering is an important process. It is also a form of being blessed. Loss affects our whole selves—mind, heart, body, and soul. If you have lost someone close to you in the past year, think of something you can do to honor that person. Perhaps you could plant a tree or flower, write a poem, paint a picture, donate to a charity, or put a flower on this person’s grave. Think about those in your faith community, neighborhood, or workplace who have experienced a significant loss. If you know someone who is grieving, reach out to that person today with a kind word or helpful gesture.

Sending & Serving Activity

⑨ A Blessing of Peace

Supplies:

- song: “Shalom Chaverim,” traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; [music video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnnc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnnc)
- website: Wikipedia article about “shalom,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shalom>

Set aside time to listen to the traditional Israeli song “Shalom Chaverim.” The word *shalom* is a Hebrew word rich in meaning; it connotes peace, completeness, wholeness, and well-being. You can read more about this concept on Wikipedia. As you listen to this song, sing along, offering your words as a blessing of peace upon others—those closest to you in your family, coworkers, neighbors, those in your community, and those in the world in need of God’s shalom.

Reflect

In what ways has scripture encompassed you in times of blessing and times of letting go? Which sections of scripture speak to you most powerfully in such times? Place your palms upward and receive these words of blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

Attachment: Activity 7

Saying Goodbye to Moses

Deuteronomy 34:1-4

Reflect

Moses had led the Hebrew people through the wilderness for 40 years. Moses is reaching the end of his life. It is time for Moses to let go and pass the baton of leader on to someone else. He sees the land with his eyes but realizes he will not reach it.

Put yourself in Moses' shoes.

1. What might you be feeling and thinking?
2. What would be the hardest thing about letting go?

Deuteronomy 34:5-8

Reflect

The Hebrew people depended upon Moses to lead them for 40 years. Even though they complained and grumbled, Moses was their leader. Now, just as they are about to move into a new land, Moses dies.

Put yourself in the shoes of the Hebrew people.

1. What might you be feeling and thinking?
2. How do you say goodbye to Moses?

Deuteronomy 34: 9-12

Reflect

God calls Joshua to become the new leader. Joshua had learned from Moses what it meant to lead the people.

Put yourself in Joshua's shoes.

1. What might you be feeling and thinking?
2. How might you be blessed in your new role as leader?

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

From the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night, we are learning more about what it means to follow Jesus. This affects the way we live together at God's people in the body of Christ. When we are forgiving and let go of grudges, we follow Christ's example. When we bring blessing to others through kind words and actions, we live as followers of Christ. When we replace fruitless responses like anxiousness and worry with gratitude and thanksgiving, we live Jesus' teachings. The following activities invite us to explore what it means to live like Jesus in our homes, in our personal lives, and in our communities and places of work as we bless and let go.

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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① We Are Blessed

Supplies:

- Bible
- small pieces of paper, pens or pencils
- empty, clean jar
- self-adhesive label
- art supplies, such as ribbon, stickers, glitter glue

Read Colossians 3:12–17 from your favorite Bible. What does it say about the value of living in a spirit of thankfulness? As a household, create a “Blessings Jar.” Invite household members to recall the blessings they enjoy—what are they thankful for? Invite each person to think of things for which he or she is thankful, writing or drawing each blessing on a separate piece of paper. Fold each paper in half and place it in a jar. Print “Our Blessings Jar” on a self-adhesive label and stick it on the outside of the jar. Decorate the jar with art materials, such as ribbon, stickers, and/or glitter glue. When you sit down to share a meal together, draw a paper from the jar and, together, give thanks for the blessing named.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Straight Paths

Supplies:

- Bible
- rope, about 12’
- open space, preferably outdoors

Christians are on a lifelong journey of becoming disciples. We are called to trust God’s ways. As a family or household, gather in an open space. Toss the rope into the air, allowing it to fall where it may. Take turns walking on the rope, placing one foot ahead of the other. After everyone has had a turn, straighten the rope and walk on it again. What is the difference between walking on the winding rope and walking on the straight rope? Read Proverbs 3:6. How do you understand the promise of these words? Take turns walking on the straight rope as you say Proverbs 3:6. Create a rhythm as you walk.

After each person has a turn, reflect together: What does it mean to trust God wholeheartedly? What helps us stay on God’s paths? Then invite each person to take a hold of the rope. Form a circle and pray for one another that you might have strength and courage to walk in God’s ways.

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Sing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Supplies:

- hymnals or other songbooks
- Bible
- (optional) musical instruments or computer with Internet access

Music is part of all major religious traditions. Saint Augustine is said to have remarked, “When we sing, we pray twice.” Singing invites expression of many human emotions from joy to sadness. It enlivens the human spirit. It is a universal language for all ages. Read Colossians 3:16. How do you understand the purpose of the instructions given in this verse? Gather together as a family or household to sing. Invite each person to choose a favorite song from a hymnal or another songbook. You could also do an Internet search for your favorite hymn. A sight such as Cyberhymnal (<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/>) has lyrics as well as tunes. Sing each song together, pausing between each one to talk about why it is meaningful to you. If you are up for a challenge, accompany your singing with musical instruments. You might even made a video of your singing to post on YouTube.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ Forgive One Another

Supplies:

- Bible
- washable marker
- bowl of water
- paper towels

Read Colossians 3:13 from your favorite Bible. How do you understand these instructions? Recall Jesus’ appeal to forgive others. Consider whom you need to forgive. What pain are you hanging onto? What do you need to let go of or release in order for this to happen?

On a paper towel, use a washable marker to write a word or draw a symbol about this situation. Then float the paper towel in a bowl of water. Watch as the water washes away the marker. As the water washes away the marker, pray for God’s healing grace to wash away your pain and give you strength to forgive. Receive God’s peace-filled gift of freedom and forgiveness as you release the one who has injured you.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

⑤ Release and Trust

Supplies:

- Bible
- soap bubble solution and bubble wand

Sometimes it is a challenge to accept transitions in life. For example, when children move out on their own, parents and other caregivers may have a hard time letting them go. When a loved one dies, it's difficult to accept the changes in your life. When you lose a job, sometimes it's hard to adjust. Read Proverbs 3:5 from your favorite Bible. To what extent do these words offer you a way through times of transition? We can entrust one another into God's care; we can relinquish the desire to be in control. As disciples, we are invited to let go of our own understanding and place our trust in God—a huge step of faith! Our lives as God's children are found in a life of trust.

Take a quiet moment to think about your life right now. What or whom do you want to release into God's care? Blow soap bubbles, and imagine each bubble is someone or something you are relinquishing into God's care. After you blow each bubble, breathe in God's peace that embraces and blesses you as you let go.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Jesus, Walk with Me

Supplies:

- Bible
- music video: "I Want Jesus To (Go) Walk with Me," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5IP_se01-c&feature=related

Every day is a full of promise because Jesus shares the journey with us. Some segments of the journey are long and difficult, others are short and joyful. Read Proverbs 3:5–6 from your favorite Bible. What assurances do these verses offer for your journey?

Listen to the African American spiritual "I Want Jesus To (Go) Walk With Me" at the link given above. Listen again, praying for God's guidance in your life, through Jesus Christ.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Trust in God's Ways

Supplies:

- candle and lighter
- Bible
- (optional) paper, pen, highlighter markers

"Lectio divina" is a Latin phrase that means a divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading. It is an ancient way of praying with scripture. Many have found that lectio divina helps them deepen their relationship with God. Plan for a 15-minute break in your day. Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit, away from distractions. You may wish to light a candle to welcome the light of God's Spirit. Read Proverbs 3:5–9 from your Bible. Read the passage slowly three times. After each reading, pause for about three minutes to contemplate the questions in the list below. You may wish to write your responses or use highlighter markers to underline key words or phrases in your Bible.

1. After the first reading: What word or phrase speaks to you?
2. After the second reading: What is a word of challenge to you?
3. After the third reading: What is a word of hope and promise to you?

As you return to the responsibilities of your day, carry a word of hope and promise with you.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



8 Forgiving One Another

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>
- (optional) paper, pen or pencil

Jesus shows us how to love and to forgive just as we are forgiven. Take a break from your daily routine of work and study. Sit quietly with the artwork “Forgiveness.” What do you notice about this picture? Study the body positions of each person. What do these postures communicate? Imagine yourself as each of these figures. Place yourself in each position.

- How does it feel to be ask someone for forgiveness?
- What are you called to let go of in order for forgiveness to come?
- How does it feel to forgive someone who has offended you?
- With which figure do you connect most at this point in your journey?

Then think about those with whom you work, worship, live and play. What words of apology might you offer to someone? What words of forgiveness? Choose an appropriate way to respond, such as journaling, sketching, writing a letter, making a phone call, sending an e-mail, or meeting with someone.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Mystery Meal

Supplies:

- Bible
- hospitable space
- food for a main course, beverages, table service

Read Colossians 3:12–17 from your favorite Bible. What do you learn from these verses about living together as God’s people? Imagine these words as a “recipe for living,” calling for the ingredients of gentleness, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, gratitude, and thankfulness.

Invite a group of friends or coworkers to gather at your home for a mystery meal. Ask each one to bring a favorite salad or dessert. Provide the main course, beverages, and table service. As you host the gathering, think about how you can show gentleness, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, gratitude, and thankfulness to each person gathered. Pray God’s blessing upon them as they leave after the meal.

Reflect

Sit quietly and ponder how this Exploration helped you follow Christ’s example in blessing and letting go. Then hear these words of blessing to you: “God loves you and has chosen you as God’s own special child” (based on Colossians 3:12).

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Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

One of the first places we experience the gift of traditions and rituals is at home. In our daily living, traditions help us feel secure through times of change and transition. Traditions help us celebrate the joys in life, as well as the sorrows. Sometimes we have to let go of long held traditions in order to move into the fullness of God's love. The activities that follow explore what it means to bless and let go in the context of Christian traditions.

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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Mealtime Prayers

Supplies:

- “Mealtime Prayers,” Attachment: Activity 1
- 4” × 6” index cards or pieces of cardboard
- pen or markers
- (optional) glue stick, scissors, basket
- (optional) book: *Blessed Be Our Table: Graces for Mealtimes and Reflections on Food* by Neil Paynter (Glasgow, UK: Wild Goose Publications, The Iona Community, 2003)

Some of the first prayers we learn to say as children are mealtime and bedtime prayers. These prayers give meaning and ritual to our lives. Many different faith traditions encourage the practice of saying a mealtime blessing, sometimes called a grace or a table prayer. As a family or household, recall favorite mealtime blessings you have learned over the years. Work together to create a new prayer for mealtime. Read the blessings on the attachment for ideas. Remember blessings can be said before or after meals. Print each new blessing on an index card or piece of cardboard. Fold it in half so it stands up. Make a card to place by each place at the table, and pray this prayer together at mealtime. As an option, cut out each mealtime prayer from the attachment and glue it to an index card. Put the cards in a basket and draw one prayer to use each time you sit down for a meal together.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Bless and Praise God

Supplies:

- Bible
- art supplies, such as construction paper, scissors, tape, fabric scraps, markers, crayons, paint, modeling clay

As we read and reflect upon scripture, we discover how ancient words speak to our daily lives. As a family or household, read Psalm 148 from the Bible. Talk about the psalm. Who is called to praise and bless our Creator? In what ways are we blessed by God? Then invite each person to choose one part of creation named in Psalm 148 and portray it using art supplies. For example, one person might wish to create a sea monster (v. 7) using construction paper or modeling clay. When all the creations are completed, read Psalm 148 again, holding up the created items as they are named. Have everyone join in speaking the words “Praise the Lord!”

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Recycled Blessings

Supplies:

- greeting cards you've received
- basket

Throughout the course of a year, most people receive a variety of greeting cards. It is a common tradition to send cards to acknowledge various life transitions and celebrations including birthdays, illness, death of a loved one, anniversaries, births, new jobs, graduations, retirements, Christmas and other holidays, and so on. Gather greeting cards that you and members of your household have received. Place them in a basket and set them on the table where you gather for meals. When you eat a meal, choose a card from the basket and pray a prayer of blessing upon the person(s) who sent the card. Consider making this a “new tradition” by recycling old greeting cards into prayers of blessing.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ Praise God in All Things

Supplies:

- outdoor space
- Bible

Since the beginning of time, all creation has expressed worship to our Creator God. In worship and praise, we remember what God has done in the past, how God is with us in the present, and look forward to what God will do in the future. Worship is particularly important during times of joy and sorrow, for worship turns our focus to God. Psalm 148 is a hymn of praise calling every part of creation to praise God. It includes all aspects of creation from productive fruit trees and tame animals to destructive elements such as fire, hail, wind, and storm. Find a quiet spot to sit outdoors, and read Psalm 148 from your favorite Bible. Think about the power of praise in the midst of the joys and sorrows in your life right now. With the psalmist, add your voice of praise to the song of creation around you.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

⑤ Traditions Reshaped

Supplies:

- Bible
- pipe cleaners

Read the story of Peter's vision in Acts 10:1–48. Peter's certainties were founded on scripture and tradition. After his vision, Peter gains a new appreciation for God's presence in the old ways of eating and living. Peter's vision of church as being a group composed only of Jews is reshaped into a wider vision that in-

cludes Gentile believers. God continues to reshape our certainties. Sometimes we have to let go of long-held traditions or ways of understanding scripture in order to live more fully as God's people. Create a symbol from pipe cleaners to represent tradition or scripture. Then reshape this symbol into a new symbol to reflect God's love for all people.

Sending & Serving Activity



6 Baptism as Blessing

Supplies:

- artwork "Baptism of Jesus" by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- Bible
- bowl of water

Baptism is a sacrament, a sign of God's blessing. Sit and study "Baptism of Jesus" by Pheoris West. What words and actions of blessing does this picture bring to your mind? Is there anything you have to let go of in order to appreciate this image? If so, what is it?

Read the story of Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:9–11. Consider the powerful blessing of the words in verse 11. As you think about Jesus' baptism, recall your baptism and feel the power of God's blessing for you. Dip your fingers in some water to remember your baptism. Receive God's blessing: "You are my child, chosen and cherished, delight of my life." Hold this blessing with you.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Luchtime Examen

Supplies:

- (optional) journal, pen

St. Ignatius of Loyola developed "The Prayer of Examen" as a way to prayerfully reflect upon the events of one's day. The examen is an ancient Christian practice that can help people today see God's presence in their daily lives. Although the prayer of examen is often used at the end of the day, it can be done anytime. Whether you are at work or at home, set aside 15–20 minutes midday. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit where you will not be distracted. Follow the process described below. If you like, record your thoughts and feelings in a journal as you move through the steps.

1. Ask God for grace to see what you need to see. Invite God's Spirit to lead you.
2. Give thanks. Imagine God's blessings streaming down upon you like the rays of the sun.
3. Review your day thus far. In God's light and love, look back upon the hours just completed.



4. Face your shortcomings. Recall what didn't go well and ask God for forgiveness. Let go of what is wrong in your life and in you.
5. Look toward the hours to come. What is one thing you can do to love others? Where do you need God in the hours to come? What else might God want to say to you?

End your time with the Lord's Prayer. Carry God's loving presence with you into the rest of your day.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 God's Love Includes All

Supplies:

- Bible
- public area, such as a shopping mall or coffee shop

There are moments when our vision of faith is expanded. Read Acts 10:34–36. What is Peter's new insight into living as the community of God's people? How would you restate verse 35 in your own words? Take a break from your regular daily activities and go to a public place such as a coffee shop, mall, or park. Sit and quietly observe people for 15–20 minutes. Pay attention to the diversity in God's creation. Be aware of your own bias and partiality. Invite God to expand your vision of God's inclusive love. Ponder:

- How do I treat others, especially those people I do not know or people who make me feel uncomfortable?
- How might I grow in my willingness to accept others as they are, without trying to make them become like me?
- Where do I see the hand of God at work in each person?
- In what ways am I blessed by these people?

As Saint Benedict said, "Let everyone be received as Christ."

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Overlooked Transitions

Supplies:

- ingredients for the food you choose to make

Some transitions in life are commonly recognized through tradition and ritual. For example, a gift of food is often delivered when a neighbor or coworker is having a baby, is moving, has been hospitalized, or has experienced the death of a loved one. There are other life transitions, however, that often are overlooked, such as divorce, job loss, child leaving home, or entering military service. In some of these situations, people do not know how to respond, so they do nothing.

Identify some of the times of transition that are not commonly recognized by people in your community. Think of a person in your neighborhood, church, or place of work who may be going through one of these significant changes. Make



a gift of food such as a pie, casserole, or pot of soup and deliver it to him or her. Include a note of encouragement and care. Or contact the person and make plans to get together for coffee and conversation.

Reflect

What new insights are you making about blessing and letting go as you reflect upon traditions in your daily life? What traditions do you need to let go of to move forward in your faith journey? What traditions might you embrace? What new traditions might you create to help you live fully and freely as a child of God? Receive these words of blessing: “You are my child, chosen and cherished, delight of my life” (based on Matthew 3:17).

Mealtime Prayers

God is great and God is good,
And we thank God for our food;
By God's hand we all are fed,
Give us Lord, our daily bread. Amen.

Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat.
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you, God, for everything. Amen.

For health and strength and daily bread,
We give you thanks, O God! Amen.

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.
Let this food to us be blessed.
May there be a goodly share
On every table everywhere. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Friend of sinners, we thank you for friendship,
Prince of peace, we ask you that we may be
peacemakers.
Lord of all, we thank you for this food.
Bless it to our bodies, we pray. Amen.

Bless, O Lord, this food for our bodies,
And make us ever mindful of the needs of others.
Amen.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

God has called and gifted each one of us in unique ways to continue the mission of Christ. We carry out the ministry of Christ in our homes, at school, in our neighborhoods, at work, and in our world. Sometimes God calls us to step out into the unknown. As God pours material and spiritual blessings upon us, we are called to use these blessings to serve others. In serving, we both give and receive additional blessings. The activities that follow invite us to say “yes” to God’s mission wherever we find ourselves in daily life.

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 our former ways and our focus on material goods, 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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① Going on a Journey

Supplies:

- Bible or children’s story Bible
- backpack

Read the story of God calling Abram and Sarai (Genesis 12:1–5) from your Bible or a children’s story Bible. Like Abram and Sarai, God calls us to begin new adventures no matter how young or old we might be. At every age, we embark upon journeys, some long and arduous and others brief and joyful. Find an occasion when you are gathered together as a family or household, perhaps after a meal. Invite everyone to imagine they are moving to a new country: What would you take, and what would you leave behind?

Play a game of “I’m going on a journey, and I’m taking . . .” Each person holds the backpack, repeats what the previous person said, and then adds his or her own item. After a couple rounds of this, change the game, using the sentence “I’m going on a journey, and I’m leaving . . .”

After the game discuss these questions together.

- What is most important in life?
- What helps you stay close to God in new ventures?
- What might you need to let go of in order to live in God’s ways?
- What gives you hope?
- What brings you a deep sense of blessing?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② What Is Our Mission?

Supplies:

- Bible
- maps (local and global)
- computer with Internet access

Read the account of Paul’s journey in Romans 15:22–29. Paul delivers material blessings to the needy in Jerusalem on behalf of God’s followers in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul recounts how the Jews shared spiritual blessings with the Gentiles. We, too, carry out God’s mission by sharing material and spiritual blessings with others. Spiritual blessings might include praying, encouraging others in the faith, and being a Christ-like example.

As a family or household, learn about mission opportunities in your community, church, and world. You may wish to use the Internet to access your denominational website or the website of a Christian relief organization such as Church World Service. Locate on maps the places where this work occurs. Decide on a mission project you will do as a family or household. You might set aside a certain day once a week or once a month as your “mission day.” Possibilities could

include: serving a meal at a homeless shelter, volunteering at a humane society, visiting nursing home residents, working at a food pantry, cleaning up litter, or other service and mission projects that are led by your church. Each time you serve, take a moment to consider what you learn about your neighbor, about God, and about yourself as you serve.

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Clean Out the Clutter

Supplies:

- empty boxes or bags

Most human beings do not find it easy to let go of material things, of traditions, of relationships. When we let go of something, it opens up space for something new to emerge in our lives. The practice of letting go of things we don't need can bring great freedom. Sometimes letting go is intentional and positive, with a goal of a new purpose. Encourage everyone in your household or family to fill a box or bag with things they no longer need. Decide together what you will do with these articles. Reflect together on these questions:

- What do we experience when we let go of material possessions?
- What blessing comes in letting go of things?
- What is the hardest thing about letting go?
- How do we decide what to give up and what to keep?
- What new freedom or opportunity emerges as we let go?
- How does letting go of possessions move us along in our faith journeys?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

④ Call to Action

Supplies:

- outdoor location
- 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
- paper, pen

From Abram and Sarai to the apostle Paul to each one of us, God calls us to move beyond our comfort zones as we continue the ministry of Christ. As we obey God's call to action in our daily lives, we both give and receive blessings. If possible, find a place to sit outdoors. Become aware of the wind around you. Imagine it is God's Spirit surrounding you. Then study "Sisters in the Wind" by Ethan Hubbard. Ask yourself the following questions.

- What strikes you about this artwork?
- What do you notice about the two children?
- What might they be looking at?
- Notice the position of the girls' hands. What might their gestures mean?

- What might they be leaving behind, and what might they be moving toward?
- What kind of journey might they be on?
- How might they be a blessing to others?

Imagine you are one of these children. Write a letter to God in response to God's call to action in your life.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Going Boldly

Supplies:

- Bible
- Sand
- tray or container
- small pebbles or stones
- gold glitter

We journey with ancestors of faith like Abram and Sarai, who boldly set forth into the unknown. Read Genesis 12:1–5. Imagine the journey God called Abram and Sarai to begin. Leaving behind the familiarity of home, they hung onto God's promise of blessing. Pour sand into a tray. Use your finger to imagine the journey of Abram and Sarai. Imagine their thoughts and feelings. What obstacles might they have encountered?

Place stones along the path as you imagine their fears and challenges. Then smooth the sand with your hand and gather the stones. Now move your finger through the sand again, this time imagining your own life's journey. Listen to God's voice. Where might God be calling you? What are your thoughts and feelings? What do you need to let go of in order to follow this calling?

Place stones along the path as you name fears and obstacles you face. Now consider the ways God desires to bless you and make you a blessing. Sprinkle gold glitter over the sand to represent God's blessings and promises to you.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Journey into the Unknown

Supplies:

- mode of transportation

Read or recall the story of God calling Abram and Sarai to leave their home and go where God would show them (Genesis 12:1–5). Consider the words of God's blessing to them in verse 2. Take a 15–20 minute "unknown journey" by foot, bike, bus, or car. Choose a route you do not regularly travel. Or you may decide to have no destination in mind; rather, simply venture off into a new territory and see where your journey takes you. As you travel, think about the challenges of venturing into the unknown. What are the risks of stepping out in faith? What gives you courage and confidence? How is God with you in new adventures? What blessings might come to you? How might you be a blessing to others?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Letting Go

Supplies:

- materials needed for the project you choose

The journey of becoming free is sometimes a long and arduous one. It can be marked by choices to serve and to sacrifice, to love as Christ loves us. However spiritually satisfying, these are never easy choices. When we let go of habits and comforts that threaten to impede our journey of discipleship, and to which we cling, we are freed to go forth as recipients and givers of blessing. One choice we can make is to live more simply. When we let go of material possessions, we are better able to focus on spiritual blessings.

Organize a garage sale with your neighbors, coworkers, or faith community. Decide on a date and location for your sale. Choose a charity to receive the money you raise. As you work at the sale, think about how letting go of stuff makes it easier to hang on to God.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Blessing Walk

Supplies:

- comfortable shoes
- Bible

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. Read Romans 15:22–29 and recall Paul's work as a missionary. He was a blessing to those in need by sharing material resources. Take a break from your regular daily routine of work or study. Go for a 15–20 minute "blessing walk." Invite God's Spirit to open your eyes to see the needs of those around you.

- To whom might you offer a blessing in word or in deed?
- What material items might you offer?
- How might you be a spiritual blessing to someone?
- How can you be a "giver of blessings" to others?
- What might you have to let go of in order to be free to give to and receive from others?

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Serving Others

Supplies:

- materials needed for the project you choose

Mahatma Gandhi said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Service and mission to others give a sense of meaning and purpose to life. Often we receive far more than we give when we serve others. Service opens our eyes to the challenging realities of life that many experience.

Choose a service project to be part of in your community. Invite others to join you, if you like. Project ideas include: being a school volunteer, picking up garbage, planting trees, serving in a soup kitchen, stocking shelves at a food bank, visiting those who are homebound, assembling relief kits, and so on. As you are serving, pray God’s blessing upon the individuals who will be affected by your serving. Receive the blessing that others offer you as you serve.

Reflect

When you say “yes” to the many ways that God leads you into mission, know that God’s blessing and promise go with you.

Blessing and Letting Go



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Thinking about the future can be both exciting and scary. While we don't know what lies ahead, we know God's faithfulness will be there for us no matter what we face. The future belongs to God. As individuals, families, and households, we wait in hopeful expectation as the promises of God's blessings unfold. The activities that follow invite us to experience God's grace and mercy as we move into 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 communities to the blessings for the journey when we are willing to let go.



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

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

① Dreams for the Future

Supplies:

- Bible
- large piece of paper, markers, glue, scissors
- magazines to cut apart

Families and households make plans for their future. People who share a close relationship also share dreams about their hopes for life. Dreams give hope, especially during difficult times. Read Jeremiah 29:1–14 from your Bible. This is the vision of the prophet Jeremiah for the Israelites living in exile. During their time of despair, God called Jeremiah to encourage them with these words. What promise do you perceive in Jeremiah’s words?

As a family or household, talk about the future God has in store for you. What are your hopes and dreams? Work together to create a banner—using words, pictures, or both—and title the banner “Our Dreams for the Future.” As you are working, discuss your thoughts about this question: What might we need to release and what might we need to embrace for these dreams to come true?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Time Capsule

Supplies:

- airtight plastic or metal container and lid
- whatever you choose to put in your time capsule

As we journey into the future, we know it will bring changes, including both joys and sorrows. When we look back on our past, we can see our faithful God at work, giving us courage for the future. We can perceive the ways we have been blessed. As a family or household, create a time capsule. A time capsule is like a treasure box that preserves a piece of your family’s past as you move into the future.

Choose a container to hold your precious artifacts. It should provide a dry environment and have a tight-fitting lid. A kitchen food storage container or metal cookie or popcorn tin will work well. The key to a meaningful time capsule is to make it personal, relevant, and interesting. Topics of interest such as fashion trends and fads, popular movies, books and toys can be cut from newspapers or magazines. Include a CD of favorite songs. Objects of everyday life such as coins, postage stamps, and a grocery receipt showing the price of milk or bread are popular items to include. Family photos are also great items.

Encourage older children to add their own special objects. Paraphernalia from favorite sports or hobbies, such as ribbons won in competitions, are wonderful choices. School papers, drawings, and outlines of hands and feet will make for exciting comparisons when the capsule is opened. Younger kids can make a list of “My Favorite Things” or “Things I’m Good At.”

As a family write a “Letter to the Future” telling what your lives are like now and describing your favorite family traditions. Include your favorite Bible verses. Close the letter with a paragraph imagining what the future will hold.

It is exciting to look forward to the opening of your time capsule. Wait as long as possible to make the effect more dramatic. Even a year will seem an eternity to children. Specify the date your time capsule will be opened and who should be present when it is. Tape this information to the outside of the capsule.

Finally, find a good hiding place for your time capsule in your house, perhaps a spot in the attic, basement, or storeroom. This is preferable to burying it, because families often move or forget where it is buried!

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Blessing One Another

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Christ Among the Children” by Emil Nolde, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- (optional) scarf or shawl

Display the artwork “Christ Among the Children” by Emile Nolde. Read the story of Jesus blessing the children in Mark 10:13–16. Invite family members or household members to explain how it feels to receive a blessing: What are the kindest words of blessing you ever received? How does it feel to be blessed by another?

Bless each person in your family or household. Gather around the person being blessed and place a hand on his or her shoulder or head. As a blessing is offered, the one being blessed may wish to wear a prayer shawl or scarf. Blessings you might use include the following.

- “God be with you.”
- “Go in God’s peace and love.”
- “God loves you and will be with you.”
- “May God always provide good things for you.”
- “God bless you.”
- “God goes with you.”
- “You are a cherished child of God.”

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

4 Set Free

Supplies:

- music video: “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” by Chris Tomlin, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbe7OruLk8I>
- 1” × 6” strips of paper, stapler or tape, marker

As we think about the future, we know God's blessings go before us. Listen to the song "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" at the link above. As you listen to this song, think about what binds you and prevents you from moving into the future as God's child. All kinds of things can weigh us down like chains—material things, unhealthy thoughts and behaviors, hurts and grudges—and get in the way of living into God's intended joy and freedom. On strips of paper, name these things. Attach them with tape or stapler to form a paper chain. Offer these "chains" to God. Then form a new paper chain of God's "good promises" to you. Think of all your blessings and name these things on the strips of paper.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Feather Prayer

Supplies:

- feathers
- poem: "On Children" by Kahlil Gibran, <http://www.katsandogz.com/onchildren.html>
- hymn: "Go, My Children, with My Blessing," by Jaroslav J. Vajda (tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos), <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/gomychild.htm>

Blessing and letting go occurs in many contexts and is not always easy. The process of releasing can be a painful adventure. Perhaps one of the most difficult gifts that adults let go of is the children in their care. It is natural to try to protect, rescue, or even control their lives. Grounded in the loving presence of God, we can let go of our own agendas and prayerfully release the children in our care into God's loving care. Read the poem "On Children" by Kahlil Gibran at the link listed above, and listen to the hymn "Go, My Children, with My Blessing."

Pray for the children you love and release them into God's future. Hold a feather in the palm of your hand. Then gently blow it into the air. The feather will land where it will—you cannot control its outcome. As you do this, imagine the children in your care, or any loved one, being released into the hands of God.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Hope for the Future

Supplies:

- modeling clay, wire, or other sculpture material

As we move into the future, our resurrection faith enables us to live in hope in the midst of despair. Genuine hope is often costly and benefits from the courage of our imagination. The walk of discipleship is a hope-infused journey. Hope doesn't just come at the end of the journey—hope is one of the companions on the way.

In the Christian faith, there are symbols associated with hope. For example, an anchor symbolizes hope, stability, and a secure foundation. At one time in history an anchor was used to secretly identify Christians. Hebrews 6:19 talks about hope as "as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul." Another symbol of hope is a dove with an olive sprig (recalling Noah's dove in Genesis 8:11, a harbinger of hope). Use clay, wire, or other sculpture material to create your own symbol of hope. Carry it with you or place it in a prominent location in your home or office to remind you that hope is your companion.



Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Promises of Hope

Supplies:

- index card, marker, ribbon, hole punch
- helium balloon or bouquet of fresh flowers

Hope is a powerful gift for the future. The prophet Jeremiah gave the people a promise of hope when they had been filled with despair. Read Jeremiah 29:4–14 and choose one verse or phrase that inspires your imagination with hope. Copy this phrase onto an index card. Punch a hole in the card and place a ribbon through it. Tie the card to a helium balloon or bouquet of fresh flowers. Then think of someone at work or in your community whom you would like to inspire with a blessing of hope. Place the balloon or flowers on the desk of a coworker, or leave on the doorstep of a neighbor.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 My Life Flows On

Supplies:

- Bible
- hymn: “My Life Flows On” by Robert Lowry (tune: How Can I Keep from Singing), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/c/hcaikeep.htm>; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkJF3J1xGyU>

Jeremiah 29:1–14 is a letter of hope to the people of Judah who are living in exile in Babylonia. God gives Jeremiah a vision of hope and promise to share with the people: “for surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (v. 11). Even though the people are living in exile, they worship God, and God is with them.

Listen to the hymn “My Life Flows On” on the music video listed above. You may wish to follow along with the words. Listen to the song several times. As you do so, think about how your life can encourage and bless others around you at work or in your neighborhood.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 God’s Blessing

Supplies:

- Bible
- olive oil



Read Luke 2:22–38 from your Bible. What blessings are given and received by Simeon? By Anna? By Jesus? By Jesus' parents? When have you received words of blessing from another person?

To be blessed means to be favored by God. To express or offer a blessing is to give voice to the desire that the one receiving your words will experience God's favor. Think about those with whom you work or live. To whom might you offer words of blessing? Is there a coworker or neighbor who is beginning a new venture or taking a trip? Send him or her on the way with a word blessing. Make the sign of the cross on his or her hand or forehead with oil, speaking your own words of blessing or a biblical blessing, such as Numbers 6:24–26.

Reflect

As you live into the future, rest in God's mercy and grace. Life will continue to bring loss as well as joy. Know that you are held in God's eternal love and care. "May the road rise up to meet you, may the wind be ever at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face and the rain fall softly on your fields. And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of God's hand" (traditional Irish Blessing).