



**THE WAY OF LOVE**  
*Practices for Jesus-Centered Life*

**Life Transformed:  
The Way of Love in Lent**

**Adult Forums for Lent**

By Hillary Raining and Jenifer Gamber

[episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove](http://episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove)

# LIFE TRANSFORMED: THE WAY OF LOVE IN LENT

## ADULT FORUMS FOR LENT

### About “Life Transformed: The Way of Love in Lent”

The journey through Lent into Easter is a journey with Jesus. We are baptized into his life, self-giving, and death; then, we rise in hope to life transformed. This Lent, communities are invited to walk with Jesus in his Way of Love and into the experience of transformed life. Together, we will reflect anew on the loving actions of God as recounted in the Easter Vigil readings. Together, we will walk through the depths of salvation history into the fullness of redemption.

This set of seven Adult Forums ties the Easter Vigil readings to the seven practices of the Way of Love. Drawing on the ancient practice of setting aside Lent as a period of study and preparation for living as a Christian disciple (known as the catechumenate), the forums encourage participants to reflect on salvation history; walk toward the empty tomb; and embrace the transforming reality of love, life, and liberation. As we stand with the three women at the empty tomb, we hear his call to go and live that transformed reality.

These forums are suitable for diverse formation contexts, from traditional Sunday morning forum hours to midweek gatherings over a meal and regular study groups. While these seven sessions have been written for use over the six weeks of Lent with one offering in Easter, congregations can use this curriculum as an entry point into the Way of Love any time of the year. As people of God, ours is an ongoing journey.

After the 40 days of Lent, participants are invited into a 50-day Eastertide “Test Kitchen.” During this time, people everywhere will actively “GO” with Jesus from the tomb to bless the world – and then share and inspire each other with accounts of how they are living the Way of Love. Learn more about the Test Kitchen here: [bit.ly/50daysWOL](http://bit.ly/50daysWOL)

For a complete set of offerings associated with this curriculum, please visit [www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove)

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### Curriculum Resources

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Learn more about The Way of Love and The Episcopal Church at [www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove). Share reflections and queries by writing to [wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org) or on social media using #wayoflove.

Scriptural citations from the New Revised Standard Version.

# LIFE TRANSFORMED: THE WAY OF LOVE IN LENT

## SESSIONS IN BRIEF

### **Session One / TURN:** Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ (Romans 6:3-11)

As Christians, we are continually called to repent and be renewed in faith. This session introduces the Way of Love and invites participants to reflect on themes of repentance and the new life we have in Christ through baptism. Participants consider spiritual practices of turning away from the spiritual forces of evil and sin, and turn toward Christ.

### **Session Two / PRAY:** Israel's Deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:10-15:1)

God's people prayed throughout their Exodus from slavery in Egypt: The Israelites cried out to God; Moses cried out on behalf of the people; Miriam gave thanks with tambourines and dance. This session invites participants to learn and practice varieties of prayer.

### **Session Three / LEARN:** Learn Wisdom and Live (Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6)

As wisdom says: "My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver." This session will take a careful look at the gift of wisdom through the practice of reading Scripture. Participants will leave with a model for "holy reading."

### **Session Four / BLESS:** A New Heart and a New Spirit (Ezekiel 36:24-28)

Blessed by God, we can bless others and bear new life in the world. This session examines the scriptural call to be freed from idols and given a new heart. Participants explore their ties to modern day "idols" (work, money, power, etc.) to see what practices can be transformed into blessings for the sake of the world.

### **Session Five / REST:** The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

True sabbath time will help to restore us – body, mind, and soul – like the dry bones into which God breathes new life. This session explores the meaning of sabbath and the variety of ways to keep it. Participants commit to their own specific sabbath practice.

### **Session Six / WORSHIP:** The Gathering of God's People (Zephaniah 3:12-20)

This session includes a clear call to worship God and give thanks for all God's blessings. Participants try out practices designed to help them see the glory of God in all things, turning life itself into an act of worship.

### **Session Seven / GO:** The Empty Tomb (Luke 24:1-12)

On Easter morning, we go from the tomb into the world, ready to take up Jesus' life and mission, and to share resurrection hope in our words and actions. This session invites participants to craft an action plan based on the Baptismal Covenant, and to discern how they could "GO" to join God's mission of border-crossing, transformation, and healing.

# SESSION ONE / TURN

## DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE IN CHRIST

### Note to Leaders

Leaders may want to review and give a brief overview of the Way of Love. An introductory handout and video, along with descriptions of each of the seven practices, can be found at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/explore-way-love>. You may also consider printing or ordering a set of Way of Love brochures. PDF files of the brochures (pocket guides) can be downloaded at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love-materials> or ordered from Forward Movement (product #2542).

### Materials Needed (List of materials)

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant in the group
- A copy of the Easter Vigil service for each participant (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 285-295)
- Paper and envelopes for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session One (Romans 6:3-11)
- Discussion questions for Session One
- Optional: Video projection with internet streaming

### ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 254)

### REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)

#### Scripture reading

Invite a participant to read Romans 6:3-11 to the whole group.

(See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)

For the ancient Church, the Easter Vigil was the night when catechumens (those who had been studying for months in preparation of their baptisms) would enter into the waters of new birth and emerge members of Christ's body, the Church.

Our current baptismal practices rarely do justice to the drama that those nights would contain. We have evidence that catechumens would be asked to stand on a hair-shirt (a mark of penitence), confess their sins, and renounce Satan and all the forces of wickedness that drew them from the love of God. As they did so, they would turn toward the West – the direction associated with death, since the sun always sets over the western horizon. Then, they would TURN and face the East – the direction of new life and resurrection.

As they watched the sun begin to rise, they would make their profession of faith and walk into the large font. Indeed, the fonts would likely have been shaped as crosses or sarcophagi (a larger, more elaborate casket) to call to mind Paul's words about being buried with Christ in baptism. A jar of oil would be poured over their heads, and they would be dressed in a gleaming white garment. Finally, they would be ushered into another room where all their Christian brothers and sisters would greet them. The room was lit with the new fire of Easter, and they were invited to taste their first Eucharist.

The drama and mystery of the moment are palpable even now, and it is no wonder that this ancient rite has been adopted into our modern Easter practices and every baptism. In our baptism, we have turned from a life of sin and begun to walk the Way of Love back to God. In our baptism, we have turned from death itself and been joined with Christ in his everlasting life. And in our baptism, we have turned from living a life alone and have become one with the whole Church as members of the Body of Christ.

### **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

In his letter to the Romans, Paul lays out his theological belief that baptism is the TURNING point in our new life with Christ. It is the time that we leave the life of sin and death behind us to be born into life that is eternal.

Divide into smaller groups to discuss the lesson and answer some of these questions.

**NOTE:** You may not have time for all of these, so feel free to pick a few that will have the most impact for your group.

Paul's vision of a baptismal life is one lived free from the weight of everlasting sin and death. What does it mean to be free from that burden? How much does sin weigh on you?

- Do you remember your baptism? If so, describe it for the group. If not, what might your baptism be like if you were to be baptized today?
- Turning is a practice that involves confessing our sins as well as forgiving others. Share a story about a time when you were forgiven. How did it feel?
- In your packet, you have been given a copy of the Easter Vigil. Take a moment to review the parts of the vigil with your group and make note of what sticks out to you. Have you ever been to an Easter Vigil? If so, what did you notice? If not, what part intrigues you?
- Discuss specific practices of turning away from forces that separate us from God and turning toward Christ. Formal examples include the General Confession (Book of Common Prayer, p. 359) and Reconciliation of a Penitent (Book of Common Prayer, p. 447). Informal examples include the Ignatian practice of examen to reflect on each day. The examen consists of asking pairs of questions, such as the following: What has brought you joy this day? What has brought you sorrow? Focus on those things that bring you joy. They are likely those that draw you closer to God.
- What are the places in your life that need to be turned back to God so that new life can break forth?
- If there is time, watch this two-minute video (<https://youtu.be/se9suaWjdX4>) to hear Jake Owensby, bishop of the Episcopal Church in Western Louisiana, talk about repentance. After

watching, have the group consider the following questions:

- The act of turning toward Christ is an act of repentance. How does Bishop Owensby challenge or reframe your understanding of repentance?
- How might this reframing change your practice of repentance?
- How is repentance good news to you? To others?

### **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

One of the greatest gifts of baptism is having a Christian family to help us in our journey. Take this time to share with the larger group some of the sacred stories that have been shared within the small groups, offering any opportunities to TURN in your life.

### **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

Give everyone a blank piece of paper and an envelope, which they should address to themselves. Then, ask the participants to do the following: Take time before the next session to write a letter to yourself containing your hopes and prayers for this journey. Imagine that you are starting this time by facing toward the metaphorical West in your life – the habits, beliefs, or behaviors that draw you from the love of God – and make a commitment to TURN away from them. See this as an opportunity to turn to a new way of life with God, which is promised to us in baptism. Bring your letter back, sealed in your self-addressed envelope, to be held onto by the leader until the last session.

Participants may consider downloading the “Reimagining the Examen” app (free) by Loyola Press to help them settle into a practice of turning each day.

### **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord’s resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 222)

# **SESSION TWO / PRAY**

## **ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA**

### **Materials Needed (List of materials)**

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Two (Exodus 14:10-15:1)
- Discussion questions for Session Two
- Copies of the Spiritual Preferences found in the resource section of this curriculum
- Optional: Video projection with internet streaming

### **ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)**

O God, whose wonderful deeds of old shine forth even to our own day, you once delivered by the power of your mighty arm your chosen people from slavery under Pharaoh, to be a sign for us of the salvation of all nations by the water of Baptism: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may be numbered among the offspring of Abraham, and rejoice in the inheritance of Israel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 289)

### **REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)**

#### **Scripture reading**

Ask one or two participants to read Exodus 14:10-15:1 to the whole group. (See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### **Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)**

The story of the Exodus is one of the most important baptismal stories in the whole Bible. In the blessing over the water, which we PRAY at every baptism, we remember that the Hebrews were liberated from bondage in Egypt through water. Exodus is also the only reading that is specifically required in the Easter Vigil because of the way God delivered Israel through the Red Sea and the pillar of fire lit the way for God's people. That pillar is echoed in the Easter fire, which shines in our darkness at the vigil. The Exodus event holds a seminal place in the recitation of God's liberating action – the common thread woven throughout the vigil and the Bible itself.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this powerful story is the way prayer has been woven through every step the Israelites took in their path to liberation. When they were afraid and even doubted, their prayer was heard by God who told them that he would not abandon them. When they were about to be overtaken by the Egyptians, their prayer for deliverance was answered. Moses was given the power to part the sea, and they crossed on dry land. Finally, when they were safe, the prophet Miriam led a prayer of rejoicing and thanksgiving with song and dancing. Each of these prayers is important to the story and to the relationship built between God and God's people.

As you will remember in our first session, in the early Church, Lent was a time for catechumens (those who were preparing to be baptized) to learn about the Christian life. The outline of the faith that they would follow was called a catechism, and we still have a similar form in our Book of Common Prayer today (pp. 845-862).

In particular, our catechism describes the role of prayer in Christian life, including the seven types of prayer.

1. **Adoration:** We lift up our hearts and minds to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.
2. **Praise:** We praise God, not to obtain anything, but because God's Being draws praise from us.
3. **Thanksgiving:** We offer gratitude to God for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to God.
4. **Penitence:** In penitence, we say we are sorry, confess our sins, and make amends and life change wherever possible.
5. **Oblation:** We offer ourselves, our lives and labors, in union with Christ, for God's purposes.
6. **Intercession:** We bring before God the needs of others.
7. **Petition:** We present our own needs, that God's will may be done.

Each of these forms of prayer will help you grow and bring you into a closer relationship with God. In fact, Scripture tells us that even when we don't know how to pray, "the Holy Spirit will intercede for us" and teach our heart how to pray in "sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

If there is time, watch and discuss this video together about yoga as a spiritual practice: [vimeo.com/232710051](https://vimeo.com/232710051).

- Audrey Berg-Clothier finds yoga to be a way to "change the channel," tune out what is distracting, and simply pray. What practices have you found that help you "change the channel" and pray?
- Hillary Raining talks about the connection between body and spirit and uses the phrase, "what happens on the mat also happens off the mat." Prayer is that way. It changes us. How have you found prayer to be transformative?

### **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

PRAYER is one of the essential components of walking the Way of Love. Yet, some people can find it intimidating, frustrating, or hard to practice. In your group, spend some time discussing your prayer life:

- Which of the prayer styles from the catechism speak to you? Is there one that comes naturally?
- Which of the prayer styles from the list above seem hard or strange to you? Would you be able to spend some time in the next week trying these styles?
- Many people conceptualize prayer as a stationary activity done in solitary silence; however,

as we read in Exodus 14, people pray in many different ways, including with their bodies and with music. The Book of Common Prayer defines “prayer” as “responding to God, by thought and deeds, with or without words” (p. 856). Have you encountered any kinds of prayers that have been a welcomed surprise to you, such as walking a labyrinth, using prayer beads, journaling, coloring, or singing? If so, what are these prayer styles like for you? If not, would you be willing to give some a try? What constitutes a prayer for you?

- Share a story about a time when your prayers were answered.
- What is your current prayer life like? Does it feed you or are you in a “desert place” that feels barren? Do you find it hard to make time for prayer? If so, is there one small change you can make to your schedule to open up a space, like the parting of the Red Sea, to let the Holy Spirit enter your heart through prayer?

### **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

When we offer our PRAYERS for one another, we can grow in faith and unity. Take turns, inviting each participant to offer up a prayer for him/herself and a prayer of intercession for someone else in the group. It can be personal or more general in nature, but be sure to have the other person’s permission before sharing another’s concern, to avoid a breach of confidentiality.

### **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

Ask the participants to do the following: Take a small piece of paper and write down the different types of PRAYER listed in the catechism. Post these somewhere you can see them every day. Some good places might include your steering wheel, your mirror, or your computer screen. At least once a day, commit to offering up one prayer from each type, paying attention to what the Holy Spirit might be teaching your heart.

Alternatively, take the Spiritual Preferences found in the resource section to discover what prayer practice may suit you. Try that prayer practice for a few weeks.

### **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 231)

# SESSION THREE / LEARN

## LEARN WISDOM AND LIVE

### Materials Needed (List of materials)

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Three (Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6)
- Discussion questions for Session Three
- Lectio Divina handout in the resource section of this curriculum

### ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 236)

### REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)

#### Scripture reading

Invite one or two participants to read Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 to the whole group. (See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)

As mentioned in the previous sessions, Lent has always been the traditional time of study and growth for those who seek to follow Jesus' way and LEARN his life and teachings. As Christians, we are invited to continue to grow in our knowledge and love of God. Remember, Episcopal tradition holds that we never really "arrive" in our journey with God.

This passage from the Book of Proverbs echoes the blessing we pray over every newly baptized Christian that the person might have an "inquiring and discerning heart" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 308). In this passage, wisdom is personified as a woman crying out for people at the crossroads of the city to hear the gift of life she offers. In the Bible, wisdom is an active and powerful force present even at the beginning of the world. She does not want anyone to be left without knowledge of God and refuses to deny God's love to anyone who is willing to learn. However, gaining wisdom is not simply studying a book or memorizing a few facts. Wisdom goes beyond mere knowledge into action. We cannot be considered wise if we do not act in accordance with what we have learned. Wisdom demands integrity. Wisdom calls us to "lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Proverbs 9:6).

The baptismal blessing over the water notes that "the Holy Spirit moved over the waters at creation" (Genesis 1:2). Wisdom is often equated with the Holy Spirit herself. In other words, every part of this earth is created with some element of the powerful gift of wisdom. One method for us to practice learning is to sit at the feet of Jesus, our great teacher in wisdom, and learn his way through regular meditation on the Scriptures. Through him, we can access the wisdom that fills all of creation and already lives in each one of us.

## **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

When we are dedicated to learning more about God's wisdom through relationship with Jesus and with others, we open ourselves up to God's holy word made manifest in all with whom we come in contact. Let the wisdom of the group begin to bubble up in your conversation around some of these topics:

- Where in your life are you truly wise? How do you share that wisdom?
- What aspect of God would you like to learn more about? Grace? Peace? Prophecy? Is there someone you know who is wise in these ways you could interview?
- How often do you spend time reading the Bible? What wisdom have you gleaned from its pages?
- In what ways has the Holy Spirit been calling out to you to learn more about her and her wise ways?

## **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

Knowing that the collective wisdom in a group is a holy gift, share some of the wisdom you have LEARNED today. What action are you going to take to begin walking the Way of Love?

## **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

Reading and LEARNING from Scripture are wonderful ways of growing in the knowledge of God. Even if we have read a passage dozen times before, it could still yield fresh wisdom when we ask the Holy Spirit to move over it, as she does over the waters of creation and baptism. Lectio Divina is a wonderful way to open the reading of Scripture up as a wisdom practice. Hand out the summary of Lectio Divina found in the resource section of this curriculum, and invite participants to use the practice of Lectio Divina with this week's passage.

## **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing; Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 216)

# **SESSION FOUR / BLESS**

## **A NEW HEART AND A NEW SPIRIT**

### **Materials Needed (List of materials)**

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Four (Ezekiel 36:24-28)
- Discussion questions for Session Four

### **ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)**

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who are reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(Book of Common Prayer, pp. 290-291)

### **REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)**

#### **Scripture reading**

Invite one or two participants to read Ezekiel 36:24-28 to the whole group.  
(See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### **Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)**

In our first session, we explored the ancient baptismal ritual that is the foundation for the Great Vigil of Easter. In the passage from Ezekiel for this session, we see that God BLESSES the Israelites through the act of sprinkling them with clean water. This reading reminds us that we, too, are blessed by God through the waters of baptism. Some congregations practice asperging (the sprinkling of holy water on the people) in the Easter Vigil after the renewal of baptismal promises.

As noted, a major element in the ancient rite was turning from sin and renouncing the things that draw us from the love of God. We are called to renounce the idols we worship in place of God. Now, from our modern viewpoint, we might not think we worship idols; however, idols are not simply images of other gods. Rather, an idol is anything to which we assign ultimate value in our lives – those things we spend our time, talent, and treasure serving other than God. Our job, power, money, reputation, certain relationships, or anything that pulls on our heart more than God – these are idols.

While idols seem momentarily satisfying, they eventually harm our relationship with God and limit our capacity or willingness to live for others. Often, we cling to idols out of an attitude of scarcity; we desire what we think we do not have. When our hearts are focused on an idol, they are bound up and clenched shut like a heart of stone. Only when we turn to God will our hearts be opened so that we can, in turn, open our hearts in blessing to others. When we realize that there is enough of God's love for us, we no longer cling to the idols of old that can never give us that sense of abundance. Once we are secure in that abundance, we will leap to bless others with our stories, our money, our time, and our hearts.

## **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

BLESSING is necessarily relational, an affirmation of our belovedness as fellow children of God. Share the blessing of fellowship by sharing your reflection on this session's teaching.

- Take a few minutes to discuss what you have spent the most time, money, or worry on in the last week. What amount of attention or time do they take relative to resources spent in direct relationship with God? Did these things keep you from blessing others? Or are they a blessing?
- Jobs and relationships are, indeed, good. However, when we forget to see them as blessings from God that are meant to be offered back to God, they can begin to take the central place in our hearts. How can you reframe the most important things in your life as a blessing from God that you could give back to God?
- Who or what in your life needs a blessing right now? How can you help the person or the situation move from a place of stone and rigidity into a new life of joy and freedom?

## **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

Ezekiel tells us that through this cleansing action, “you shall be [God’s] people, and [God] will be your God” (36:28). This prophecy points to the fact that we enjoy new life in God, especially when we enter into community. Spend time together BLESSING one another by naming what particular gift or joy a member of the group has brought to your life and how you specifically hope God will bless that person.

## **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

God has given each of us gifts with which to BLESS others. In fact, for a community to be whole, every person's gifts must be called forth, nurtured, and used. Ask participants to do the following: Spend some time this week completing a spiritual gifts inventory and discovering what gifts you have to bless others. Return next week with your discoveries. Here is one inventory you might try online: [www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Spiritual-Renewal/Assessment-Tools](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Spiritual-Renewal/Assessment-Tools).

Alternatively, in Lent, many people decide to take on a practice of giving something up in order to clear the path between us and God. This week, spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide you in what you might release or surrender – be it stress or a habit, or even giving a sacrificial financial gift to a worthy cause – in order to be a blessing to yourself and others.

## **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

God of hope, from you come every blessing and all peace: Show us that, in the midst of our struggles, you are with us. Give us the abundance of your grace that we may do the work you give us to do and that we may be for the world a sign of your presence; through Christ, the Way and the Truth. Amen. [The Office of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, *Daily Prayer for All Seasons* (New York: Church Publishing, 2014), 71.]

# SESSION FIVE / REST

## THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

### Materials Needed (List of materials)

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Five (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
- Discussion questions for Session Five

### ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)

Almighty God, by the Passover of your Son you have brought us out of sin into righteousness and out of death into life: Grant to those who are sealed by your Holy Spirit the will and the power to proclaim you to all the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 291)

### REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)

#### Scripture reading

Invite one or two participants to read Ezekiel 37:1-14 to the whole group. (See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)

We do not live in a culture that encourages REST. All too often, we are forced to work harder and longer hours, and it shows in our health. Yet, from the beginning, God – who rested on the seventh day of creation – set rest into the pattern of all life. Truly practicing the Way of Love means spending time with God in sabbath rest. Not everyone has the luxury of long breaks and vacations, or even days off. Still, we can help each other find ways internally to pause and receive the gift of sabbath. The act of rest and restoration is a part of the cycle of rebirth that is God's hope for us and gift to us.

In the exciting story of the Valley of the Dry Bones, we hear the way God sent God's breath, the Holy Spirit, onto a field of bones. That very breath was enough to reanimate them and bring them back to fullness of life. Making sabbath rest has the same impact. Sabbath rest provides the opportunity for God to refresh us, to breathe new life into us. When we neglect sabbath time with God, we can begin to feel withered and tired, just like those dry bones. This is no coincidence. When we constantly run from activity to activity without breathing and returning to God, we become depleted and dry.

The gospels record numerous times when Jesus retreated to a place of sabbath to reconnect with God and to receive the strength he needed to continue his ministry. In Luke 5 when the news about Jesus spread and crowds gathered around him, Jesus withdrew and prayed. Studies have shown that people who take regular breaks from work have higher rates of creativity and productivity. It should come as no surprise that the ritual of baptism follows the pattern of death into life – that is the sabbath cycle in action.

## **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

It has been said that we don't take a sabbath, but rather make sabbath. REST is an intentional act. Take time now to intentionally reflect on the practice of sabbath-making together.

- Do you currently have a practice of reserving a block of time each day, week, or month for sabbath rest? If so, how does it restore you? If not, what has the effect of that lack felt like? Lent is a chance to reevaluate our patterns of living. Is God calling you to explore the gift of sabbath this Lent?
- Notice the setting of the passage in Ezekiel. God brings Ezekiel outside of the city walls to see this powerful restoration of life. Do you find restoration in nature? If so, how can you tread more lightly on the earth, taking up actions that bring relief and restoration to a creation stressed by human demands on its resources?
- The breath of God has often been described as the Holy Spirit. What part of your life needs the Holy Spirit to breathe on it and spur new life?

## **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

“Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth? I will, with God’s help.” The Anglican Church of Canada added this pledge as the ninth question of their “covenant inquiry” at baptism. Similar language has been proposed at Episcopal General Conventions. Such a promise would remind us that we are tied to this creation by our baptism – we have been united with Christ, who entered into the world out of great love for creation.

One way we as Christians can conceptualize sabbath in an eco-stewardship mindset would be to think of giving sabbath REST to the earth through conservation. In the Bible, even creation gets a sabbath break every jubilee year, when the people do not work the soil. As sabbath people, we are seeking to conserve the energy and resources we use. Discuss ways that your church or ministry can help conserve our resources or give sabbath to the earth in another way.

## **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

Ask participants to do the following: This week, take a step to reclaim your time and commit to sabbath REST from digital media during some part of each day this week. This may include turning your smartphone or other handheld device off during meals so that you can be fully present to others or to your own thoughts, and at bedtime so you can be fully open to God’s voice and restorative presence.

Alternatively, commit to spending a block of time in an energy fast. This practice encourages us to turn off all our appliances and even our heat (if that is safe for you) and spend a time of quiet sabbath appreciating the stillness that comes with turning off distracting electronic devices. This will also be an act of conservation to help the earth itself have a bit of sabbath rest.

## **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 825)

# SESSION SIX / WORSHIP

## THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

### Materials Needed (list of materials)

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Six (Zephaniah 3:12-20)
- Copies of the Book of Common Prayer
- Discussion questions for Session Six

### ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 291)

### REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)

#### Scripture reading

Invite one or two participants to read Zephaniah 3:12-20 to the whole group. (See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)

One of the most dramatic elements of WORSHIP in the Easter Vigil is the element of surprise and delight baked into the liturgy. We start in darkness and subdued energy only to have a burst of worship-filled energy when we get to the ultimate song of worship: the Gloria! When we arrive at the Gloria, we throw on the lights, ring bells, sing at our loudest, and may even have a gleeful asperging (sprinkling of holy water as a reminder of our baptism). We are celebrating the greatest surprise of all: the resurrection of Jesus, which put an end to death. This drama is an invitation to let our hearts be moved from fear and despair into gratitude and joy.

In this final oracle from Zephaniah, we hear a distinct call to worship that follows the same dramatic arc that we find in the Easter Vigil. God has come. It is a time for celebrate. We are told to “Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.... On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion ... he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love.” Here we see that God intends to turn all our fear into rejoicing, which means our worship should well up as an overwhelming act of gratitude.

In Jesus, the prophecy of Zephaniah is fulfilled. From the very moment he was born, the angels cried out to say “fear not” before breaking into their own Gloria song, mirroring ours during the Easter Vigil. In response to this wonderful gift from God, the shepherds ran to his stable to

worship the newborn King of Peace. As their fears subsided, their gratitude naturally flowed. Yet, by the time Jesus' life is ending, when faced with the possibility of following him to the cross, the disciples are once again filled with fear. When they are reunited with the resurrected Jesus, the doors of a new future are flung open and they return to a stance of gratitude and worship. Their fear of eternal death, as well as our own, has been buried in the empty tomb. We are invited to rejoice and let our gratitude for the gift of new life draw us to worship God.

### **EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)**

In our reading this week, we are called let go of our fears so that we might truly WORSHIP God. In a world beset by violence, hunger, exploitation, and oppression, this is no easy task.

- Do you find it hard to worship when fears are weighing you down? Are there any that you would like to share with the group? How can you let go and offer these fears to God?
- The disciples found it hard to believe in the promise of everlasting life that Jesus proclaimed throughout his ministry ... until they encountered him in his post-resurrection appearances. Do you ever struggle with the belief in the resurrection? What signs of resurrection have you seen in your life?
- What brings you the most joy in your life? Can that joy be offered up to God as an act of worship?
- What are your favorite ways to worship: praying together, singing, dancing, etc.? Why?

### **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

The disciples did not come to believe in Jesus on their own. They joined together in community to share their experiences of Jesus as Lord, experiences that would eventually form the backbone of our faith. The Apostles' Creed is an early statement of belief that forms the first part of the Baptismal Covenant found in the Easter Vigil service. The first three questions of the Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-305) frame the statements of the Apostles' Creed. Together, we can renew these vows and discuss the way these statements of belief call us from fear into joy.

### **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

As we have seen, practicing gratitude can call our hearts to WORSHIP. This week, our practice will cultivate gratitude, helping us set aside the fears that plague us. Ask participants to do the following: Using a notebook, or index cards, write down at least five things every day for which you are grateful. They can be very small, but they should be things that make you appreciate the gift of life we have from God. At the end of the week, bring this list to worship and place it in the offering plate as an act of grateful worship.

### **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore: Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 124)

# SESSION SEVEN / GO

## THE EMPTY TOMB

### Materials Needed (List of materials)

- Brochure or pocket guide to the Way of Love for each participant
- Scripture reading for Session Seven (Luke 24:1-12)
- Copies of the Book of Common Prayer
- Discussion questions for Session Seven
- Optional: Video projection with internet streaming

### ENTERING THE WAY (OPENING PRAYER)

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 222)

### REMEMBERING THE WAY (SCRIPTURE READING PLUS TEACHING)

#### Scripture reading

Invite one or two participants to read Luke 24:1-12 to the whole group. (See the resource section at the end of the curriculum for the reading.)

#### Teaching (Present and discuss the following teaching with the group)

Easter! What an amazing moment it must have been to be one of the women who went down to the tomb that first Easter morning. They came expecting death and sorrow. Their messiah and friend had been killed, and now the best they could hope for was to give him a proper burial. Instead, they find an empty tomb, two angelic figures proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, and an invitation to new life. Their expectations were blown away. This encounter with Jesus changed them so much that they were compelled to GO back to their fellow followers and proclaim the good news. Their testimony would eventually spread to every corner of the earth so that wherever we go, the love of God will meet us there.

In this journey, you have been called to engage with the mystery of death and resurrection as mirrored in the Easter Vigil. We have been called from darkness into light. From fear into joy. From sin into restoration. From death into life. Our job now is to follow the examples of those women and go into the world proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. Let this be the season that you go and live the full gift of the resurrection.

### EXPLORING THE WAY (REFLECTION OR PRACTICE IN SMALLER GROUPS)

- How will you GO and tell the story of the empty tomb out loud? How have you been changed and how might you change others?
- In the last few weeks, we have journeyed together in the Way of Love. What part has been most surprising or life-changing?

- Where do you think you will go from here? Are there particular barriers God is inviting you to cross, or particular places of brokenness God is inviting you to enter and help to heal?
- Are there any new actions, social justice initiatives, or habits that you would like to adopt?
- How will you be the hands, feet, eyes, and body of Jesus to this world?
- If you have time, watch this video (<https://vimeo.com/84250694>) about being missionaries.
  - Bishop Desmond Tutu says, “We are all missionaries or we are nothing.” Like the Marys at the tomb, we are a people sent. How are you sent?
  - Missionaries share, respond, love, and partner. What verbs would you use to describe mission? How does your faith community prod you to act?
  - Missionaries are old, young, planned, and unexpected. Can you identify a time when you were an unexpected missionary?

### **FINDING OUR WAY TOGETHER (REPORTING BACK TO THE GROUP)**

Retrieve those self-addressed letters from the beginning of your time, and take a moment to bless each one – perhaps even placing them on the altar at church. Have one person collect each letter and make a promise to mail them in a month. When participants receive theirs in the mail, they should read them in a prayerful way and reach out to other members of the group to see and share what signs of transformations everyone has seen in their life.

Alternatively, look at the five baptismal promises in the Baptismal Covenant together. Last week, in answering the first three questions in the Baptismal Covenant, we recounted all that God has done for us. How else can we respond but in love? As a Church, we are very specific about what we mean by love. You can find it in the five baptismal promises on pages 304-305 of the Book of Common Prayer. Look at these together and talk about what each means. Which is difficult? Which do you feel most drawn to? What might be missing? How will you go into the world this Easter to join in God’s transformation of all creation?

### **PRACTICING THE WAY AT HOME (A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME)**

Easter is not just one day. It is a season of 50 days, significantly longer than the 40 days in Lent. Our Church’s calendar is designed this way to help us remember that we are called to GO and live a life that is centered more on resurrection joy than on fear. Ask participants to do the following: During this Eastertide, find ways to live into the Way of Love you have walked this Lent. The end of our Lent journey is only the beginning, as we take all the transformation we have experienced and imagined and use it to join God in healing and reconciling the world. How will you continue to walk the Way of Love for your whole life? Who will be your companions along the way?

## **BEING SENT ON THE WAY (CLOSING PRAYER)**

**Read this poem by Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) together:**

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
with compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

# CURRICULUM RESOURCES

## THE WAY OF LOVE

### **Turn: Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus.**

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.

### **Pray: Dwell intentionally with God daily.**

Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in thought, word, or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray, we invite and dwell in God's loving presence.

### **Learn: Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.**

By reading and reflecting on Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God and God's word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to Scripture, we learn to see God's story and God's activity in everyday life.

### **Bless: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve.**

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

### **Rest: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration.**

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness – within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting, we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

### **Worship: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God.**

When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.

### **Go: Cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus.**

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort, to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

# CURRICULUM RESOURCES

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

### Life Transformed: The Way of Love

#### Session One: Romans 6:3-11

<sup>6</sup> <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For whoever has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

#### Session Two: Exodus 14:10-15:1

<sup>14</sup> <sup>10</sup>As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, “Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians”? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’ <sup>13</sup>But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup>The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.’

<sup>15</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. <sup>16</sup>But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup>Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. <sup>18</sup>And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.’

<sup>19</sup>The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. <sup>20</sup>It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

<sup>21</sup>Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup>The

Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. <sup>23</sup>The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. <sup>24</sup>At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. <sup>25</sup>He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.'

<sup>26</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' <sup>27</sup>So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. <sup>28</sup>The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. <sup>29</sup>But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

<sup>30</sup>Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup>Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

15 <sup>1</sup>Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:  
'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'

### **Session Three: Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6**

8 <sup>1</sup> Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?

<sup>2</sup> On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;

<sup>3</sup> beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

<sup>4</sup> 'To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live.

<sup>5</sup> O simple ones, learn prudence;  
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.

<sup>6</sup> Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is right;

<sup>7</sup> for my mouth will utter truth;  
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

<sup>8</sup> All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

<sup>19</sup> My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.

<sup>20</sup> I walk in the way of righteousness,  
along the paths of justice,

<sup>21</sup> endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries.'

9 <sup>4</sup> ‘You that are simple, turn in here!’

To those without sense she says,

<sup>5</sup> ‘Come, eat of my bread

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

<sup>6</sup> Lay aside immaturity, and live,

and walk in the way of insight.’

#### **Session Four: Ezekiel 36:24-28**

36 <sup>24</sup>I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. <sup>28</sup>Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

#### **Session Five: Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Valley of Dry Bones**

37 <sup>1</sup>The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ <sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’

<sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup>I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ <sup>10</sup>I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

<sup>11</sup>Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

## **Session Six: Zephaniah 3:12-20**

**3** <sup>12</sup> For I will leave in the midst of you  
a people humble and lowly.

They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord—

<sup>13</sup> the remnant of Israel;

they shall do no wrong

and utter no lies,

nor shall a deceitful tongue

be found in their mouths.

Then they will pasture and lie down,

and no one shall make them afraid.

<sup>14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;

shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,

O daughter Jerusalem!

<sup>15</sup> The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,

he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;

you shall fear disaster no more.

<sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;

do not let your hands grow weak.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord, your God, is in your midst,

a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,

he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing

<sup>18</sup> as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,

so that you will not bear reproach for it.

<sup>19</sup> I will deal with all your oppressors

at that time.

And I will save the lame

and gather the outcast,

and I will change their shame into praise

and renown in all the earth.

<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you home,

at the time when I gather you;

for I will make you renowned and praised

among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes

before your eyes, says the Lord.

## **Session Seven: Luke 24:1 - 12 The Resurrection of Jesus**

24 <sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.'  
<sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

# CURRICULUM RESOURCES

## SPIRITUAL PREFERENCES

You can select more than one, but be particular, choosing the best answers for you.

### 1. When and where are you most likely to experience God?

In nature

In silence and solitude

While reading scripture, theology, or an inspirational story

While meaningfully connecting with another person

In churches and beautiful architectural spaces

During worship

While singing or listening to music

While helping another person in need

While creating art

Other

### 2. Which person of the Trinity do you tend to relate to in prayer?

Father, Almighty Creator

Jesus, Friend and Brother

Holy Spirit, Renewing Energy and Comforter

### 3. Which part of Sunday worship best feeds your soul?

Singing the hymns

Hearing scripture read

Reading the scripture to the congregation

Hearing the sermon

Praying the prayers

Passing the Peace

Participating in Holy Eucharist

Meeting for coffee after the service

Serving on the Altar Guild

Offering service as a communion minister, usher, deacon, etc.

Other:

### 4. What do you believe is the best way to respond to God?

By finding time to be alone with God

By being the hands and feet of God

By feeling compassion for the needs of God's world

By learning more about God through theology and scripture study

Other:

### 5. Do you get energized and renewed by:

By being alone?

By being with people?

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# CURRICULUM RESOURCES

## LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is the practice of holy reading that invites the movement of the Spirit into a time of prayerful reading. Those accustomed to reading Scripture as an academic study may, at first, experience some discomfort. Lectio Divina is the invitation to let the words of Scripture intermingle with your thoughts and feelings at the moment. Both academic study and evocative readings provide important entry points into hearing Scripture anew.

The practice has four parts: lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio. The first step in Lectio Divina is to find a comfortable place to sit – in a chair or on the floor – and choose a passage to read. You may choose to practice alone or with a group. The following describes the process in a group setting.

### **Lectio – Reading**

Take a moment of silence to move inward in preparation for the reading. Read the text aloud. As you listen to the sacred text, allow yourself to focus meditatively on evocative words, images, phrase, etc., that speak to you. Allow for several minutes of silence after the reading of the text.

### **Meditatio – Meditating**

This is a time to reflect on the words that have been spoken to us. Share aloud with one another what the voice of God is saying to you in this text. Let your mind be playful. Consider the following questions: What insights and connections came to you when you heard the reading? What words, phrases, images, metaphors remain with you? What memories does this text recall from your life events?

### **Oratio – Prayer**

After your conversation and sharing, have another group member read the text again. Allow for a period of silence after the reading. Let the words settle in more deeply, and notice the prayers that emerge. Invite members to offer an expression of prayer in response to what has been shared and read. This may be in the form of words, a drawing, a song, or movement of the body.

### **Contemplatio – Contemplation**

If time allows, invite a member of the group to read the text a third time aloud. A period of silence follows and remains throughout this stage. In this silence, rest in the love of God. This final stage is a time to surrender self and be in the presence of a mystical union with the Divine.

The silence may be concluded with a communal prayer such as The Lord's Prayer.