

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways—

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—

We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.

So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways,

Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people’s stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Endings



After spending days pouring colored sand through funnels to create sacred symbols, Tibetan monks sweep away the beautiful sand painting, reminding us of the impermanence of life.

Endings

Chalice Lighting

We gather this hour as people of faith
with joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.

We light this beacon of hope,
sign of our quest
for truth and meaning,
in celebration of the life we share together.

—Christine Robinson

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to
make a beginning. The end is where we start from.

—T.S. Eliot

Our time together will be a chapter in the stories of our lives. . . . The
good good-bye includes: Acknowledging feelings, sharing memories,
offering praise, making a promise, and giving a final blessing.

—Danita Nolan

Great is the art of beginning, but greater the art is of ending.

—Longfellow

I wanted a perfect ending . . . Now I've learned, the hard way, that
some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear
beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to
change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing
what's going to happen next.

—Gilda Radner

To live in this world, you must be able to do three things: To love what
is mortal. To hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends
on it; and when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.

—Mary Oliver

Behind a good-bye there lurks much of the salutation of another
beginning—to me.

—Walt Whitman

What is born will die,
What has been gathered will be dispersed.

—Buddha

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: Share a story about a good-bye from your childhood.

Round 2: Share more deeply feelings and experiences about endings
you gained from doing the homework.

Round 3: Closing ritual.

Closing Words

Spirit of Life, known to us in beginnings and endings,
In possibilities and promises

We give thanks for all that has led to this moment,
And all that is yet to come.

—Kathleen Rolenz

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Details about the potluck.

Homework: Endings

This session represents the last session for your covenant group as it currently is. Our lives are full of beginnings and endings. We will spend some time looking at the ending of this covenant group, along with other endings, with awareness, reflection, and appreciation.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive at where we started
And know the place for the first time.

—*T. S. Eliot*

Endings are a catharsis. They give meaning to what comes before, and change us from the way we were.

—*Steven Winn*

Appreciation can give a meaning to endings.

—*Patrick Dawson*

It is when one first sees the horizon as an end that one first begins to see . . . Ends are the hardest things in the world to see—precisely because they aren't things, they are the ends of things. And yet they are wonderful. What would life be without them! . . . if we didn't die there would be no works—not works of art certainly, the only ones that count.

—*Archibald MacLeish*

The end of something is better than its beginning.

—*Ecclesiastes 7:8*

Beginnings and endings go together. We would like to imagine that our lives are a series of only beginnings, but the fact of the matter is that nothing begins without an attendant ending, and there are no gains in our lives that do not include losses.

—*Christine Robinson*

Questions to Ponder

- Do you remember a good-bye from your childhood? Who or what were you leaving/ending?
- Recall a good and a poor good-bye from your adult years. What made the good ending good? What made the poor one poor?
- What is something you appreciate about this group as it has been?
- What meaning do you make of endings? What follows the endings?

Leader's Guide: Endings

This session represents the last session for your covenant group as it currently is. Our lives are full of beginnings and endings. We will spend some time looking at the ending of this covenant group, along with other endings, with awareness, reflection, and appreciation.

Pre-Meeting Instructions

There is a lot to do in this last meeting. The sharing time has been abbreviated to allow time for the closing ritual. As written, the meeting should last about an hour and a half, but it could go over.

Closing Ritual Instructions

Bring a large index card (unlined) for each person in the group and an assortment of Sharpie fine point markers. Cut out the "speech" found at the end of this document. Read over the closing ritual to become acquainted with it.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

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with joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope,
sign of our quest
for truth and meaning,
in celebration of the life we share together.

—Christine Robinson

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to check in, telling in one or two sentences how they are doing this week. Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it if you would like.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Have each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (55 min)

Do three rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that everyone gets a turn to share.

Round 1 (10 min): Share a story about a good-bye from your childhood.

Round 2 (30 min): Share more deeply feelings and experiences about endings you gained from doing the homework.

Round 3 (15 min): Pass out an index card to everyone. Ask each person to write his/her name on one side. Then have each person pass their card to the person next to them, who will write a characteristic, adjective, or phrase on the back of the card describing the person whose name is on the card. For instance one card might have phrases like loving, deep, compassionate, or great hugger. Another may say sensitive and optimist.

Closing Ritual (10 min)

When done, group members will pass the card on to the next person. When everyone has added a phrase to each person's card, gather up the cards. Mix the cards and pass them out (preferably without anyone getting their own card).

Begin with the card you passed out to yourself. Start by reading this introduction: “[*Name of person*], you have been a valuable presence in our group. You have shared your story with us, told us your joys and sorrows, and allowed us to enter into your life. You are [*read the words written by group members*]. Your gifts have enriched us.”

This introduction is found at the bottom of this document. Pass it around as each person reads the words on the card they are holding, before they return the card to its owner.

Closing Words (1 min)

Read or ask someone to read the closing words.

Spirit of Life, known to us in beginnings and endings,
In possibilities and promises
We give thanks for all that has led to this moment,
And all that is yet to come.

—Kathleen Rolenz

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Talk about the details of the potluck.

CUT HERE

[***Name of person***], you have been a valuable presence in our group. You have shared your story with us, told us your joys and sorrows, and allowed us to enter into your life.

You are [***read the words written by group members***].

Your gifts have enriched us.