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Traditions and Transitions

JOHN 14:15-23



GOAL

The children identify and mark transitions in life and in the church and hear that God's Spirit is with us in these holy times of change, loss, and beginnings.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, help me to assure the children in my care that you love them and abide in each of their hearts, particularly through times of change. Amen.

THIS SESSION

As hard as goodbyes are, they are part of living in community. Communities celebrate milestones, both happy and sad. This session will explore the milestones that communities share together—including those around people leaving the community—remembering that we are all one in Christ Jesus. Even when we are physically apart, we are still connected through our love of God.

THE BIBLE STORY

This story from John is Jesus' promise to the disciples. Although he will not live among them any longer, the Holy Spirit will guide their work. In keeping Christ's commandments, we keep Christ with us. An important undercurrent to this story, which should be reflected in the leadership of this session, is that God's love is bigger than any one of us, and that God's love endures beyond transitions and through all of the life markers and events that we will face.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Rather than thinking of transitions, milestones, and goodbyes as sad or scary times, this session will help children think about how to acknowledge milestones, times of transition, and goodbyes within a community. By recognizing and creating rituals and traditions, these milestones and transitions can be looked at as both endings and beginnings. Children will bring varying experiences with them to this session. Even if they may seem minor, many of the usual times of transition that children experience can feel like a big deal to them.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Singing Together" (p. 34): Obtain hymnals with the song "O Look and Wonder" or use the prepared newsprint with the lyrics of the song from session 1.


Depending on the options you choose:

- "All Kinds of Goodbyes" (p. 35): Obtain *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2015) or use the YouTube video "Read Out Loud—The Goodbye Book" (bit.ly/FMGoodbyeBook, 2:27).
- "Celebrating and Remembering Life Milestones at Church" (p. 36): Obtain white 4"x 4" tiles or mini-canvas panels. Speak to a pastor or church leader about appropriate milestones for the activity (optional).



GETTING STARTED

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- Pictures cut apart from Resource Pages 1 and 2

 If you have more than twelve children or you need more variety in pictures, find additional photos in magazines or from an internet search to add to the other pictures.

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- Hymnals with the song “O Look and Wonder” or prepared newsprint with the lyrics of the song from session 1
 - Internet-connected device (optional)

PICTURE IT!



Greet the children as they arrive and invite them to look at the pictures from Resource Pages 1 and 2 you have displayed on a table. Encourage them to choose a picture that speaks to them in some way; they may like it or may identify with it. Tell them that these pictures represent transitions, or changes, in our lives, some big and some small. Invite the children to imagine a short story about their picture. Tell them that they will share their stories with the group. Have the children hold onto their pictures for “The Circle of Life” (below).

SINGING TOGETHER



Use hymnals or display newsprint with the lyrics to the song “O Look and Wonder.” Talk through the words to the song, then listen to the tune. If the whole song seems too ambitious, just sing the refrain, and perhaps the first verse in this session. Repeat it several times, especially the refrain.

To hear the tune, go to bit.ly/FMOLookTune (0:21). To sing along in Spanish (words not provided on the video), show the YouTube video “*Miren que Bueno* (O Look and Wonder)” (bit.ly/FMMiren, 1:52). Try to sing the refrain in English and Spanish.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

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- Pictures from “Picture It!” above

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE




Invite each child to share their picture and the short story they imagined about their picture.

Once all children have shared, have them get up and arrange all the photos in a *circle of life* on a large table or open area of floor. There is not a particular right or wrong order for the pictures, simply what the children create together. Discuss together the different transitions and milestones of life these pictures represent. Encourage the children to brainstorm additional ones not represented in the images.

Use the questions below for conversation:

- ✦ Although many of the transitions and milestones here are mostly happy or mostly sad, there are both good and bad things associated with each of them. What happy and sad things can you think of for these milestones?
- ✦ Which of these milestones or transitions have you experienced? What sorts of things did you learn from going through them?
- ✦ What rituals or traditions do you associate with these milestones? Did you, your family, or a group you were a part of do something special to mark this event?
- ✦ How do you think the church community can support people through these milestones and transitions?

Set aside pictures for “A Request, a Gift, and a Promise” (p. 35).

 Try and be aware of any children who may have undergone a major transition such as parents’ divorce or the death of a close family member or pet. They may want to talk about the experience, or they may not. Be flexible and follow the children’s lead.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

JESUS' GOODBYE WORDS



Tell the children that you are going to read a Bible story about some of the things Jesus said to his disciples when he was with them for the last time. Read the adapted Bible story from John 14:15–23 on Resource Page 3 or read the passage from the Bible. Invite the children to spend three minutes quietly thinking about the story and what Jesus told the disciples. Encourage the children to draw or jot down words if that is helpful. Gather as a group and ask the children if, in their quiet time, they had any thoughts about the story to share with the group. If needed, you may use the following prompts or some of your own to stimulate conversation:

- ➔ Imagine you are a disciple hearing Jesus' words. What emotions might you be feeling?
- ➔ Jesus talked about love a great deal in this passage. How do you think it feels to have to say goodbye to someone you love?
- ➔ What question would you have for Jesus if you were one of the disciples?

- Resource Page 3
- Bibles (optional)
- Paper, pencils



The *Common English Bible* is a good choice for children, but use what you have available.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

A REQUEST, A GIFT, AND A PROMISE



Randomly distribute the pictures from “The Circle of Life” (p. 34). Form groups of three or four children, or work together as one. Have the children choose one card within their group and invite them to imagine what might be a request, a gift, and a promise that the people (in the picture, or who might not be in the picture but part of their life) might make, just as Jesus did with his disciples. An example might be: at baptism, a congregation might *request* that the child be a part of Sunday school, *gift* the child with a handmade quilt, and *promise* to teach them about Jesus. Have the groups create a skit to show their ideas.

- Pictures from “The Circle of Life” (p. 34)

ALL KINDS OF GOODBYES



Read *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr or show the YouTube video “Read Out Loud—The Goodbye Book” (bit.ly/FMGoodbyeBook, 2:27). Invite the children to share a story of a time when they had to say goodbye. Use the following questions for conversation:

- ➔ What feelings described in the book have you experienced? Are there other feelings *not* in the book that you experienced when saying a goodbye?
- ➔ What helped you feel better when you experienced some of the sad, mad, or confused feelings of goodbyes?
- ➔ What is something that you learned (and still remember!) from someone that you said goodbye to?

- The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2015) or internet-connected device



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Paper, pencils
 - Newsprint
 - Smartphone or tablet for recording (optional)

SONGS FOR SPECIAL TIMES

M

Form small groups, or work together as one, to create one or more songs that could be sung for a specific transition, such as a baptism, first Bible, moving, saying goodbye, and so forth. Tell the children that they will write the words to fit a familiar tune by counting the number of syllables in a line. Explain that this is called the *meter*, or the beats in a line of a song. Have the children count out the syllables, or beats, to the first two lines of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

Twinkle, twinkle, little star, (7)
how I wonder what you are. (7)

Affirm that there are seven beats in each line of the song, so, if they write new words to the tune, they would write six lines with seven syllables, or beats, in each line.

If the “Doxology,” also known as “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” sung to the traditional tune OLD HUNDREDTH is familiar to the children, they could use that song, which has four lines with eight beats in each line.

Rhyming is not as important as the number of beats per line, but if the children want to try rhyming, the rhyming pattern is as follows:

- “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”—AA, BB, AA (The last two lines repeat the first two lines.)
- “Doxology”—AA, BB

Have the children write the words to their song(s) on newsprint. Have everyone try singing the new words to the familiar tune. Take a video of the children singing, after they have practiced a few times, and play it back for them. Consider sharing the song(s) and video with church leaders and the congregation, as appropriate.

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- Newsprint, markers
 - White 4”x 4” tiles or mini-canvas panels
 - Permanent colored markers

CELEBRATING AND REMEMBERING LIFE MILESTONES AT CHURCH

A

Many milestones happen at church. Invite the children to share ones that they can think of. If necessary, mention baptism, receiving a first Bible, confirmation, weddings, funerals, moving away, and leaving the church, or others that occur in your congregation.

Tell the children that they will create a decorated tile or canvas panel to be given to people in your congregation who reach one of these milestones.

Have the children brainstorm pictures and words that would be appropriate for their artwork and write them on newsprint. Some ideas might be:

- Inspired by Scripture:
 - If you love me you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)
 - May God’s peace guard your heart and mind. (from Philippians 4:7)
 - Nothing can separate us from God’s love. (from Romans 8:38–39)
- Images or other words:
 - Drawn images of a heart, a cross, water, a butterfly, or another Christian symbol

- Words of your church’s mission statement or tagline, such as:
 - “You are God’s beloved child.”

Provide tiles or canvas panels and permanent colored markers. Have the children sign the back with their first name and age. Give the artwork to the pastor or appropriate committee person to distribute when needed.



Contact the pastor or appropriate committee to see what a specific need might be for baptisms, members moving away, or other such transition moments in the church. Adjust the activity as appropriate.



FOLLOWING JESUS

BLESSING



Tell the children that the words that worship leaders say at the end of the service have a special name. Often there is a *charge*, and there is always a *benediction*. The charge is a challenge or instruction to the people—something that perhaps was shared in the service that the leader wants the people to remember and try to live into in the week. The benediction is a blessing—a promise that God goes with the people.

Remind the children that, in the Bible story, Jesus made a request (or a charge) to his disciples: “keep my commandments.” Then Jesus had a gift and a promise (a benediction) for them: “God will send an Advocate, and I will not be gone forever.”

Using the model of worship and the model of Jesus, have the leader offer a challenge and a gift or promise to each child individually or to the group as a whole. One example might be:

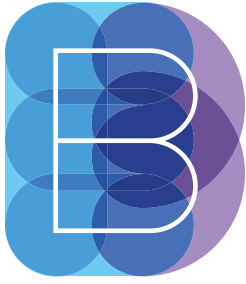
I challenge you to celebrate the changes that may come your way this week, and I send you with a blessing as you tackle your school projects and homework.

Invite anyone who would like to offer a challenge and blessing to the group to do so.

End the time together with the words “And all God’s children say . . .” and invite the children to respond, “Amen.”







BIBLE STORY

BASED ON JOHN 14:15–23

As Jesus was explaining to his disciples what was to come, and how he would no longer be living among them, he had important things to say to them:

He had a challenge for the disciples: “If you really want to show that you love me, you must remember my teaching and keep the commandments I have given you.”

He had a gift for the disciples: “I will ask God to give you another Advocate when I am gone—the Spirit of truth; I know it may be hard to understand, but this Spirit of truth will be in each of you.”

He made a promise to the disciples: “I know you worry that I am leaving you all alone, but I will come again.”

The disciples heard these words, but they had questions! “How?” They asked.

Jesus again reminded them. “LOVE. Keep these words I have been teaching you; my words are God’s words, and when you follow my word, you experience God’s love.”

