

# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Art

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.



- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

## About this Workshop

Sometimes words fall short of expressing our deepest hopes, dreams, fears, and questions. Art can open hearts and minds in ways that move beyond words and pull young learners into new ways of experiencing the blessings of creation. Whether as observers of art or as creators, learners in this workshop will discover how expression in color, form, and texture can bring new understandings to ancient truths and the practice of blessing and letting go.

### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Genesis 12:1–5**

**Isaiah 43:18–19**

## Leader Preparation

Center yourself by reading Isaiah 43:18–19. Leave behind what binds you, and expect God to break through the ordinary in new and miraculous ways. Anticipate with wonder the unpaved paths children always seem to find, and follow wherever God may lead you and those in your care. May you enter into these activities knowing that you move not in solitude, but with the spirit and power of Christ surrounding you. Go now in peace!

*Prayer: Creative and Creating God, open my spirit to the wonders of imagination, and guide me into the swirling spontaneity of creation. Help me break down my own*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Trash to Treasure Walk (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Locate an area outdoors where children can do this activity safely. Be aware of any allergies to latex, poison ivy, or other outdoor issues such as asthma.

#### Supplies:

- paper or plastic grocery bags
- small latex gloves or sandwich bags
- plastic or metal tray
- Bible

Gather the children and read aloud Genesis 12:1–5. God asked Abram and Sarai to leave all that was familiar to them and set off on a journey to a new place. They listened to God and did as God asked, believing that God would be with them and protect them wherever they went. God blessed Abram and Sarai and blessed all the generations that followed. We are part of that great blessing.

Invite the children go on a treasure walk to help them see ways that God has blessed all creation. Form pairs for the “trash to treasure” walk. They will take a trip, looking for “treasure trash.” Explain where they may go for this walk. Treasure trash is anything laying about that might get thrown away or are considered of little value. Treasure trash could be something from nature, scraps of paper or other objects on the ground, or anything that seems to be out of place. Explain that they are to walk quietly and not take anything that belongs to someone else. Make sure the youngest children are paired with a shepherd for safety. Add any guidelines that might be important for your particular church location.



walls of judgment and allow me to experience, once again, the sheer joy and blessing of transformation. Amen.

### Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

Give each child a glove or a sandwich bag to use as a glove, and give each pair a bag for collection. Allow about five minutes for them to collect their treasures. Gather the children again and invite them to lay out their items on the table and talk about the items and where they came from. Create a treasure centerpiece by inviting the children to work together to arrange the items on a tray. Let the centerpiece serve as a reminder of how precious we are to God, even in times when we may not feel good about ourselves, times when we feel we don’t belong, or times when we may feel like “trash.” We are always a blessing in the eyes of God, and God will always be with us no matter where we go in life.

### 2 Color Me Happy, Color Me Sad

**Leader preparation:** It is often difficult for children (and adults) to express in words how they feel. By using art instead of language, children can explore their emotions and discover new ways of voicing what they hold inside. Create a finger painting for yourself before the activity.

**Supplies:**

- protective covering for tabletop
- finger paints in primary colors
- finger-paint paper or freezer paper
- pencils
- paint smocks or shirts
- basin of water and towels for cleanup

Distribute sheets of finger-paint paper, and ask learners to fold them in half. Invite the children to think of two emotion words that are opposites, such as happy and sad, love and hate, angry and calm, hold on and let go, keep and give away. Have children choose one pair of words and use a pencil to write one of the words on each half of the paper. Ask children to think about what those emotions might look like if they were described in finger painting. Invite the children to paint one emotion first and then the opposite. Remind the children how to create additional colors through the mixing of primary colors.

After they have finished their creations, let each child have an opportunity to tell about his or her painting.

### 3 Forever Becoming

**Leader preparation:** If possible, invite someone to come and sing the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” This hymn is found in many hymnals and church songbooks.

**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](http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower); music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- card stock
- pencils
- various types of seeds and small dry beans
- white glue

Gather children and ask them to tell about some of the changes they have noticed outdoors this past week. How is nature growing and changing, unfolding into something new? Discuss:



- Think of the weather. What happens when a thunderstorm moves across the sky?
- Think of the seasons. What happens to the plants in each season?
- Think of your family. How is each person a little different than he or she was last year?

Introduce the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” Listen to it, or have someone sing it. Invite children to name the images of change they heard in this song.

Distribute card stock and pencils. Have children trace one of their hands on the cardstock. Invite the children to glue seeds and beans around the outline of their handprint. As you look at the finished creations, tell children that you hope these will help them remember that just as a seed becomes something bigger than itself, so they are becoming even more than they are today. The blessings of growth and change lay inside every living creature and those blessings are inside each one of us!

### Discerning & Deciding Activities



#### 4 Labyrinth (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Consider ways in which you are able to quiet your mind and find a place to hear God’s guiding voice. Read the information below about finger labyrinths, and print a finger labyrinth for each child.

**Supplies:**

- “Finger Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 4
- crayons, markers, stickers

Explain that life is filled with times of great joy and laughter and also struggle and tears. Jesus experienced all the emotions that we go through, but he also knew what to do when times were tough. Jesus knew how to pray. Jesus knew how to quiet himself deeply and connect with God for comfort and guidance. Wouldn’t it be great if we all had a place we could go to when life seems really hard? Actually, that place is the same place Jesus would go to because that special place is right inside us, and this is a blessing.

Distribute copies of the attachment “Finger Labyrinth.” Explain that most labyrinths are created as large circles with paths that wind through the circle almost like a maze. But, unlike a maze, in a labyrinth you never hit a dead end. The path leads to the center and back out again. A labyrinth is sometimes called a “body prayer” or walking meditation. People walk a labyrinth as a way of centering themselves.

Invite the children to use a finger to trace the pattern in the finger labyrinth. Explain that by carefully and slowly moving their finger from the entrance and then along the path until they reach the center, their concentration may quiet their mind and open their spirit to God.

One of the last places Jesus prayed was in a garden the night before he died. Invite the children to decorate the area around their finger labyrinth with images that might be found in a garden, like flowers and butterflies. Explain that they should not draw inside the labyrinth itself so that they will still be able to trace the path with their finger. As they work, maintain silence in the group.



### 5 The Broken Pot

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 43:18–19 and reflect on the significant changes that have taken place in your life.

**Supplies:**

- medium-sized terra cotta pots, 1 for every 3 children
- paper or plastic grocery bags
- pottery repair glue
- masking tape
- children’s Bible

Gather the children, and ask each to recall a time when she or he broke something. Ask:

- What did you break?
- Did you get in trouble?
- Did you try and fix it? Were you able to fix it?
- When things are fixed, are they the same, or better, or worse than they were before?

Form groups of three. Give each group a terra cotta pot and a bag. Ask groups to look at their pots closely. *Are there any cracks? How might the pots be used?*

Tell the groups to put their pot in a bag and tape the bag closed. As a group, go outdoors so groups can hold up the bags, and then drop them on the sidewalk. They are not to smash the pot, just break it into 8–10 pieces. When groups are finished, go back inside and tell participants to put their pots back together again. Explain that the glue is to hold the pot together, but the masking tape can be used to hold the pot in place while the glue dries. The children will have to work closely as a team to get this job done. The better they work together, the easier it will be.

Allow about ten minutes to repair the pots, and then invite groups to tell about the experience.

- Were you able to put the pot back together? If so, how useful will the repaired pot be?
- If you were not able to reconstruct the pot, how might the pieces be used?

Explain that life is filled with changes. Sometimes the changes are blessings, but at other times the changes may seem almost unbearable, and we feel as if we are broken. During the times of greatest change, it might be hard to see God’s blessing in our lives. But God is always there. Each change is an opportunity to grow.

Ask an older child to read aloud Isaiah 43:18–19 from a children’s Bible. Invite children to join in a cheer to thank God for always loving us and always helping us grow.



### 6 Christina’s World

**Leader preparation:** Sit with Andrew Wyeth’s “Christina’s World, 1948.” What feelings and thoughts come to you?

**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>





Show the children “Christina’s World, 1948.” Take a few quiet moments to study it. Discuss:

- What story might you tell about this picture?
- Why is this girl lying in the grass?
- What is she thinking about?
- Does this painting tell a sad or happy story? Why?

After children have responded to these questions, tell about the painting. Christina is the name of the girl in the painting. She suffered from polio, a muscular disease that made it impossible for her to walk. The artist, Andrew Wyeth, painted the picture after he saw the girl crawling across a field. The young girl refused to use a wheelchair. Ask the children how they understand the picture now that they know who Christina is. Wonder together about why she might have refused to use a wheelchair. *In what ways might Christina’s life have been blessed?*

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Random Acts of Blessing (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** A simple act of kindness has the power to produce small changes in the way a person looks at life. Perform a random act of kindness this week and observe the results without being seen. What are your feelings when watching your blessing of kindness being received?

Before children arrive, cut tissue paper into about 6” × 8” rectangles

#### Supplies:

- tissue paper in many colors
- pipe cleaners
- scissors
- clear tape
- “Flower Blessing,” Attachment: Activity 7

Invite the children to create tissue paper flowers to leave anonymously for other people to find. Demonstrate how to make a flower:

1. Stack 15 rectangles of tissue paper, using the same color or different colors.
2. Accordion pleat the paper, working from the long side. Pleats should be about 1 inch wide.
3. Wind one end of the pipe cleaner tightly around the middle of the accordion-pleated tissue paper.
4. Trim the ends of each side of the pleat as a scallop or a triangle to give the petals a unique look.
5. Gently separate each layer, pulling upward toward the middle of the flower.
6. Tape one of the blessings from the handout to the stem of the flower to remind the person that he or she is a blessing in God’s creation.

Brainstorm about where flowers could be left for people to find, such as on windshields of cars, on doorknobs, and on chairs or pews in church. Place the flowers where they will be a blessing.



## 8 One Thousand Paper Cranes

**Leader preparation:** If you do not know how to fold an origami crane, watch the videos suggested below.

Prepare to tell the story of Sadako in a way that lifts up the spirit of the young girl and the spirit of peace that has grown from her life and death.

In August 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bringing World War II to an end and killing close to 250,000 people. Many more died in the following years from the effects of the radiation, including a 12-year-old girl named Sadako. Before she died, however, Sadako began folding paper cranes from her hospital bed. She believed in a saying that if you fold a thousand cranes, you would get over your sickness. Although Sadako's paper cranes could not save her life, they did inspire the creation of the Children's Peace Movement. In the Hiroshima Peace Garden stands a bronze statue, topped with a figure of a girl holding a folded crane. At the foot of the statue are the words: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace on earth."

A video about Sadako (<http://youtu.be/yITtwO0gHIo>) is part of the Video Rotation, Activity 7, and could be used with this art activity.

### **Supplies:**

- video: "Origami Crane Instructions" (folding instructions for older children), <http://youtu.be/es-vMeZy9HA>
- video: "Origami Dove" (folding instructions for younger children), [http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/origami\\_dove.htm](http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/origami_dove.htm)
- origami paper or copier paper in different colors

Gather the children and tell the story of Sadako. (see Leader preparation above). Tell how children and adults from all over the world travel to the Children's Peace Monument each year, bringing their own folded paper cranes and as a symbol of their desire for peace.

Show the children how to fold a paper crane. At the close of the activity, invite the children to exchange their paper cranes with one another and offer a blessing of God's peace to each other. Give them additional paper to continue folding cranes at home and teaching others



## 9 Change of Heart

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on times when you have had a "change of heart." Make copies of the attachment "Heart Pattern" on red card stock, one handout (with 2 hearts) per child.

### **Supplies:**

- "Heart Pattern," Attachment: Activity 9 on red card stock
- scissors
- yarn
- candies that are somewhat flat, such as gum or flat chocolate mints
- hole punches
- crayons, markers, stickers

Hold up one red heart and invite the children to list all the things they think of when they see a heart. Ask if to tell about the phrase "change of heart."



### Reflect

Remember the words at the base of the statue in the Hiroshima Peace Garden, "This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace on earth." How do you see hope in the faces and voices of the children in your care? Celebrate that your time together nurtured the best in all present.

Invite the children to create a heart to remind them of Jesus' teaching about loving God and loving others. Demonstrate how to make the hearts:

1. Cut out the two hearts on the attachment "Heart Pattern."
2. Hold the two hearts together and punch holes around the sides, but not the top.
3. Cut an 18-inch piece of yarn.
4. Tie the yarn to the top hole on one side. Sew the two hearts together and tie the yarn in a knot at the end.
5. Decorate the heart with drawings and stickers.
6. Place candy inside the hearts.

Explain that these hearts represent the love that God places in their hearts. Suggest that the children give their hearts to someone as a blessing, a sign of friendship.





Finger Labyrinth





**Attachment: Activity 7**

**Flower Blessing**

**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.

**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.

**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.

**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.

**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.

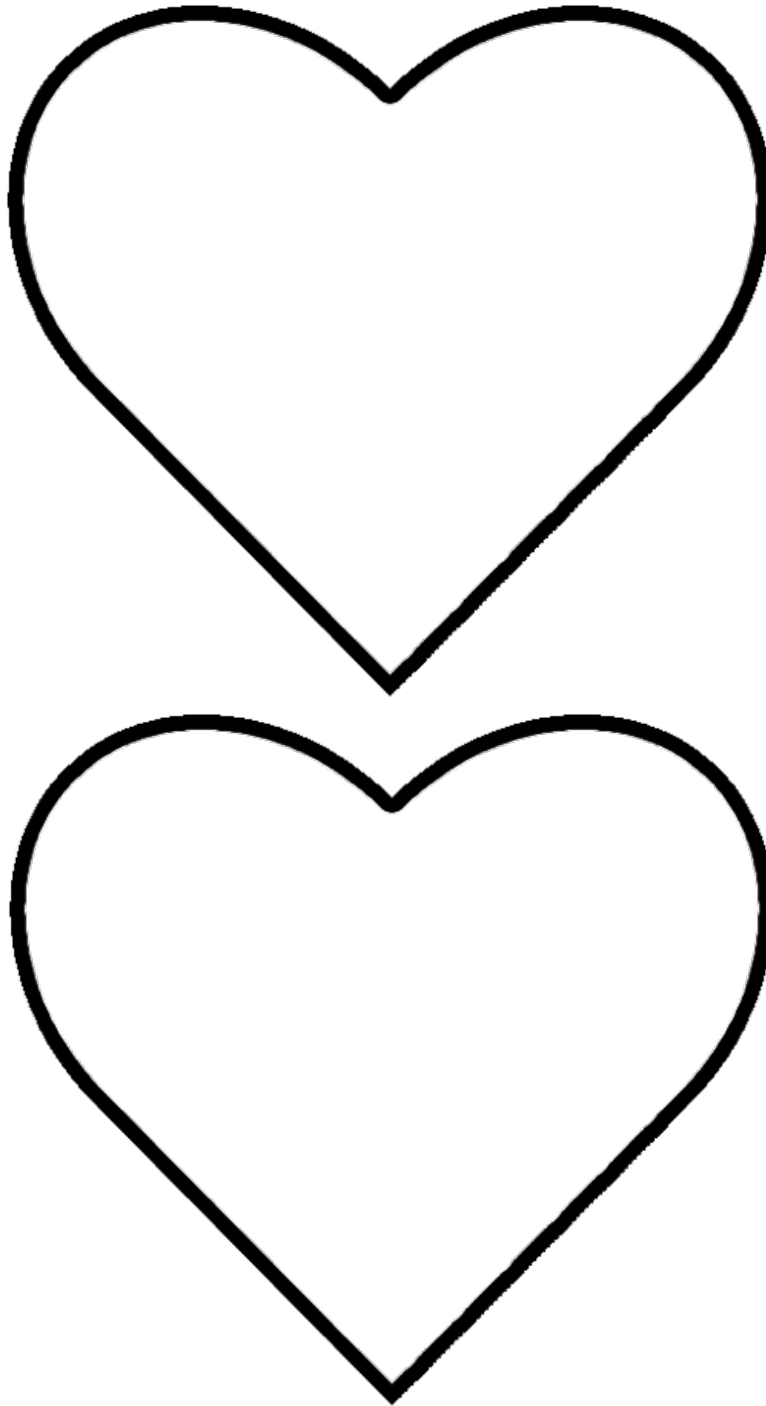
**God Bless You!**

May your day be filled with blessings,  
Like the sun that lights the sky.  
May you always have the courage  
To spread your wings and fly.



Attachment: Activity 9

Heart Pattern



# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Computer

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.



- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

### About this Workshop

Computer technology enables us to broaden our horizons and see interconnections in all creation. We can share in the experiences of people around the world and appreciate the similarities that bind us together while celebrating the extraordinary diversity in the lives and stories of other people. Through the use of the Internet, learners may discover the many ways blessings are expressed through the traditions of other cultures.

#### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

#### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Colossians 3:12–21**

**Luke 18: 15–17**

**Mark 1:9–11**

**Genesis 12:1–5, 15: 3–5**

### Leader Preparation

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Read the focus scripture, Matthew 5:43–48, and then read the supplemental scripture, Colossians 3:12–21. How is it possible to love our enemies if we are not clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience? Imagine Christ, arms open, waiting for you and the children in the room in which you will gather. Let the peace Christ offers settle in your heart, and the words of Christ dwell in you richly.

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### ① Free Hugs (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read the Bible Focus and Supplemental scripture passages. Consider ways in which “strangers” may also be considered “enemies.” Preview the Free Hugs video.

#### Supplies:

- video: “Free Hugs Campaign,” [http://youtu.be/vr3x\\_RRId4](http://youtu.be/vr3x_RRId4)
- device with Internet access and projection capability

How much difference can a hug make? Tell children that on June 30, 2004, Juan Mann began giving out hugs in the Pitt Street Mall in central Sydney, Australia. For months, Mann had been feeling depressed and lonely until one night, at a party, he received a random hug from a stranger. According to Mann, that one act of random kindness was a blessing that made him feel like a king. Mann recalls, “It was greatest thing that ever happened.”

Watch the “Free Hugs” video with the children. Invite questions and comments after the video. Point out that strangers were asked if they wanted a hug before giving one, and that children should not hug people they do not know unless a parent is present and says it’s OK. Invite the children to name ways they might bless others by performing random acts of kindness.

#### ② Blessed Be Your Name

**Leader preparation:** Reflect the meaning of your name and the story of how you got your name. Remember your ancestors and all who have helped shape who you are today. Pray that your presence with those in your care will be a blessing long remembered.





Prayer: *Compassionate God, may your holy presence fill the space before me, giving me strength and wisdom to speak the good news of your love to all who gather. Open my heart to the blessings of both joy and sadness, and keep me humbly mindful of the many lives in my care. Amen.*

### Supplies:

- devices with Internet access
- website: “Meanings of Names,” <http://meaning-of-names.com/>
- Bible

Ask the children to tell the story behind their names, perhaps if there were named after someone or if their parents liked their name for some particular reason. Help the children find out about the meaning of their names at the website listed above. In many cultures the baby is named in a blessing ceremony where the child is dedicated to God and the community promises its support and care.

Gather in a circle. Read aloud Mark 1:9–11, emphasizing verse 11. Move to each child, saying: *[Child’s name], you are a child of God, deeply loved and forever blessed.*

## Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

### ③ Butterfly Blessings

**Leader preparation:** Think about the changes in your life, especially the struggles. To what extent did you emerge as a changed person as you moved through the changes? What blessings did you discover in the midst of the struggle and after the struggle. What did you need to let go of in that struggle?

### Supplies:

- devices with Internet access
- website: butterfly puzzles, <http://www.jigzone.com/gallery/Butterflies>

Invite the children to tell what they know about caterpillars and butterflies. In many cultures and traditions, butterflies are seen as symbols of resurrection—of beauty at the heart of change. In the span of a month, a butterfly goes from egg to caterpillar to cocoon, and then emerges from the safety of a cocoon as a brand new creature. No other animal in creation goes through such a change so quickly.

Invite children to imagine how God created the butterfly to help us know what is possible when we face the changes that come in life and to emerge from our challenges as brilliantly as the butterfly.

Go to the website and invite the children to create butterfly puzzles. Help the children format the number of pieces in the puzzle to fit their ability. They could work with a partner also. Those who are especially skilled could try with more pieces later.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Our Common Threads (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Become familiar with Google maps so you can navigate the system easily. To use Google maps, go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and click “Maps” in the upper menu bar. In the upper right corner you will see a box labeled “satellite.” Move the cursor to that box and another box will appear labeled “earth.” Click on “earth” and a globe will appear on the screen. Double clicking on any spot on the globe will zoom in to street level visuals.

### Supplies:

- devices with Internet access
- Bible





Invite the children to tell something they know about how people live in another country. Explain that they are going to travel by Internet to distant and strange places. No need for passports, but they will need to bring along their imaginations. Ask the children to suggest a country or place, and then use Google maps to get a street-level view of the area. Encourage the children to look for similarities and differences between countries and landscapes.

Begin a conversation about what things all humans have in common (need for food, water and shelter; need to love and be loved; need to be safe). Ask:

- Where in the world are people in need of these basic things?
- How can families and our church make a difference in the lives of these people?

Close by reading aloud Colossians 3:14–21, reminding the group of how Jesus calls us to act toward one another and toward strangers.



### 5 Hidden Faces

**Leader preparation:** Pay attention to all the “invisible” people you see each day, and think about why they go unnoticed. Look at the artwork “Christ Among the Children.” Do you see your face in the crowd?

#### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Hidden Faces,” <http://youtu.be/rjdxCC2CXxU>
- 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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401)
- Bible

Ask one of the strong readers to read aloud Luke 18:15–17. Discuss:

- Why do you think Jesus thought children were so special?
- How did Jesus treat children?
- Do you think that the other adults treated children like Jesus did? Why or why not?

Display “Christ Among the Children.” Ask: *What do you see in the painting? Where are the children positioned in the painting? Where are the adults?*

Explain that during Jesus’ time children often were ignored and considered of little value. When Jesus taught, he often show special care for those who always seemed to be pushed off to the side by others—children, women, those who were sick and disabled, people who were not accepted by society. Jesus was shining a light on the hidden faces of his world. Jesus calls us to do the same today. Jesus teaches us to love God and love one another, no matter who the other might be.

Ask the learners to name who they think the “hidden faces” are in our world today. Together, view the “Hidden Faces” video.



### 6 Life’s a Puzzle

**Leader preparation:** Visit Google Earth on the Internet. On the home screen, go to the top row of icons and click the Saturn icon next to the sun. Become familiar with navigating the software.



Make copies of the attachment “Finnish Proverb,” and cut apart the strips, one for each child.

### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- website: Google Earth, <http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>
- “Finnish Proverb,” Attachment: Activity 6
- Bible
- black construction paper
- white construction paper
- pencils
- darning needles
- glue sticks

Read aloud Genesis 12:1–5; 15:3–5. Ask: *When God told Abram and Sarai they would be blessed with more children than there are stars in the heavens, what do you think God meant?*

Invite the children to explore the night sky through Google Earth. Ask them to find a constellation that intrigues them and plot out its stars on white paper.

After all children have found constellations and recreated them on paper, demonstrate how lay the white the white sheet with the constellation on top of the black paper, and then use a darning needle to punch holes through the stars on the white paper, punching all the way through the black paper. Then demonstrate how to hold the black paper up to a window or light and see the stars shining through.

As the children look at their constellation creations, read again Genesis 15:5. Wonder about how each one of you is part of the promise and blessing given by God to Abram and Sarai.

Give each child a strip with the Finnish proverb to glue to the black paper. Read the proverb in unison.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Free Rice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Bring information about the ways that your congregation responds to poverty and hunger, locally and around the world. If possible, invite a person who serves in a food pantry or other hunger project to tell the children about his or her work. Preview the “Free Rice” website so you can explain the program to the children.

### Supplies:

- (optional) guest
- device with Internet access
- website: “Free Rice,” <http://freerice.com/>
- Bible

Introduce your guest and invite children to introduce themselves to him or her. Ask your guest to tell about his or her serving in mission to those who need food. Invite questions and comments from the children.



Tell children that each night millions and millions of people go to bed hungry. We may know some of these people, but mostly they are strangers living far away or in places we rarely visit. Surely if a friend was hungry and asked for food, we would share what we have. Jesus said, “That’s easy!” Everyone shows compassion to those they love, but what about the stranger or, worse yet, the enemy?”

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Invite the children to pose wonder statements, such as “I wonder how we might feed strangers or people we see as enemies.” Point out that it is often easier for a group of people, like a church, to tackle the difficult issues of hunger and poverty. As a church, working together, we are truly blessed to be a blessing in the world.

As a group, visit the “Free Rice” website. Invite the children to participate and encourage them to tell their families and friends about this site.

### 8 *Lo Siento*

**Leader preparation:** Recall any experiences you have had traveling in other countries and encountering language problems. When have you felt like a stranger in a strange land?

**Supplies:**

- device with Internet access
- translation website, such as <http://translate.google.com/>

Ask the children to say “hello” and “thank you” in any languages that they know. Ask if any know how to say “I’m sorry” in another language. For example, “I’m sorry” in Spanish is *lo siento*. Be sure to add any languages you know to the conversation. Wonder together about why it might be important to know how to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you” in other languages.

Invite the children to explore the language of forgiveness in other countries through a translation website. Such websites allow the user to enter any phrase or sentence for translation and to listen to the words as they are spoken. Encourage the children to think about the words they would use to both ask for forgiveness and accept forgiveness.

### 9 *Share the Good News*

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the ways that the media you view affects your perception of the world.

**Supplies:**

- devices with Internet access
- news websites, such as: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD> and <http://www.usatoday.com/news/index>
- link to local news agency in your community

*Ask: On any day are people likely to see more news stories about good things and the best in human nature or more stories about disasters and bad things and the worst in human nature?*

Invite the children to take a few moments to view news websites and to count the number of stories that seem uplifting and positive and the number that seem frightening and negative.



### Reflect

The Internet has increased our awareness of the larger world, but has it strengthened our sense of community? Reflect on the strength of fellowship in the gatherings. Are there some children who seem to always remain in the margins or shadows? Lift up those children who need your special attention that all may have the childhood memories of church as a place of welcome, safety and care.

Have the children imagine that they are creatures from outer space who are trying to understand the nature of humans. *If the only information you have is what you read on the Internet, what might you think about human beings on Earth? Would this be a fair and accurate picture? Why or why not?*

Wonder together how fearful and negative news might make people unwilling to love one another. The fear that makes us lock our doors can also make us lock our hearts. When we lock our hearts and allow our love to be given only to those we know and trust, we ignore the many ways that God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. Ask: *In what ways might we let go of that fear? Who can help us do that?*

Form groups of two or three, and have each group brainstorm positive stories in the children's lives that they can then tell to others. Suggest to the children that before they fall asleep each night, they remember all the blessings from their day. Invite them to let their blessings settle in their hearts as they drift to sleep.



**Attachment: Activity 6**

**Finnish Proverb**

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

Even the smallest star shines in the darkness. (Finnish Proverb)

# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Drama

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/





linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.

- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

## About this Workshop

The acts of blessing and letting go are key components in the history of God's people and are played out both in ordinary lives and extraordinary circumstances. Learners in this workshop will be invited to experience the challenges and joys of blessing and letting go through role play, pantomime, storytelling, and dramatic interpretation.

### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Isaiah 43:18–19**

**Luke 2:22–40**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Fit to Be Tied! (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Take time before gathering with the children to think of the ways anger or hurt have tied you up inside. If possible, be prepared to tell about what letting go of anger or hurt has felt like to you.

### Supplies:

- ribbon or yarn, cut into 18" pieces

## Leader Preparation

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Sit comfortably with eyes closed, and let yourself settle down. Let go of all the thoughts, tensions, and sensations you may feel and begin to rest in the love of God who dwells within. Pray that as you ask those in your care to open themselves to the power of blessing and letting go, you, too, will find release and comfort in the practice.

*Prayer: God of blessing and comfort, open my heart to the movement of your Spirit. Through your grace, may I find the*

Gather the children in a seated circle and then form groups of three. In each group of three, have children put their hands together and loosely tie each of the center child's wrists to the wrists of both neighbors, using two pieces of ribbon or yarn. Have the groups of three stand up, exit a door, walk down a hall, get a drink, and return to the room. Give each trio paper and pencils and ask them to write their names on the paper. After they have completed all their tasks, have the children gather again, seated in a circle. Leave their wrists tied.

Ask the children to tell about their experience of being tied to others, and whether the tasks they were asked to complete were more difficult because their wrists were bound with another. Discuss how being unforgiving can bind us and make even the simplest activities more difficult to accomplish. Invite the children to tell about times when they have been angry or hurt, and to what extent those feelings seemed to "take over" all other feelings. After all the children who wish to do so have had an opportunity to talk, go around the circle and untie the children's wrists, saying to each child: *Forgive others as God forgives you.*



*courage and wisdom to share myself with others, and receive with joy the blessed gift of living in the presence of children. Amen.*



### 2 Becoming a Tree

**Leader preparation:** Read the guided imagery on the attachment “Becoming a Tree” several times, so you will sense where to pause and where to add emphasis.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- “Becoming a Tree,” Attachment: Activity 2

## Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

Gather the group and read aloud Matthew 5:43–44. Invite comments about how easy or how hard learners think it is to follow Jesus’ teaching about forgiving. Explain that when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, it is through our imaginations that we are able to create a space for love and compassion instead of hate and fear. Imagination pulls us beyond the impossible and into the world of possibilities where peace and reconciliation are as real as our own breath and heartbeat.

Use the guided imagery on the attachment “Becoming a Tree” to help the children imagine the circle of growth of an apple tree, from seed to fruit filled to bare branched. Ask the children to find their own personal space on the floor and make themselves as small as possible. Tell the children they are apple seeds, nestled tightly inside a hard seed pod and buried under the cold ground. Invite the children to listen carefully and respond to your words.

After the meditation pause, and then ask children to join you in a circle. In the circle, talk with the children about the different sensations and emotions they may have felt during each stage of the tree’s growth. Wonder together how the changes that humans experience might be similar to the changes we see in nature. Ask: *In what ways did the tree have to let go? In what ways was the tree blessed?*



### 3 Kitten and Spider

**Leader preparation:** In addition to the pictures on the attachment “Kitten and Spider” you might find more pictures of two animals: one the children will be drawn to, such as a kitten, and one that most children would dislike, such as a spider.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- “Kitten and Spider,” Attachment: Activity 3
- masking tape or wall adhesive

Tape the pictures of the two animals on a board or wall. Discuss them:

- What words would you use to describe how you feel when you look at the kitten?
- What words come to mind when you see the spider?
- How are your feelings for the kitten different from those you have for the spider? Why?

Ask children to name other animals they like and dislike. Ask: *Is it fair to like or dislike someone or something simply because of the way it looks? Why or why not?*

Remind children that Jesus tells us that we are to love the people who are most difficult to love, even those people who may never love us back. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:43–48.



Make a tight prayer circle. Ask the children to extend their left hand into the center of circle with the hand in a fist and thumb extended, and to hold the thumb of the person on the left. Imagine Jesus at the center of the circle. When we are drawn closer to the center, we are pulled closer to one another. Offer a closing prayer such as: *Dear God, soften our hearts that we may see everyone as a blessing in your creation. Amen.*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Emotional Walking (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about how your body expresses emotion. Do you smile often? Do you stand straight, shoulders back, head up? Pay attention to your body language, and notice the body language of the children as they enter your time together.

**Supplies:** None

Ask the children how they know when they are hungry, thirsty, or tired. Explain that our bodies have built in signals that let us know what we need. Our tummies growl when we are hungry, and our mouths become dry when we are thirsty. When we smile, our brain senses happiness and releases hormones that lower stress and trigger good feelings. Our brain doesn't know the difference between a fake smile and a genuine smile, so we just need to lift the corners of our mouths for our bodies to feel the effects of smiling.

Invite the children into an exercise to help them discover how their bodies react to emotions. Form pairs. Designate one person as the smiler and the other as the resister. See how long it takes for the smiler to convince the resister to smile. Afterward, discuss how easy or difficult it is to not smile back when someone smiles at us. As time and space allows, have pairs walk through the church facility, smiling at people they meet. Have them keep track of how many people smile back.

Close by affirming that we can't let go of problems and challenges simply by smiling, but smiling may be a small first step we can take to help us release what is weighing us down. When we smile at someone else, our smile may be the blessing someone needs to feel love and happiness. God has blessed creation with brilliant sunrises and star sprinkled skies, and sometimes God's greatest blessings come in the tiniest form—a smile given and a smile received!

### 5 Shoehorns and Umbrellas

**Leader preparation:** Think about times when things did not go as planned for you. What happened? How did you weather the change? If you are able, plan to tell the children a story about a time when your plans changed in a big way and how you were able to let go of the past and live into the new.

Gather items that have a single purpose.

**Supplies:**

- 6–8 objects with a single purpose, such as: shoehorn, can opener, straw, thimble, screw driver, bike helmet, whisk, glove, umbrella
- Bible



Gather in a circle and ask children to take a quiet moment to remember a time when things did not go as they (or their families) had planned, such as a vacation that got rained out or a trip to a favorite place that got canceled. Invite children who would like to tell a story about this situation to do so. Tell your own story, as well.

The musician John Lennon once said, “Life is what happens to you when you’re busy making other plans.” Life takes turns that we don’t expect, and we become what we didn’t imagine. *When the unexpected happens, how do we adjust to the change?* Explain that God has given us the eyes and heart to let go when we need to and imagine ourselves into something new.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 43:15–21. Discuss: *What does the prophet say about changes in our lives? What will God do to help us?*

To help the group exercise the gift of imagination, form pairs. Give each pair one of the items and ask them to imagine things that the item could be used for beyond its original purpose. Allow about three minutes to brainstorm ideas, and then have each pair tell about—and perhaps demonstrate—their new discoveries.

After all pairs have had a turn, invite the children to consider the surprising purposes God may have for each of their lives. Discuss how surprises in our lives may be blessings to us and to others.



### 6 Storytelling

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the stories, fables, and parables that you remember from childhood. Which stories helped to shape the story of your life?

**Supplies:**

- “Stories,” Attachment: Activity 6

Introduce the stories from the attachment “Stories.” No one knows when the first story was told, but long before history was kept through the written word, stories were used as a way of explaining the unexplainable and passing on from one generation to the next truths that brought meaning and purpose to life. Point out that Jesus told stories as he taught about God. We can find the same messages of justice, love, peace, and forgiveness that are at the core of Jesus’ teachings in stories from many cultures.

Form three groups. Give each group one of the three stories from the attachment. Tell each group to read its assigned story and decide how to tell it or act it out for the others. Encourage them to use their imaginations in their presentations, and help them find whatever they may need to give their stories depth and dimension. Allow about five minutes for groups to work.

Gather and have each group tell its story. Applaud each effort. After all stories have been told, work with the children to identify common themes in the story. Older children may want to discuss how the discovery of peace in unexpected places, the power of gentleness, and the blessings found in imperfection reflect the teachings of Jesus.



## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Belly Laughs (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about the way laughter affects you and how often you find yourself with sides aching from laughter. Be prepared to let loose with the children and encourage full-body laughter!

**Supplies:** None

Ask the children how many times they have laughed in the past 24 hours. Now ask them to raise their hands if they knew that laughing makes people healthier. The simple act of laughing exercises the heart, fills the lungs with air, reduces blood pressure, decreases stress hormones, reduces pain, and helps in healing. Another great benefit of laughter is that when we are laughing we are, at least for a moment, letting go of negative feelings and opening ourselves to the experience of joy.

Invite the children to exercise their funny bones by following this series of laugh commands:

1. Laugh like a hyena.
2. Laugh like a grandparent.
3. Laugh like a tiny mouse.
4. Laugh through your nose.
5. Laugh without making a sound.
6. Laugh while you are touching your toes.
7. Laugh your silliest laugh.
8. Laugh while you are hopping on one foot and patting your head at the same time.
9. Laugh while someone is tickling your ear.
10. Laugh backwards.

Invite the children to offer some other laugh commands. After the exercise, ask children to describe how they are feeling and whether their laughter brought about any changes in how they were feeling before laughing. Affirm that God has blessed creation with the gift of laughter, and this is truly a gift we can use and offer to others.

### 8 Building Bridges

**Leader preparation:** Plan a way for the children to view the video at the link below.

**Supplies:**

- device with Internet access for viewing video
- video: “Love Your Enemies,” <http://youtu.be/L0HhHLHLHaA>

Gather the group and watch the video. Discuss the video by asking the following questions:

- How did the characters in the video use the stones?
- How did the characters in the video build a connection with each other? Why do you think they chose to stop fighting?
- What are some ways we can handle the “stones” that are tossed at us in life?



Read aloud each of the following scenarios. After each one, invite volunteers to act out how they might respond in these situations in order to build bridges and strengthen relationships.

### Scenario 1

You are at a shopping mall and see a group of friends from school. You wave to them, but they pretend not to know you. When you approach them, they say something mean to you and then walk the other way. What do you do?

### Scenario 2

At school, a good friend asks if you will buy lunch for her. You do, knowing that she will pay you back. Then a boy, who you don't know very well and who always seems to be asking people for money, approaches you and asks you to buy his lunch. You have enough money. What do you do?

### Scenario 3

A new student at your school has been picking on you constantly. You have no idea why this boy seems to dislike you so much since you barely know each other. You try to ignore him, but he just gets meaner and meaner. What do you do?



## 9 Blessing the Baby Jesus

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 2:22–40. If you had been in the temple that day, what blessing might you have offered to Jesus? When you meet a new baby for the first time, what blessing do you offer?

Make a copy of the attachment “Baby Blessings,” and cut apart the strips.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- “Baby Blessings,” Attachment: Activity 9
- scissors
- baby doll wrapped in blanket

## Reflect

The spontaneity of children is a wonderful reminder to move beyond our limited expectations and experience life in the unplanned moments. Reflect on the way those in your care surprised you and the lessons you learned in their presence.

Read aloud the story of the day Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple from Luke 2:22–40. Wonder with the children about how thankful the adults in this story were for God's gift of the baby Jesus.

Gather in a circle and give each child one of the sentence strips from the attachment “Baby Blessings.” Tell the children you will pass the baby doll around the circle. When they are holding the baby doll, ask them to read the sentence they have been given. Let the older children help the younger ones read.

Invite children to think of things they might say as a blessing when they meet a new baby.



**Attachment: Activity 2****Becoming a Tree****A Guided Imagery**

It is winter. Snow covers the ground, and you are barely awake. The earth presses on your hard shell, keeping you safe beneath the frozen ground.

Now the earth is beginning to warm up a bit. Spring is coming. You are starting to feel more awake. The snow above melts, and the water soaks into the ground. The earth feels warmer, and you begin to pull energy from the soil. It is time to come out of the safety of your seed pod.

You feel strong and energetic. Using all your strength, you push up against your seed pod and break through, like a baby chick breaks out of an egg. You sprout upward into the warm earth, reaching for the sun. The earth around you is damp, and you soak in the life-giving moisture. Finally, with one great push, you emerge from the soil and see, for the first time, the *Sun!*

The sun's energy flows into you and you feel stronger and stronger. You stretch upward and outward until you are a healthy seedling. The gentle spring rains nourish and refresh you. Just take a moment to enjoy it.

*Pause.*

In a few years you have grown into a strong young sapling. You have beautiful green leaves that soak up the sun and make you strong. But you want to grow taller. So you gather all your energy and you stretch out and up. As the years go by you become a strong, fruit-filled apple tree. You stand proud in the sun and enjoy your own strength and beauty.

Now it is fall. You have grown beautiful—nourishing apples hang from all your strong branches. Your apples contain seeds that might someday become new apple trees. The apples are heavy. Your branches are strong, but you feel weighed down. You feel as if your branches might break.



### Attachment: Activity 2 (*continued*)

Some children run to you. You know they are coming for your apples. They have baskets. They are laughing and singing, and they pick your apples. Now your branches feel light. You know they will take your apples away and eat them. You know they will throw away the seeds, and that some of those seeds might grow to become new apple trees.

Almost all of your apples are gone. But you know you will grow more next year. You feel grateful to those children. You hope they will enjoy the apples.

*Pause.*

The days are growing shorter now and the sun is not as high. Winds shake your branches, and your leaves fall away in swirls of golden orange and red.

Now it is winter. All of your leaves have fallen. Your branches are gray and bare, but you know they will be filled with mounds of green again next spring. Now it is time to rest.



## Kitten and Spider



**Attachment: Activity 6**

## Stories

### Portrait of Peace

Once there was a king who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best portrait of peace. Many artists brought their pictures to the king. The king looked at all of the pictures, and after much consideration, he was down to the last two.

One painting was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror of the peaceful mountains that towered around it. Overhead, wispy, white clouds floated in a blue sky. Everyone who saw this picture said that it was, indeed, the perfect portrait of peace.

The second painting had mountains, too. These mountains were rugged and bare. Above was an angry gray sky from which rain fell and lightning flashed. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming, raging waterfall. This did not appear to be a peaceful place at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw that behind the waterfall was a tiny bush growing in the rock. Inside the bush, a mother bird had built her nest. There—in the midst of the rush of angry water and under the terror of the stormy sky—sat the mother bird on her nest.

The king chose the second picture as the best portrait of peace. “Because,” he explained, “peace is not only in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace is found in the midst of things as they are, when there is calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

### The North Wind and the Sun

One day, the North Wind and the Sun argued over who was the strongest. The North Wind bragged of great strength, but the Sun argued that there was greater strength in gentleness. “We shall have a contest!” the Sun proclaimed.

Far below, traveling on a winding path was a man wearing a heavy coat. “As a test of strength, let’s see which of us can take the coat off that man,” said the Sun. “This will be quite simple,” exclaimed the North Wind, eager to make his point.



### Attachment: Activity 6 (*continued*)

The Wind began to blow. Dust began to fly around the feet of the man and birds clung to their trees for safety. The harder the Wind blew, however, the tighter the man grasped his coat against the cold, bone-chilling air.

The Sun then appeared from behind a cloud. Slowly the Sun warmed the cold air and frozen ground. The man tilted his head to the sky, comforted by the heat on his face. Then he unbuttoned his coat. The Sun grew brighter and more brilliant until the man's coat became too hot to wear and he took it off and sat down under the shade of a tree.

"How did you do that?" the Wind asked.

"Simple," said the Sun. "I lit up the day and through gentleness got my way!"

### **The Cracked Pot**

Each day, a water-bearer carried two large pots on a yoke across his shoulders up the hill from the river to his master's house. One pot had a crack and leaked half its water out each day before arriving at the house. The other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water after the long walk from the river.

Finally, after years of arriving half-empty and feeling guilty, the cracked pot apologized to the water-bearer. The pot was miserable, saying, "I'm sorry that I couldn't accomplish what the perfect pot did."

The water-bearer asked the pot, "What do you have to apologize for?"

The pot responded meekly, saying, "After all this time, I still only deliver half my load of water. I make more work for you because of my flaw."

The man smiled and told the pot. "Do you see of all the lovely flowers growing on the side of the path where I carried you? The flowers grew so lovely because of the water you leaked. There are no flowers on the perfect pot's side."



**Baby Blessings**

This baby will grow up, and the sick will be healed.

This baby will grow up, and the blind will see.

This baby will grow up, and the lame will walk.

This baby will grow up, and the thirsty will drink living water.

This baby will grow up, and the silent will be heard.

This baby will grow up, and the prisoner will be set free.

This baby will grow up, and the hated ones will be loved.

This baby will grow up, and the sinner will be forgiven.

This baby will grow up, and the lost will be found.

This baby will grow up, and the broken will be made whole.

This baby will grow up, and the weary will find comfort.

This baby will grow up, and the weak will find strength.

This baby will grow up, and the peacemakers will be blessed.



# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Food

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.

- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

### About this Workshop

Many children learn their first blessing around the dinner table as they speak words of thanks for all God has given them. In addition to the Bible Focus Story, learners in this workshop will also explore God's gift of food to the Israelites in the story of the Exodus and consider the consequences of holding on tightly to more than is needed.

#### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

#### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Exodus 16**

**Colossians 3:12–21**

**Isaiah 43:18–19**

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Bless Our Food (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Remember your own childhood and whether saying grace was a tradition. While there is no verse in the Bible commanding prayer before meals, saying grace before eating is one of the most common and universal forms of spoken prayer. It is one way people express gratitude for the blessings of food.

#### Supplies:

- index cards
- pens or pencils
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the children to tell about their family traditions of mealtime prayers. Be mindful that not all families have a tradition of praying at mealtime. Read aloud these prayers from other cultures and traditions that are spoken before meals:

#### **Buddhist Blessing**

For every grain of rice we are thankful for thousands of workers. For every drop of rain we are thankful for God's blessings. Amen.

#### **Scottish Blessing**

Some have meat and cannot eat. Some have no meat, but want it. We have meat, and we can eat, and so the Lord be thanked. Amen.

#### **Jewish Blessing**

Blessed are You, O God, Creator of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Amen.

### Leader Preparation

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Name yourself as a blessing to those you serve, and accept all in your care as a blessing in your life. Allow Paul's words to the church in Colossae to settle in your heart and light your path: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him" (Colossians 3:16–17).



Prayer: *Great and Bountiful God, help me to remember that within each child you have planted the seeds of peace. May I continue to walk with you, growing stronger in my faith as I bear witness to the blessed faith of your children. Amen.*

### Catholic Blessing

Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we're about to receive from your bounty. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Ask: *What is similar in these blessings?* Work as a group to write a mealtime prayer. Write it on the whiteboard or newsprint, and have children copy it on index cards to take home.

## Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

## 2 Enough Is Enough

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the story of God's gift of manna to the Israelites (Exodus 16).

### Supplies:

- jelly beans, enough so each child can have at least six
- two bowls
- slips of paper, with the word "rich" written on 20% of the papers and the word "poor" written on 80% of the papers
- Bible

Explain that letting go can mean many things. For parents, letting go may mean letting children live their own lives. For others, letting go may mean letting go of anger or hurt. Point out that when God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, letting go had a lot to do with letting go of fear. God promised the Israelites new life away from slavery, but the Israelites held onto fear that they would die from hunger in the strange wilderness. But God provided for the Israelites and bread or manna rained down from heaven each day. As God's hungry children gathered up the manna, God had only three rules:

- Don't be greedy and take more than you need for your family.
- Don't hide any away to keep until the morning.
- Gather twice as much on the sixth day each week so that you won't have to work on the Sabbath.

Read aloud Exodus 16:4–5. Ask: *How often do we take more than we need because we think we don't have enough?*

Invite the children to play the "Enough is Enough" simulation game, giving these instructions:

1. Each child draws a slip of paper.
2. Divide the meeting space so that the "rich" have two-thirds of the space and the "poor" are crowded into a corner at the back of the room.
3. Give the "rich" group a bowl with enough jelly beans so that each child will get at least six.
4. Give the "poor" group a bowl with just one jelly bean for every two children.
5. Tell each group to decide how to divide its candy, but not to actually do so.

After the simulation, discuss:

- How did you feel about the number of jelly beans your group received?
- How did you plan to divide the candy?
- Why is food important?



- Why is it important for God's people to share their food?
- What is the difference between the things we need and the things we want?
- How hard is it to let go of the things we want?

Distribute the jelly beans evenly among the children, and enjoy!



### 3 Dressing for God

**Leader preparation:** Read Colossians 3:12–21 twice, silently and then aloud. Let the words of Paul “clothe” you. Gather the ingredients for the Blessing Treat. Be aware of any food sensitivities or allergies, including latex.

#### Supplies:

- ingredients for Blessing Treat, separated into bowls:
  - candy-coated chocolate or fruit-flavored candies in red, yellow, orange, green, and blue
  - raisins
  - small fish-shaped crackers
  - mini-pretzels
  - dried cranberries
  - miniature marshmallows
- “Blessings Treat,” Attachment: Activity 3
- scissors
- small zipper-sealing plastic bags
- latex gloves or small sandwich bags to use for gloves
- clear tape
- spoons
- Bible

Read aloud Colossians 3:12–17. Summarize that the apostle Paul writes that we are to “clothe” ourselves in ways that are blessings to others. Ask the children to listen for the words that express the way we are to live as God’s children as you read the passage again. Have children repeat the words they heard.

Invite the children to create a Blessings Treat. Make sure that everyone washes hands before assembling the treat bags. Give each child a copy of the handout “Blessings Treat” to use as a guide in assembling a treat in a small plastic bag. If you like, tape a copy of the “Blessings Treat” explanation to each bag. Have each child take two bags—one to share with his or her family and one to give to a friend.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Knock, Knock (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on how you feel in the presence of strangers and how you respond to a stranger at the door. Reflect on times when you have extended extravagant generosity to a stranger. Find out how your congregation provides assistance to those who need food. Be sensitive to children whose families may rely on a food pantry for assistance.

#### Supplies:

- Bible



Have children imagine a mother and father and two young children knock on the church's door. They need food to last them until the next payday. Explain that those in need often turn to a church, even a church they have never been to before, believing that people who love Jesus would surely help them. Ask:

- If this family came to our church, what help could we offer?
- Where in our church or our town is there food set aside for emergencies like this?

Have the group walk through the church, especially the kitchen, and find what the children could offer. Children might notice a place where donations are gathered for a community food pantry. Wonder together about why churches try to provide for people in need.

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Explain that it is easy to help people we love or people we know will pay us back. Sometimes it is difficult to show love and generosity to those who have no way of paying us back. Emphasize the many ways people rely on the generosity of others. Sometimes we are blessed to share what we have with others and sometimes we are the ones in need.

Invite children to think of ways they can help your church provide food for people who need it.

### 5 Churn, Churn, Change!

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 43:18–19. Think of the changes that have taken place in your life over the past year. What new things has God created in your life? When have you glimpsed a “stream in the desert”?

Be aware of food allergies, such as gluten or lactose intolerance.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- quart glass jar with lid
- 1 pint heavy cream or whipping cream
- salt
- bread or crackers
- spoon
- knives
- napkins

Read aloud Isaiah 43:18–19. Ask: *How do we let go of one thing to make way for another? When is change easy? When is it hard?*

Invite the children to help change a liquid into a solid. They will need their muscles and patience. It's time to churn butter!

Sit in a circle. Fill a glass jar about halfway with heavy cream or whipping cream. Fasten the lid securely and then send the jar around the circle, with each child shaking it for 30 seconds. Keep sending the jar around the circle. After a few minutes, whipped cream will form. After about ten minutes most of the liquid will have become solid and butter will form. Drain off the remaining liquid, which is buttermilk. Use a spoon to mix in a sprinkle of salt. The homemade butter will be softer and paler than store bought butter, but still delicious!

Invite children to spread a little butter on bread or a cracker and enjoy.



## 6 Manna from Heaven

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the story of God's gift of manna to the Israelites (Exodus 16). Organize the ingredients for Manna Cookies. Arrange to use an oven and recruit a couple of older youth or adults to help.

**Supplies:**

- ingredients: butter, vanilla, white sugar, eggs, white flour, honey
- measuring cups, measuring spoons
- mixing bowl, mixing spoon
- teaspoons
- cookie sheet
- children's Bible

Tell how sometimes even good changes can be scary. Ask the children to tell about any changes in their lives that seemed frightening at first (moving to a new town, meeting new people). *How were you able to let go of your fears?*

Tell learners that when the Israelites left Egypt, they had difficulty letting go of the security of their homes. They grumbled that they didn't have enough food to eat. God heard the grumbling. Ask an older child to read aloud Exodus 16:1-5. Discuss how God provided food.

Invite the children to wash their hands and work together to prepare Manna Cookies to serve to others at church. Explain that no one has any idea what manna really tasted like. In fact the word "manna" means "what's this?" All we know is that it tasted sweet like honey, so the cookies are made with honey.

### Manna Cookies

**Supplies:**

- ½ cup butter, softened
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups white flour
- 2 teaspoons honey

**Procedure:**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Blend the softened butter and sugar.
3. Add eggs and mix well.
4. Add honey and vanilla and mix well.
5. Add flour and mix well.
6. Drop dough by half teaspoonfuls on a cookie sheet.
7. Bake at 400 degrees for 8 minutes.
8. Remove from oven, let cool, and serve the Manna Cookies!





## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Feed the Hungry (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Find out what mission projects your congregation and denomination are involved in that address issues around hunger. If possible, invite a member of the congregation who is involved in one of these projects to speak to the children about the congregation's response to hunger, locally and globally.

**Supplies:** None

Invite children to tour the church's kitchen and fellowship hall. Sit in the kitchen or fellowship hall and ask:

- When is food served at our church?
- When have you eaten at our church?
- What do we do as a church to help people who need food?
- How can food be a blessing?

If you have invited a guest to talk about how your church responds to issues of hunger, welcome him or her and introduce the children. After your guest tells his or her story, ask children what they have learned from this person.

### 8 A Cup of Tea

**Leader preparation:** Have you ever sat alone or with a friend, sipping a cup of hot chocolate or a glass of milk? How might it be different to do this with a stranger or with someone you consider an "enemy"?

**Supplies:**

- ½ cup instant tea powder
- 1 cup sweetened lemonade powder
- 1 cup orange-flavored drink mix
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- large bowl, mixing spoon
- small zipper-sealing plastic bags
- "Friendship Tea," Attachment: Activity 8
- scissors
- clear tape

The Balti people of Pakistan have a saying: "The first time you share a cup of tea, you are a stranger. The second time you share a cup of tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family."

Recall how Jesus teaches us to love our enemies. We cannot do this if we do not get to know them. The more we take the time to sit with people we do not know, the more easily we will come to see everyone as children in God's family.

Invite the children to wash their hands and help you mix up a batch of Friendship Tea in a large mixing bowl:

- ½ cup instant tea powder
- 1 cup sweetened lemonade powder
- 1 cup orange-flavored drink mix



- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves

Have children put the Friendship Tea mix into small zipper-sealing bags and tape a copy of the card on the attachment to each one. Have each child take two bags of tea—one for his or her family and one to give away.

### 9 Matzo for Everyone

**Leader preparation:** Gather all ingredients for baking matzo and arrange to use an oven. You may want to ask a couple of older youth or adults to help. Be aware of any food allergies before you offer food to eat. See if it would be possible for the matzo you make to be used in communion.

#### **Supplies:**

- several slices of white bread, cut in fourths
- white plain flour
- salt
- vegetable oil
- water
- mixing bowl, mixing spoon
- measuring cups, measuring spoons
- rolling pin
- knife
- cookie sheet

Give each child a fourth of a slice of white bread. Ask them to look closely and notice the tiny holes. Explain that these holes were created air bubbles formed by yeast. When we buy yeast at the store, the yeast is in a state of inactivity, almost like hibernation. But when moisture is added and mixed into dough, the yeast wakes up and begins eating. As the yeast grows, it produces carbon dioxide, which makes the bread rise up and creates all those tiny holes. The process of bread rising takes hours. Let the children eat the bread.

Tell how, when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the people had to leave in such a hurry that there wasn't time for bread to rise, so they made unleavened bread called matzo. Today, when Jews celebrate Passover, they eat matzo to remember how the Israelites escaped from slavery and how God blessed them with freedom.

Ask children to wash their hands and help you make matzo. Explain that in Jewish homes, there are some strict rules about making matzo. The matzo must be finished in 18 minutes. The 18 minutes begins when the water hits the flour and ends when all of the matzo comes out of the oven. See if you can do this!

#### **Matzo**

#### **Supplies:**

- 4 cups white flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup vegetable oil (and a little more for greasing the cookie sheet)
- ¾ cup water (add more as needed)

#### **Procedure:**

1. Preheat the oven 375.
2. Rub oil on a cookie sheet.
3. Mix the salt into the flour.



### Reflect

Children often have issues around food and may be hesitant to move beyond the “icky” stage or indulge too quickly if the food offered is sweet. How did the children respond to preparing the food and the connections back into the scripture? Were they able to let go of impulses to take too much? Were they able to try something new?

4. Add the oil, and quickly knead it into the flour, using your hands.
5. Gradually knead the water into the dough until the dough is no longer crumbly.
6. Flatten the dough with a rolling pin until it is about ¼” thick, and shape it to fit on the cookie sheet.
7. Place the dough on the cookie sheet and cut into squares or triangles.
8. Cook for 15–20 minutes until crispy (like a dry cracker).

Let children taste the cooled matzo and compare it to the bread they usually eat. If the matzo will be used for communion, tell them when.



**Attachment: Activity 3**

**Blessings Treat**

**Blessings Treat**

Love: red candy  
Compassion: yellow candy  
Kindness: orange candy  
Humility: raisins  
Meekness: fish shaped crackers  
Patience: green candy  
Forgiveness: blue candy  
Gratitude: pretzels  
Harmony: dried cranberries  
Peace: marshmallows

Colossians 3:12-17

**Blessings Treat**

Love: red candy  
Compassion: yellow candy  
Kindness: orange candy  
Humility: raisins  
Meekness: fish shaped crackers  
Patience: green candy  
Forgiveness: blue candy  
Gratitude: pretzels  
Harmony: dried cranberries  
Peace: marshmallows

Colossians 3:12-17

**Blessings Treat**

Love: red candy  
Compassion: yellow candy  
Kindness: orange candy  
Humility: raisins  
Meekness: fish shaped crackers  
Patience: green candy  
Forgiveness: blue candy  
Gratitude: pretzels  
Harmony: dried cranberries  
Peace: marshmallows

Colossians 3:12-17

**Blessings Treat**

Love: red candy  
Compassion: yellow candy  
Kindness: orange candy  
Humility: raisins  
Meekness: fish shaped crackers  
Patience: green candy  
Forgiveness: blue candy  
Gratitude: pretzels  
Harmony: dried cranberries  
Peace: marshmallows

Colossians 3:12-17



**Attachment: Activity 8**

**Friendship Tea**

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

**Friendship Tea**

A little cup of friendship  
With a bag of tea.  
When you drink this  
Think of love from me.

To serve, place 2 teaspoons of mix in  
a mug. Stir in 1 cup of boiling water.  
Adjust to taste.

# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Games

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.





- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation’s overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

### About this Workshop

Given a choice, most children would rather play than do most anything else. A good game can encourage and nurture cooperation, compassion, empathy, and creativity, while providing a time to release energy through movement, reasoning, and laughter. In this workshop, learners will engage in playful activities that stretch their minds and bodies and strengthen their hearts.

#### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

#### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Romans 15:22–29**

**Colossians 3:12–21**

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Finding Balance (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on your own life. How well do you find balance, and how faithful you are in keeping Sabbath each week?

#### Supplies:

- rulers, one for each child

Ask children if they have ever heard adults talk about “finding balance” in life. Invite them to tell what they think this means. Part of finding happiness in life is finding a balance in all the activities we do—playing, learning, sleeping, working, sharing. We must also be able to let go of things and thoughts that weigh on us and pull us off balance. Distribute rulers and invite the children to try these balancing activities:

1. Balance the ruler on one finger. (They will only be able to do this if they find the center of the ruler.) Invite the children to walk slowly around the room while balancing the ruler.
2. Ask the children to stand with both feet on the floor. Ask them to lift one foot off the floor. Are they still in balance? Put that foot down and try the other foot. Is balance just as difficult to maintain? Now ask them to balance on one foot and close their eyes. How difficult is balancing with eyes shut?
3. Ask the children to stand with both feet on the floor. Invite them to find a spot directly in front of them on the floor and stare at that spot. Let all that is around them fade away as they concentrate only on the spot they have chosen. Ask them to now slowly lift a leg and balance once again, but this time with all their concentration focused on the spot in front of them. Is balancing easier now?

### Leader Preparation

Pray for those in your care, remembering each by name. Reflect back into your childhood and remember those magical times when your attention focused in on the moment—running through a sprinkler, watching a rainbow, jumping into a puddle, counting stars. During the time you spend with those gathered, let the busyness of your life fade away, and focus on the moments of joy and surprise waiting to be born.

*Prayer: Holy One, Bless me with the eyes of a child, that I may see with wonder and amazement; the ears of a child, that I may hear your presence in laughter; and*



*the heart of a child, that I may expect the unexpected and believe that all things are possible. Amen.*

Discuss:

- What are some things that might pull someone “off balance” in life?
- How can we “let go” of things and thoughts that cause hurt and anger?
- How might owning too much “stuff” cause us to be off balance?
- Is it more difficult for you to let go of things, of people, or of thoughts?

### Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

### 2 Pass the Love

**Leader preparation:** Practice a breath prayer. On the inhale say, “Love God”; on the exhale, say, “Love one another.” Do this at least five times.

**Supplies:**

- two construction-paper signs: “Enemy” and “Friend”
- Bible

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. All of Jesus’ teachings are rooted in one big idea—love God and love one another! Jesus says that when we truly live surrounded by God’s love, we will love others, even people who hate us. This may be one of Jesus’ hardest teachings, but often the hardest things to do are the right things to do.

Invite the children to play a relay game to remind them of Jesus’ commandment to love your enemy. While Jesus does want us to love everyone, in this game they will only respond with a sign of love when they see the word “enemy.” Give the following instructions for the game:

1. Form two groups of equal size. If there is an odd number, then children can take turns being the referee. If there is an even number, then a leader can referee.
2. Have groups stand in two horizontal lines, facing each other, with everyone holding the hand of the next person in line.
3. Tell everyone to close their eyes and tilt their heads down, except the two players at the beginning of the line, who will watch the referee.
4. For each round, the referee will hold up one of two signs, either “Enemy” or “Friend.”
5. If the referee holds up the “Enemy” sign, then the two children at the beginning of each line must squeeze the hand of the next person in line. When that child’s hand gets squeezed, he or she quickly continues to “pass the pulse of love” by squeezing the next person’s hand, and so on. When the pulse reaches the end of the line, the last child shouts, “Love your enemy!” The line that first calls out this phrase receives one point.
6. If the referee holds up the “Friend” sign, then the first two children should not squeeze the hand of the next child. If a hand is squeezed by mistake and the last child shouts, “Love your enemy,” and then a point goes to the other team.
7. Make sure the referee mixes up the signs each round so the two watching can’t predict which sign is being raised.
8. After each round the first person in line goes to the back, and the next person becomes the one at the beginning of the line. Play until everyone has had the opportunity to be the first person in line.



### 3 Carrying Grudges

**Leader preparation:** Gather rocks, the larger the better, to use in the activity. If large rocks cannot be found, then give each child two smaller rocks.

#### 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>
- large rocks, one for each child
- Bible

Gather the children. Display “Forgiveness,” and tell them the title. Ask them to look at it quietly for a few moments, and then ask them to describe what they think is happening in the image. Use their suggestions as an opening for discussion on forgiveness:

- When have you asked someone for forgiveness?
- Is it more difficult to ask for forgiveness or to forgive someone?

After all who wish to respond have had a chance to do so, play the following game.

Have the children stand in a circle. Give each child a large rock or two smaller rocks. Tell the children that they cannot put their rocks down or give them to anyone else or rest them on anything. Invite the children to move into a straight line, but with enough space around them that they can't touch those standing next to them. Tell the children that you are going to lead them in the game of Simon Says. When you call out the commands, make sure that most involve the children moving their arms and hands so they can feel the weight of holding the rocks.

After several minutes, ask the children to gather in a circle for a ball toss. Give a ball to one child and then call out the name of another. The child with the ball tosses to the named child. After everyone has had a chance to toss the ball, invite the children to sit down in the circle.

Ask them how they are feeling about holding their rocks:

- What would it be like to carry these all day?
- What if they had to hold on to them while you were using the restroom? Playing sports? Sleeping? Eating?

Explain that the rocks they are holding are a symbol of holding grudges, or withholding forgiveness from someone. *When we hold a grudge or bitter feelings toward someone else, how does it affect us?* Close by reading Colossians 3:13.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 The Loving Chair (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Consider how often children’s games and playtime become arenas for winning and losing. How can children best celebrate their own accomplishments without diminishing the efforts of others? Playtime is a wonderful opportunity to encourage “letting go” of winning and simply enjoying the blessings of play.

**Supplies:**

- enough chairs for every child, minus one
- recorded music
- device for playing recording music

This game is a variation of the game musical chairs. Place chairs in a circle, with the number of chairs equaling the number of children minus one. Explain that this is a loving version of musical chairs. Usually in musical chairs, one person is out of the game each time the music stops, and that person has to stand apart from the rest and watch as others continue to have fun. But in the loving version, no one is removed from the fun—everyone stays in the game! When the music stops, everyone will find a seat, which means that children will be sharing seats. Each time the music stops, take a chair away. Everyone should help one another find a seat so some children will be sitting on a lap. Remind the children that they need to be careful and gentle with each other. The game ends when everyone is sitting on one chair!

After the children have played, gather in a circle and talk about the ways that playing games can sometimes lead to hurt feelings. Ask the children to offer their ideas about how games can be played and won without creating bad feelings in those who “lose.” Invite the children to express their own feelings about competing with others. *What are some ways we can learn to “let go” of the need to win and simply enjoy the blessings of play?*

### 5 Untying the Knot

**Leader preparation:** Prepare the rope by tying loose knots about every two feet. There should be six knots in each rope.

This is a difficult activity to complete and will require patience in the children, but will result in great satisfaction. Celebrate with the children when they have accomplished their mission.

**Supplies:**

- rope, a 10’–12’ piece for every 6 children
- Bible

There are times in everyone’s life when the challenges are too big to face alone. Thankfully, God has given us one another! This game calls for them to work as a team. Follow these instructions:

1. Form groups of six children.
2. Lay a knotted rope on the ground in a straight line for each group.
3. Have the groups stand beside their ropes, so that each child is standing by a knot.



4. Tell groups to pick up their rope, making sure each child has one hand on either side of a knot.
5. Tell the children to untie the knots without anyone letting go of the rope.

After the game, sit as a group and invite children to tell about how their teams did this. Then invite children to think of times in their lives when they needed help from others. Read aloud Romans 15:22–29. Talk about how Paul relied on many people to help tell others about Jesus Christ and how God blesses the church with many willing hands and hearts to reach out to others.

### 6 Accentuate the Positive

**Leader preparation:** Practice the activity so you are comfortable with the instructions.

**Supplies:**

- metal coat hangers, one for each child
- Bible

Gather the children and tell how we all have a voice inside that talks to us. Some call this voice our conscience. Sometimes our inner voice might say, “You look wonderful today!” or “What a great job you did on your homework!” At other times the voice may be negative or critical, and you might be hearing, “You are a terrible person and no one likes you.” Invite children to list words that encourage them and words that discourage them.

Explain that this negative voice can keep us from experiencing joy in life and from seeing ourselves as the blessed people God has created us to be. Read aloud Colossians 3:12–17. Point out that Paul describes the people of God as strong and positive. We are to be compassionate and kind, forgiving and patient, humble and wise. Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”—let the voice of Christ be our inner voice.

Invite the children to participate in an activity to measure the effects positive and negative thoughts:

1. Form pairs, and have partners stand at least 20 feet apart.
2. Tell one child of each pair to hold a coat hanger in each hand, holding the straight edge of a coat hanger loosely in a fist. The hangers’ hooks will be out in front, but close together. Thumbs are on the outside of the fingers, not touching the coat hanger. Arms should be at the side, elbows bent with the hands close together or even touching.
3. Ask the child holding the coat hangers to stand quietly, look at the other child, and think positive thoughts about him or her. Ask the second child to also think positive thoughts about him or herself. Thoughts could be: “I am amazing”; “I love myself”; “I can do great things”; “I am strong”; “I am happy”; “I am loved.”
4. Children should hold these thoughts for about a minute and then begin walking. Don’t be surprised if the hangers don’t move outward until the players are very close together.
5. To see what happens when negative thoughts are held, do the same experiment, but ask the children to think of a time when they were unhappy.
6. Have children switch places.



Hints for the game:

- Children shouldn't hold the hangers too tightly. The wire needs to be able to move inside the fingers.
- If children are having trouble finding the point where hangers move apart, have them back up and start again. Children may need to start at 40 feet apart!
- The child walking must think about wanting to feel the other child's energy.
- The whole point of this experience is for the children to see that how what they think and feel is real and to create an energy around them that can be measured!

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 I Hear You! (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Listening may be the greatest gift we can give to someone in need of forgiveness. Listening may also be the greatest gift we can give ourselves. Pray that you listen more than you speak, sitting with the words offered with no need of judgment.

**Supplies:**

- sticks, 10 per child (these can be thin dowels or plastic sticks from a “pick-up sticks” game or any other identical sticks)
- paper towels, 1 per child
- Bible

Peace activist Gene Knudsen Hoffman said, “An enemy is someone whose story we haven't heard.” She believes that true peace is only possible when we are willing to listen deeply to both friend and enemy. Jesus tells us to love our enemy. Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48.

Invite the children to exercise their listening skills through the “I Hear You” game:

1. Pair up children and ask them to sit back-to-back. In front of each child, place a paper towel. Give each child 10 sticks.
2. Designate one child as the “speaker” and one as the “listener.”
3. The speaker will make a design or shape with the sticks on the paper towel, describing to the listener where the sticks are being placed, one at a time. Example: “I placed my first stick vertically in the middle of the towel.”
4. The listener will try to create the same design on his or her paper towel, based on the speaker's descriptions. The listener cannot ask any questions about the instructions they are receiving.
5. Once the activity is completed, the partners can look at both designs and see how well they match.
6. Switch roles so the listener becomes the speaker and the speaker becomes the listener.





After everyone has had a chance to be the speaker and the listener, gather and discuss:

- What was it like to follow directions, but not be able to ask questions?
- How difficult was it to describe accurately what you were creating?
- Was it more difficult to speak or to listen?
- Why is it easier to listen to some people than to others?



### 8 Bless and Release

**Leader preparation:** Create a fishing line with string and a magnet. Cut fish from templates, enough so each child will have at least two.

**Supplies:**

- “Fish Pattern,” Attachment: Activity
- string
- small magnet
- metal paper clips
- clear tape
- crayons, markers
- large tub or bin

Give each child two paper fish to color. After the fish are colored, attach a metal paper clip to each one at the mouth, with at least half of the clip sticking out beyond the paper. Tape the clips in place with small pieces of clear tape.

Place all the fish—the more the better—in a large tub or bin. Have them overlapping each other. Provide a fishing line and invite the children to take turns catching the fish they colored. They must catch both their fish in a row. If they catch someone else’s fish, they throw all the fish back and pass the line to the next fisher. As they throw the fish back into the water, ask the children to say a blessing for the animals in our lives—“bless you cows for your milk,” “bless you dogs for your friendship,” “bless you bees for your honey,” and so forth.

### 9 What We Do Matters!

**Leader preparation:** Make sure you have enough dominoes for the children to create at least two long domino runs. Dominoes do not set up well on all types of flooring, so experiment with the floors available and choose the best.

**Supplies:**

- dominoes
- Bible

Ask the children to tell about times they have dropped stones in water. *What happens to the water?* (The one action of dropping a pebble in water causes ripples to move out in circles. This is called a ripple effect.)

Ask the children to think about ways their actions affect other people. Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Ask the children to think about people they dislike, without naming names. Ask:

- What would happen if you did what Jesus taught and showed love to those people?
- What would happen if everyone did as Jesus taught?



### Reflect

Consider the ways your time with the children unfolded in unexpected ways. Were these moments of anxiety or concern? If you do hold any worry over your leadership or the participation of the children, create a breath prayer to help you release anxiety. Breathe in your concern and then release your breath with the words “All will be well.”

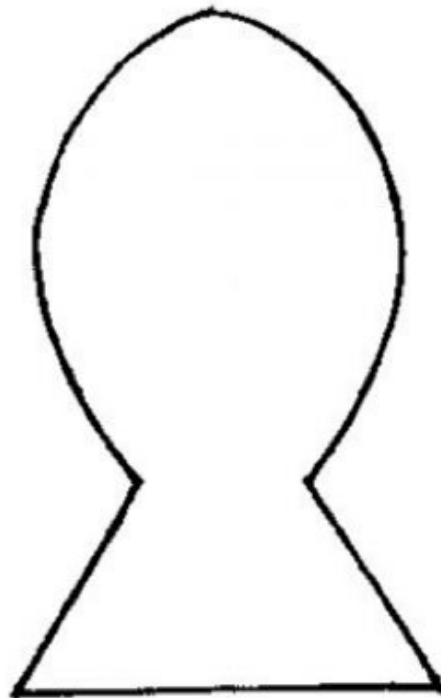
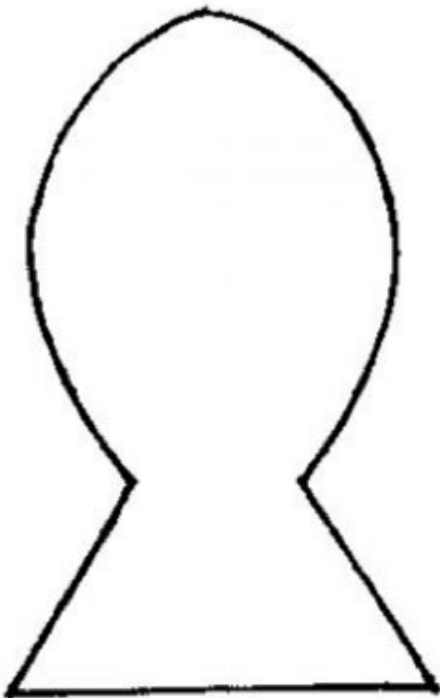
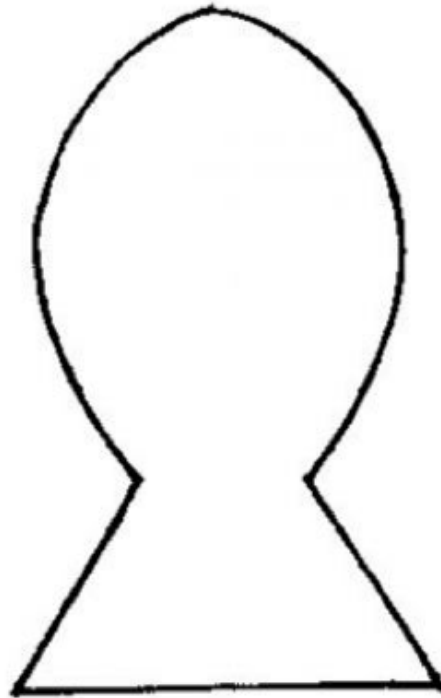
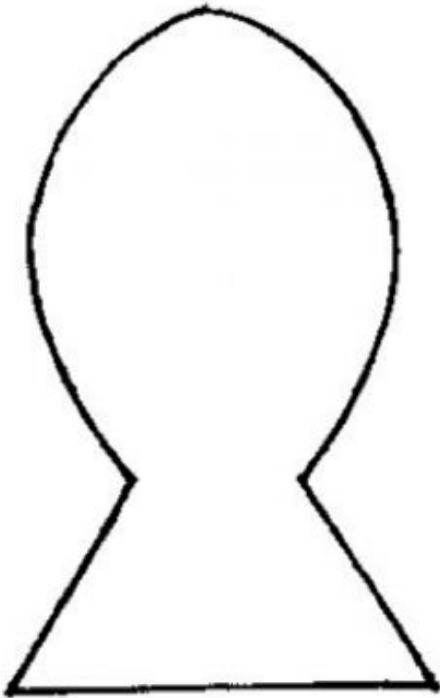
- How can the blessings of one person, shared with another, be like a pebble dropped in the water?

Use dominoes to illustrate cause and effect. Form two groups, giving each group enough dominoes to create an exciting falling dominoes experience.



Attachment: Activity 8

Fish Pattern



# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Music

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.



- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

### About this Workshop

“Music is what feelings sound like.” The author of this saying is unknown, but the words ring true. Whether created by voice and instruments or recognized simply in the sounds of nature, music has the power to elicit strong feelings of both joy and sadness and can stir the soul as nothing else can. Music has been used throughout the ages both as a response to God's blessings and as a way to bless all we have been given. Through music, learners may discover new ways to listen to their own rhythms and find harmony with all creation.

**BIBLE FOCUS STORY:**  
**Matthew 5:43–48**  
**SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:**  
**John 14:27**  
**Genesis 12:1–5**

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### ① Hymn of Promise (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about the promises that the changing of each season brings. Preview the music video of the song. Look in your church hymnal or songbook for the hymn, “In the Bulb There Is a Flower.” If you cannot find it, you can read the words on the Internet at the link below.

#### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- 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](http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower); music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>

### Leader Preparation

Find time before the children gather to reflect on the power of music in your life. If possible, listen to music that brings you peace. Sing a favorite hymn aloud. Don't be concerned with the quality of your voice; focus only the strength of the Spirit moving through your words. May God make you an instrument of peace, joy, compassion, and hope to all who gather with you this day.

*Prayer: God of harmony and peace, guide my words and actions, so that I might bring a deeper understanding of your powerful*

Gather the children and tell them you are going to watch a music video. Explain that the song was written by Natalie Sleeth for her husband, who died shortly after it was completed. Watch the video, and then read aloud the words of so children can hear the paired images. Talk about the changes that take place through the seasons.

Ask the children about the meaning of the last phrase: “unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.” If there is time, replay the video so the children can connect the images with the words and perhaps sing along.

#### ② Playing for Change

**Leader preparation:** Preview the video that will be shown to the children. If the video is too long, then show just the first few minutes.



messages of hope and love to all who will gather. Bless me with the patience to listen first to the voice of a child and to respond gently with kindness and acceptance. Amen.

### Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

#### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Peace Through Music: Playing for Change,” <http://youtu.be/u6S3RTmXGRw>
- Bible

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Invite the children to consider how difficult it is to do what Jesus is teaching: “Love you enemy.” Ask: *What are some ways we can overcome fear and anger to love an enemy?*

The video “Playing for Change” was created to celebrate and strengthen how music can connect people. As written on the Playing for Change website: “The idea for this project arose from a common belief that music has the power to break down boundaries and overcome distances between people.”

Show the video about the creation and purpose of Playing for Change, and then discuss with the children how music is a blessing from God that connects people, even strangers and enemies.

### ③ Sing, My Children!

**Leader preparation:** Watch both videos at the links given below and decide which you would like to show first for discussion purposes. Check in your church’s hymnal or songbook for the hymn “Go, My Children, With My Blessing.” Talk with your church’s worship planners about the possibility of the children singing the hymn during worship.

#### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- song: “Go, My Children, with My Blessing,” by Jaroslav J. Vajda (tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos), <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/gomychild.htm>; music videos, <http://youtu.be/xHNig73qrG4> and <http://youtu.be/0cDz1ufOSgA>
- (optional) hymnal or songbook your church uses

Ask the children if they think children experience music differently than adults, and how so. How do they think adults are affected when they hear children singing?

Invite the children to watch the two music videos of the hymn “Go, My Children, with My Blessing,” one sung by an adult and one sung by two young girls. Talk with the children about the difference and whether one makes a stronger impression on them than the other.

Teach children the hymn and, if possible, arrange to have them sing it during worship.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Enemies and Friends (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Make sure you are familiar with the song “Make New Friends.” Try this experiment ahead of time so you know how much water to put in each glass.





### Supplies:

- “Make New Friends,” Attachment: Activity 4
- 8 identical glass glasses (plastic glasses will not work)
- metal spoons
- pitchers of water

Most children know the song “Make New Friends.” This activity gives them the opportunity to play the tune on water glasses. Explain that they are to line up eight water glasses on a table and fill the glasses with varying amounts of water to alter the sound the glasses make when tapped with a spoon. The more water in a glass, the lower the note will be. This is truly a team effort in patience and good listening. See the attachment “Make New Friends.”

Once the notes have been created, teach the children the following new verses to the song, which reflect Jesus’ commandment that we love our enemies. Invite the children to also write their own verses to the familiar tune.

Fill the cup and pass the bread,  
Make sure enemies and friends are fed.  
A stranger’s just a friend unmet,  
Reach out before the sun begins to set.

## 5 One Love

Leader preparation: Preview the music video.

### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- song: “One Love, Playing for Change,” <http://youtu.be/4xjPODksI08>

The creators of the video traveled around the globe recording the song “One Love” as it was performed by musicians around the world. None of these musicians knew each other. Listen to the beautiful music that strangers, united in purpose, can make together! Watch the video together. Then discuss:

- In what ways are the musicians different from one another? (They live in different countries, wear different types of clothing, sing in different languages.)
- How might these differences be thought of as blessings?
- How are the musicians similar to each other? What connects the musicians to one another?
- How can music help people celebrate their differences while uniting humankind?

## 6 One of Us

Leader preparation: Reflect on prejudices you may hold against certain people or groups of people. Where did those feelings and thoughts come from? Are they based on personal experiences or cultural bias? Consider how you might best help the children move beyond their fears so they may see the face of God in others.

Preview the music video to make sure it is suitable for your group.

### Supplies:

- device with internet access
- song: “What If God Were One of Us?” <http://youtu.be/iwCwupf1mLM>
- Bible



Invite one of the children to read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Ask:

- How can you tell someone is your enemy?
- Mother Teresa once said, “My gift is the ability to see the face of Jesus in its most distressing disguise.” If you could see the face of Jesus in the face of everyone, how might that change your feelings about some people?

View the music video “What If God Was One of Us?” After the video, continue reflecting on the idea of seeing the face of God in the faces of others. Remind the children of the words of Mother Teresa. Ask the children to close their eyes and picture the face of someone they dislike. Then ask children to picture someone who is frightening, and then someone they love. Finally, ask children to pray for God’s help in letting go of the anger and fear, seeing each person as loved by Jesus.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 The Beat of Your Heart (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Gather an assortment of drums and rhythm sticks. If none are available, the children can tap a table with pencils.

#### **Supplies:**

- (optional) drums and rhythm sticks

Gather children and remind them that Jesus teaches us to love one another and forgive as freely as God forgives us. Jesus was able to love and forgive even his enemies because he was able to hear God’s voice guiding him. To stay focused on God’s way of love and compassion we, too, must be able to hear God guiding us.

Explain that the gift of listening is one blessing God gives us to keep us grounded in love. Listening is one way the face of a stranger, or even an enemy, can be changed into the face of a friend.

Give each child a drum to tap or a pair of rhythm sticks, if available. Or have children use pencils to tap on the table top. Use these two drumming activities to nurture the children’s ability to listen to others and also to listen to their own rhythms.

#### **Echo Pattern**

The leader claps or drums a simple rhythm and the children drum it back. When the children are ready, increase the difficulty of the pattern. Invite the children to take turns leading the rhythm.

#### **Keeping a Beat**

Form three groups, and give each group a different tempo to keep. Have members of the group with the slowest tempo begin their beat together. While that group is still beating, add another group with a slightly faster beat. Keep adding tempos until all children are drumming. Listen carefully to see if the children are still hearing their own beats in the midst of so many others.

### 8 Shalom Chaverim

**Leader preparation:** Become familiar with the song “Shalom Chaverim.” Memorize the words so you can comfortably teach the children.



### 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>
- Bible

Gather the children and read aloud John 14:27. Explain that Jesus is speaking words to comfort his disciples, assuring them that when he leaves them, he leaves them his peace. *Shalom* is probably the most well-known Hebrew word. It means “hello,” “goodbye,” and “peace.” In the Hebrew Scriptures, *shalom* is used more than 217 times, mostly meaning peace. “Shalom Aleichem” means peace be with you! “Shalom Chaverim” is a traditional Hebrew song about saying goodbye and your wish for those you leave behind.

“Shalom Chaverim” is often sung as a round, which is a wonderful and powerful way to learn the song. Show the children the music video of the children singing the song, and then invite them to learn the words and melody.

## 9 Gentle Giants

**Leader preparation:** Check in your church’s hymnal or songbook for the song “We Shall Overcome.” If you cannot find it, you can listen to Joan Baez sing it at the link in the Supplies list below. The song has been performed and recorded by many artists including Pete Seeger and Peter, Paul, and Mary. Plan to teach it by memory so the children do not have to hold paper or hymnals as they sing. If someone in the congregation was part of the Civil Rights Movement, ask him or her to speak to the children and share his or her experiences.

### Supplies:

- song: “We Shall Overcome,” African American spiritual (tune: Martin), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkNsEH1GD7Q>

Explain that no other song is so deeply connected to the struggle for justice than “We Shall Overcome.” This African American spiritual was used in 1946 by women on picket lines who were striking against the American Tobacco Company. “We Shall Overcome” became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. Hundreds of people would sing to strengthen their commitment to justice and freedom even as they walked into places of certain violence and anger. Marchers, often strangers to one another, linked arm in arm, would face the enemy and respond not with hatred, but with the power of love in their veins and the strength of forgiveness in their hearts. Each person was a blessing of strength and courage to another; together they were able to let go of fear and overcome hatred. Invite the children to close their eyes and imagine Jesus linked arm in arm with the marchers.

If you invited a guest, introduce her or him. Invite your guest to recall memories of singing this song.

Teach the children this powerful hymn. Invite them to sing the song as they link arms with one another.

## Reflect

Remember the ways in which the children responded to the music. Were they able to hear their own beat through the rhythm of others? Were some children more hesitant than others? Consider ways in which you might gently coax the timid child into a place of comfortable expression.



Attachment: Activity 4

### Make New Friends

Line up 8 glasses that are exactly alike. These must be glass, not plastic glasses. Put water in the glasses as follows:

Make all case fractions if possible; if not, make all fractions look the same

1.  $1/16$  full, to make the highest note in the scale
2.  $1/8$  full
3.  $1/4$  full
4.  $3/8$  full
5.  $1/2$  full
6.  $5/8$  full
7.  $6/8$  full
8.  $7/8$  full, to make the lowest note in the scale

Each glass should follow the sound of the notes on a musical scale from lowest to highest—C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. You can test each note by rubbing the rim of the glass or lightly tapping the side of glass with a metal teaspoon.



Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold.

# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Science

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.



- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

### About this Workshop

Nature offers us a continuous and spectacular vision of how to “bless and let go.” From the dramatic changes evident throughout the seasons of the year to the simple bending of a willow with the wind, God gives us a template for blessing the evolution of life and letting go of fears and hurts that bind us. Learners will be invited to use all five senses to discover how the patterns in creation are invitations to bless and let go.

#### BIBLE FOCUS STORY:

**Matthew 5:43–48**

#### SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:

**Psalm 148**

**Ephesians 3:14–21**

### Leader Preparation

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Read Psalm 148 aloud, listening closely to the words describing nature. Find peace in the understanding that creation is a mix of the calm and the terrifying, the peaceful and chaotic. Let go of any worries you may have about the time you will spend with the children and know in your heart that all will be well.

*Prayer: Loving God, create in me a heart of curiosity and whimsy. Wrap me in the patience of your grace and open my spirit to the wonder of time spent in the blessed presence of children. Amen.*

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Rubbing the Wrong Way (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity takes place outside and involves bark rubbing. If there are no trees available, think of alternative places the children could rub, maybe on the sidewalk or on the outside wall of the church. If you are unable to go outside, find a rough or patterned surface somewhere in the church for the rubbings.

#### Supplies:

- plain white paper
- masking tape
- crayons, with paper wrappings removed

Ask children if they have ever heard the expression “to rub someone the wrong way,” and if they have, to tell what they think it means. As is helpful, comment that to rub someone the wrong way means to annoy or irritate someone. Invite the children to think about things they do that annoy others and what others do that irritate and annoy them.

Invite them do some “rubbing” to create something beautiful. Give each child a sheet of paper and several crayons. If possible, move outside and have children stand next to a tree. Show the children how to place the sheet of paper against a tree trunk, secure it with masking tape, and rub the side of a crayon over the surface of the paper until the bark's pattern appears. Ask the children to look at their rubbings and see what different images appear in the patterns.

Close by inviting the children to try to think differently about people who rub them the wrong way, and to pray for them.





## Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

### 2 From This to That

**Leader preparation:** Spend time outdoors noticing how nature changes. How will the same places look in a month? Consider which seasons energize you and which drain you.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Invite the children to close their eyes and listen as you read aloud Psalm 148. After the reading, ask the children to open their eyes and recall what was described in the psalm, noting what seemed lovely and what seemed frightening.

Explain that just as we have a heartbeat, all creation pulses with movement. Just as we are born and grow old, creation moves through the cycles of birth and death and rebirth. The tree knows how to let go of her leaves, and the ocean’s waves come and go against the shore. God has blessed the robin with the gift of flight, but the baby bird must let go of the nest to test his wings.

Invite children to think about the changes that take place in nature. *What has to be “let go” in order for a new blessing to appear?* Give children this example of an analogy: An acorn is to an oak tree as a caterpillar is to a butterfly. Then see if they can complete these analogies.

- Winter is to spring as summer is to . . . [fall]
- Night is to sunrise as day is to . . . [sunset]
- Kitten is to cat as tadpole is to . . . [frog]
- Joey is to kangaroo as a fawn is to . . . [deer]
- Sun is to rays as moon is to . . . [beams]
- Smile is to frown as happy is to . . . [sad]

After completing those analogies, ask the children to think of their own.

### 3 Kitchen Quicksand

**Leader preparation:** Experiment with making the “quicksand” so you will know the correct proportions of water to cornstarch.

**Supplies:**

- protective covering for table
- large box of cornstarch
- water
- large mixing bowl or basin
- measuring cup
- small plastic toy animal
- bucket of water and towels for cleanup

Invite children to tell stories about their experiences with strong winds. Ask: *What can you see happening outdoors during the wind?* Explain that often in times of struggle, anger, or fear, the first thing we do is to try to take control of life and hold tight against the challenge. But what if we take a lesson from trees about how to weather storms—bending in the wind rather than breaking? Perhaps the best we can do when life seems out of control is to take a deep breath and find calm instead of fight against our situation.

Invite children to roll up their sleeves and join you in the following experiment.



### Kitchen Quicksand

Pour ½ cup cornstarch into a mixing bowl and slowly add ½ cup water. Ask a volunteer to mix the cornstarch and water with bare hands. Continue adding cornstarch and water in small amounts until the mixture has the consistency of honey. The mixture gets thicker as more cornstarch is added. As a general rule, mix about 10 parts cornstarch to 1 part water.

Invite the children to sink their hands into the bowl of “quicksand” and notice its unusual consistency. Ask them to move their hands around quickly and compare the feel of the goo to the way it feels when they to move their hands slowly. The faster they move their hands around, the more like a solid the gooey stuff becomes. Invite children to take turns sinking an entire hand into the goo and trying to grab the fluid to pull it up. That’s the sensation of sinking in quicksand! Have each child drop a plastic toy animal into the cornstarch mixture and then try to get it out.

After children have rinsed and dried their hands, discuss the experiment:

- When you moved your hands slowly, what happened to the goo? (It stayed liquid.)
- When you tried to grab onto the goo, what happened? (It changed to more of a solid and held onto the hand.)

Explain that the goo in this experiment is similar to anger and fear. When we hold onto anger or fear, the anger grows in us and we may never escape. But if we are able to relax, finding a place of calm, our anger may flow away from us just as the goo flows from our gentle touch.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Mirror Emotions (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the strength of your mirror neurons. How do you experience the emotions of others? Are you able to tolerate your own pain more than you can endure pain in others? Consider how empathy can produce both helpful and harmful responses.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- 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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

As the children are seated in a circle, sit quietly with them, and then yawn. Continue to sit quietly, and yawn again. Notice how long it takes for someone in the group to yawn after you. Ask children to raise their hands if they have ever seen another person yawn and then get the urge to yawn themselves. Ask them to raise their hands if they have seen someone fall down and get hurt and then flinch at the pain themselves. Scientists are discovering that our brains have cells called “mirror neurons” that enable us to feel the experiences of others. It is almost as if our brains were wired to act on Jesus’ command to love one another, even our enemies. Invite the children to “exercise” the mirror neurons in their brains.



1. Form pairs, and have partners stand and face each other.
2. One child in the pair will be the emotional mirror, and the other one the actor. If the actor is happy and smiling, the mirror is also happy and smiling.
3. After several minutes, invite the children to switch roles.
4. When each child has had the opportunity to be both mirror and actor, ask them to continue but now have the mirror make the emotions bigger. For example, if the actor is expressing anger, the mirror becomes furious.
5. Then ask the mirror to make the emotions smaller. For example, if the actor laughs, the mirror might just smile.

Gather the group and wonder how being able to imagine the feelings of others might be a blessing. Display “Sisters in the Wind.” Invite the children to imagine what these two girls are feeling. Explain that these two are sisters in Australia. They are living in a makeshift camp while they make a journey across the country with their family. Ask: *What might these girls be feeling? What blessings do they have? What might they have had to let go on this journey? How would that make them feel?*

Close by reading aloud Matthew 5:43–48.

### 5 Bubbles of Blessing

**Leader preparation:** Read Ephesians 3:14–21 and consider how these words are lived out in your life. Make enough bubble-blowing solution for each child to have a small cup full. Gather or make bubble wands, making sure they fit inside the cups. Choose a place outdoors to blow bubbles. If this is not possible, cover an area of the floor with a plastic tablecloth or drop cloth and monitor the bubble blowing carefully.

#### Supplies:

- homemade bubble-blowing solution: ½ cup dishwashing liquid, 2 cups water, 2 teaspoons sugar
- bubble wands, purchased or made from floral wire or pipe cleaners
- small paper cups
- Bible

Invite the children to tell stories about people who make them feel happy when they are with them. Ask them to take a quiet moment to think of people who make them feel anxious or angry, without naming names.

Explain that everything in creation is made up of energy, including us. Strong negative or positive energy from another person can change the way we feel and the way we act toward others. When we focus on the positive, we pull the positive into our lives, and then we send that same positive energy back out into the world.

Another way to think of positive energy is to think of it as God’s love and blessing. Have children imagine being surrounded by a bubble of God’s love. Whenever you feel negative energy, imagine the bubble protecting you. The negative energy cannot penetrate the bubble, but instead bounces off. Have children listen to the words Paul wrote about the power of living in the spirit of Christ. Read aloud Ephesians 3:14–21.

Hand out cups of bubble-blowing solution and wands, and invite the children to blow bubbles and imagine being surrounded by God’s love and blessing.



## 6 Strength through Prayer

**Leader preparation:** Sit quietly. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and let images of your deepest worries drift into your mind. Let these visions and the feelings that produce them float out. Honor what binds you by allowing your troubles to pass through your consciousness, but then release your concerns into God's care.

**Supplies:**

- pennies (40 for every 3 learners)
- plain paper (1 sheet for every 3 learners)
- paper clips (5 for every 3 learners)
- wooden blocks or books (2 identical blocks for every 3 learners)

Remind children that Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies, just as we would pray for those we love. Sometimes this enemy may not be a person, but the weight of the challenges and stress in our lives. Explain that when Jesus felt overwhelmed by stress, he would pray. In prayer, Jesus told God how he was feeling, and God gave Jesus the strength to continue. Like Jesus, when we turn to God, God will show us what we are to do with the stress that weighs us down. When we pray and keep turning to God, God will help us live.

Invite the children to work together in teams to build a bridge that can withstand stress. Form teams of three. Give each team 40 pennies, 1 piece of paper, 2 wooden blocks, and 5 paper clips. Tell them to use the blocks, paper, and paper clips to build a bridge that will support 40 pennies. Explain that they are to work together quietly in teams. If they become frustrated, they are stop building and breathe deeply until they can once again focus on their task. All members of a team must be part of the planning and construction of the bridge.

Give teams the following information and helps:

- The bridge is to be made from the paper and paper clips, resting on the wooden blocks. The span of the bridge must be at least 8 inches long.
- No tape or glue is allowed.
- Paper may be twisted, folded, bent, or torn.
- To test the bridge, load it with pennies one at a time, until it collapses.
- If the bridge does not hold all the pennies, pay attention to where the bridge failed and think about a different plan.
- Hints:

Folding the paper helps it resist the bending forces created by the pennies.  
Tearing the paper into strips and weaving them together adds strength.

Celebrate the efforts of each group.

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 Belly Breath (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about your own breathing. When have you used your breath to calm yourself?

**Supplies:** None



Ask children if anyone has ever said to them, “Take a deep breath.” Wonder together why someone might tell us to take a deep breath. Explain that when life gets difficult, sometimes taking a deep breath helps us calm down.

Invite the children into two exercises that explore how to breathe deeply and, in their breathing, to find their quiet still center.

### **Belly Breathing**

Ask the children to lie flat on their backs and place their hands, palms down, on their stomachs at the bottom of the rib cage, with their middle fingers barely touching each other. Have the children take a slow, deep breath through the nose. As the lungs fill fully with air, the hands should rise causing the fingertips to separate slightly. Ask them to exhale through the mouth, pushing all the air out of their lungs. Chest breathing fills the middle and upper parts of the lungs. Belly breathing fills the whole lung.

### **Letting Go through Exhaling**

Ask the children to sit up and make two tight fists. Let them imagine that in the left fist they are holding a flower and in the right fist they are holding a candle. Tell them to breathe deeply, sniffing the flower. Then ask them to exhale, blowing out the candle. As they inhale, invite the children to imagine the blessings in their lives (family, shelter, friends, food, church, and so forth). As they exhale, invite them to let go of things, people, and thoughts that bind them in anger. Repeat this exercise several times.

Remind the children that the simple act of breathing can help them embrace the blessings of life and name and let go of troubles.

## **8 The Buzzard, the Bat, and the Bumblebee**

**Leader preparation:** The descriptions below often are told as a parable about faith. The author is unknown. As you read the descriptions, think about your own response to challenges. Which creature are you? How difficult is it for you to “let go and let God”?

### **Supplies:**

- Bible

Gather the children and read aloud the information about the Buzzard, the Bat, and the Bumblebee.

### **The Buzzard**

If a buzzard is placed in a pen that is 6 feet long and 8 feet wide and entirely open at the top, the bird—in spite of its ability to fly—will be an absolute prisoner. A buzzard always begins its flight from the ground with a run of 10–12 feet. Without space to run, it will not even attempt to fly but will remain trapped for life in a small jail with no top.

### **The Bat**

The ordinary bat that flies and swoops through the air at night is actually unable to take off from a level place. When placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air.

### **The Bumblebee**

If a bumblebee is dropped into an empty water glass, it will stay there until it dies, unless it is taken out. Even though the bumblebee can fly, the poor creature



never sees the open top, but stays at the bottom, trying to find some way out through the sides. It will seek a way where none exists, until it wears itself out.

Tell children that people are something like these animals. Sometimes we struggle with all our problems and frustrations, never realizing that help is right in front of us! We run around in circles, panicking and trying to find answers when what we should do is stop, take a deep breath, and trust that God has already given us all we need. As the saying goes, "Let go, and let God!"

Ask one of the older children to read aloud Ephesians 3:14–21.

### 9 A Drop of Forgiveness

**Leader preparation:** Try this experiment ahead of time so you are comfortable with it.

#### Supplies:

- clear plastic bottle with cap
- water
- vegetable oil
- measuring spoons
- dishwashing detergent
- Bible

Gather the children and ask for volunteers to help with each step:

1. Fill the bottle one-third full with water.
2. Add 2 tablespoons of cooking oil to the water.
3. Screw the lid on the bottle and shake the bottle as hard as you can.
4. Put the bottle back down. What happens?

### Reflect

Children can sometimes move beyond their fear of the unknown and of change simply through their curiosity. How well was curiosity and imagination nurtured in the activities? Do some of the children need extra guidance and shepherding to lead them into group activities?

Invite the children to think of these two liquids as enemies, separated by their hatred of each other. What could possibly dissolve their hate and help them get along?

Explain that Jesus asks us to extend love to one another, even our enemies. Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Point out that to love our enemies, we must first be able to forgive them. Ask a volunteer to add 1 teaspoon of love and forgiveness (dishwashing liquid) to the bottle. Ask another volunteer to put on the lid and shake the bottle. What happens?



# Blessing and Letting Go



## Workshop: Video

### About this Rotation

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

### About Workshop Rotation

This method of education is informed by Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, or the many individual ways learners apprehend and incorporate information into their own understandings and ways of being in the world.

For those new to Workshop Rotation, a little vocabulary:

- *Multiple Intelligences*: ways of incorporating information, including visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, and naturalist.



- *Rotation*: the overarching story or concept that will be explored through a number of workshops focusing on different intelligences.
- *Workshop*: primary site of learning; workshop plans focus on one or two of the intelligences while incorporating others in a secondary way to give learners various experiential ways of understanding the Rotation's overarching concept(s).
- *Workshop Leader*: the one who uses this curriculum to plan the workshop, adjusting each workshop to best meet the needs of learners, according to age range, group size, disabilities, or any other special needs of the group.
- *Shepherd*: leaders who stay with and support a specific group through all the workshops in any rotation as they develop relationships with the learners.

Faith is learned experientially and in relationship. Shepherds are the key relational component, since they move through workshops with the learners. Workshop leaders can work with Shepherds to gear each workshop to the particular group of learners they will have this week.

The Bible Focus Story for this rotation is Matthew 5:43–48. At least one activity in each workshop is developed around this story. Each workshop will also have activities based on other scriptures that help us understand the practice of blessing and letting go.

## About this Workshop

Much of the lives of children are shaped by the visual images they receive through media and technology. These images often raise questions and fears that are difficult for children to express. In this workshop, leaders and learners will explore and challenge the many images that form our understanding of who we are and discover that we are, indeed, so much more than is portrayed on the “flat screen.”

**BIBLE FOCUS STORY:**  
**Matthew 5:43–48**  
**SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES:**  
**Ezekiel 2:1–5**  
**Mark 1:9–11**

## Leader Preparation

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Reflect on the blessings each child brings to the gathering and open your heart to the expectation that you will grow in their presence, calling God's gracious peace to settle on you, even in the midst of confusion.

*Prayer: Blessed God, make me an instrument for your peace. Give me the gentleness to sow love, the wisdom to nurture faith, and the strength and courage to bring hope and joy into hearts marked by loneliness and despair. Help me name*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Surprise! (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Preview the video.

#### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Welcome Back in Heathrow Airport,” <http://youtu.be/jYrb8fYscw0>

Gather the children. Ask if any have seen a game show called “Let's Make a Deal.” Tell how contestants are sometimes asked to pick one of three doors to open. Behind one door is a fabulous prize, and behind the others are things that aren't very valuable. Life is filled with unexpected blessings and challenges. Sometimes even the simplest events can change us and bless us in extraordinary ways.

Explain that the video you are going to watch is about a surprise. Watch the video. Discuss:

- What happened in this video? How did people seem to react to it?
- Do you think this experience might have helped some people let go of anger or sadness or loneliness? Why or why not?
- In what ways was this event a blessing, not only to the people who were surprised, but also to the people who were able to offer this unexpected gift of music?
- In what ways might have people passed the blessing on to others that day?

Invite the children to consider ways they might be able to surprise and bless people leaving worship, perhaps with a song, paper flowers, or hugs.



*with deep gladness the many blessings before me and move into the time ahead with a grateful and generous spirit. Amen.*



### 2 Down to the River

**Leader preparation:** Preview the video. Locate the artwork “The Baptism of Jesus.”

## Workshop Development

For each workshop 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Down to the River to Pray” by Alison Krauss, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvYadad-x5Y&feature=related>
- 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](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401)
- Bible

Read aloud Mark 1:9–11. Ask the children to repeat the words of God’s blessing at the end of the reading. Then show children the artwork “The Baptism of Jesus.” Ask: *What do you notice about the image?* Point out the movement of Jesus’ head. Jesus came to the River Jordan to be baptized with other people who wanted to let go of their old lives and turn toward God. *How do you think Jesus might have changed after his baptism? How did Jesus’ baptism prepare him for his life ahead?*

Explain that in baptism we are united with Christ. We, too, are blessed as children of God. Ask the children to tell about their own baptism or a baptism in worship.



### 3 Blessing the Animals

**Leader preparation:** Preview the video. Locate the artwork “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds.”

Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Interfaith Blessing of the Animals,” <http://youtu.be/P3gOzgE9z8s>
- 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&sortigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=b2c89647ba56409d894161743bb14f5d&searchstring=st.+francis+feeding+the+birds>
- newsprint, marker

In many churches the first Sunday in October is celebrated with the Blessing of the Animals in honor of St. Francis of Assisi. Invite the children to look at the artwork “St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds.” Ask what catches their attention in this picture. Ask them to describe the posture of St. Francis and the reaction of the birds and to notice that even the tree seems to bend a little toward St. Francis.

Explain that when we bless something, we focus our attention with thanksgiving on what God has created. Through a Blessing of the Animals, those gathered not only give thanks, but recognize the sacred bond they have with all living creatures.

Show the video. After the video, ask the children to list ten to fifteen animals, and then invite them to speak words of thanks reflecting how each of the animals is a blessing to creation.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Love Your Enemy (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Preview the video.

**Supplies:**

- device with Internet access
- video: “Tom and Jerry That’s My Mommy,” <http://youtu.be/0E1G657mmBs>
- Bible

Read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Ask:

- What is Jesus teaching us to do in this passage?
- What are some reasons someone might think of another person as an enemy?
- Why might someone think of a stranger as an enemy?

Explain that Jesus said that when we truly love him, we will show love to all people, even those who don’t like or love us. Loving people who have hurt us can seem almost impossible; the only way we can begin to do what Jesus says is to change the way we see others. When we begin to see everyone, even our enemies, as part of God’s creation, then our hearts will open with the same love we hold for our family and friends.

Show the video, a Tom and Jerry cartoon. After the video, ask: *Why did Tom, the cat, change the way he saw the baby duck?*

### 5 Forgiveness

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on your own life of forgiveness. When have you felt unable to let go of hurt, anger, or sadness? If you are able, tell children about an experience of forgiveness in your life.

**Supplies:**

- device with Internet access
- video: “*Godspell*: Love Your Enemies,” <http://youtu.be/wVCJ3WJMdrI>
- Bible

Show the video, which comes from the musical *Godspell*. After the video, read aloud Matthew 5:43–48. Discuss:

- How are the words of Jesus expressed in the *Godspell* video?
- Do you think it is more difficult to forgive ourselves or forgive others? Forgive friends and family or forgive strangers?
- What happens when people are unable to forgive?
- What is the difference between forgiving and forgetting?
- How are we blessed through forgiveness? How are we blessed when others forgive us?

### 6 Aloha Shalom

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the song “Shalom Chaverim” and learn the American Sign Language sign for the word “peace,” using the link to the ASL dictionary.



### Supplies:

- American Sign Language sign for “peace,” <http://www.signingsavvy.com/sign/PEACE>
- song: “Shalom Chaverim,” traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnnc>
- video recording equipment

Point out that the Hebrew word “shalom” and the Hawaiian word “aloha” have similar meanings. Each word is used in many ways, but their most common meanings are “peace,” “hello,” and “goodbye.” Invite the children to consider how a word can mean both hello and goodbye. Often when we think of having to say goodbye to someone, especially a friend or family member, we are filled with sadness. *What if we believed our goodbyes always held the promise of hello?*

Explain that perhaps the words to the song “Shalom Chaverim” hold the meaning of both “aloha” and “shalom”—“Have peace, my friends, until we meet again.” Teach the children the American Sign Language sign for “peace” so they can express the concept with both voice and hands. Invite one of the learners to video record the song as it is sung and signed by the children.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Sadako and the Paper Cranes (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Recall your earliest experience with death. Take time before gathering with the children to consider the difficult “letting go” that death requires. Some of the children in your care may have already experienced the death of a family member, friend, or pet, and may still feel their absence. Do not minimize the sadness felt when a loved one dies, but help the children to see that even as a body dies, the spirit of that life lives on in our memories.

The story of Sadako and the paper cranes is also told in the Art Rotation, Activity 8, with the children learning to fold origami cranes.

### Supplies:

- device with Internet access
- video: “Sadako’s Cranes,” <http://youtu.be/yITtwQ0gHlo>

Tell children that the video they will be seeing is about a young girl named Sadako, who died as a result of the effects of radiation after the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima. Many of the children may already be aware of Sadako’s story.

After showing the video, ask the children to think about what was born from Sadako’s illness and death. Ask them to think of others who have been able to move beyond great hardships to create something good and powerful, such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Anne Frank. Ask them if they know people in their own lives who are inspiring because of the way they have found joy and hope in the midst of struggle.





### 8 Let Me Sow Love

**Leader preparation:** Use the Prayer of St. Francis as a time of centering. Read the prayer once silently, and then again out loud. Are there phrases that resonant more strongly than others? Choose one phrase to use as a breath prayer. For example, use the second line of the prayer: inhale with the first portion (“Where there is hatred”), and exhale with the second (“let me sow peace”).

**Supplies:**

- “Prayer of St. Francis,” Attachment: Activity 8
- device with Internet access
- video: “Prayer of St. Francis,” <http://youtu.be/ZC9ZAykH8ys>
- video camera

Distribute copies of the handout “Prayer of St. Francis.” Invite children to read it aloud in unison. Talk about the opposite emotions, actions, and images contained in the prayer. Invite pairs of children to take turns reading the prayer, alternating verses and video record the readings.

After the children are familiar with the prayer, show the video. Ask them to pay attention to the words and also the artwork created by children. After the video, invite the children to share their impressions.

### 9 Bless and Let Go

**Leader preparation:** View both videos and decide which is appropriate for your age group.

**Supplies:**

- device with Internet access
- video: “The Miniature Earth Project,” <http://www.miniature-earth.com> (good for older children)
- video: “If the World Were a Village,” <http://youtu.be/FtYjUv2x65g> (good for younger children)

Explain that our world is so big and filled with so many people that it is hard to feel how we are connected as God’s family. We don’t always know how our lives affect the lives of other people. The Miniature Earth Project was created to put the world in perspective and show what the earth’s population would look like if it were a village of 100 people.

## Reflect

Remember your time with the children and use a paraphrase of the Prayer of St. Francis to ground you in practice of blessing and letting go. Did you seek to console more than to be consoled? Did you seek to understand more than to be understood? Did you seek to love more than to be loved?

Show one of the videos. After the video, ask the children what surprised them most about the world’s “village.” Ask: *What might some people need to let go of so others might have more? How difficult would it be to do this?*

Suggest that the children consider starting a Bless and Let Go campaign at church. Identify a place of need within the greater community (homeless shelter, safe houses for abused women and children) and invite the congregation to donate items that they still treasure, not just things they are ready to part with. During the campaign the children can tell the congregation what they have discovered about the wisdom, peace, and joy of blessing and letting go.





Attachment: Activity 8

**Prayer of Saint Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.