

"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

Cutting Apron Strings Both Ways



*Having the courage to cut these strings
calls us to look deeply at who we are
and how we want to live the life we love.*

Cutting Apron Strings Both Ways

Chalice Lighting

Today we light this flame . . .
for those who knew their small light
would not put us one spark closer to the truth
but who would not yield to dire predictions,
nor by cynicism
nor to common sense
their uncommon sense that it was their light
that was called for
that it was they
who were called
by name . . .
Let us do something worthy
of its light.

—Barbara Pescan

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naïve. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: that I am nobody but myself.

—Ralph Ellison

My desolation was that no one knew me
and I did not know myself.

My family's life was my life.

—Natalie Goldberg

We have not passed that subtle line between childhood and adulthood until . . . we have stopped saying “it got lost,” and say “I lost it.”

—Sidney J. Harris

Love yourself and watch.
Today, tomorrow, always.
To straighten the crooked
You must first do a harder thing.
Straighten yourself.

—Buddha

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. If we want to see and hear a person's soul, there is another truth we must remember: the soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, and yet shy. When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it, the soul will stay in hiding. But if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself.

—Parker J. Palmer

Round 1: Share briefly an awareness of “apron strings” in your life.

Round 2: Share more deeply an area of your life where you cut apron strings or might consider doing so now.

Round 3: Share any additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Activity (5 min)

Identifying apron strings.

Closing Words

We have shared those things that we carry with us from our lives so far. Some of us have cut the strings to the past. Some of us carry them forward to another time and place. Honoring the choices each of us makes, we celebrate our understanding of how the experiences of our lives have both helped and hindered us. We are grateful for all that the many generations of our families have expressed in their love for us. We leave this gathering aware of the importance of listening to our own voices. May we go in peace.

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: Cutting Apron Strings Both Ways

“Apron strings” reflect one of life’s ongoing struggles: being tied to someone. Have you ever been ready to take a new job, take a spontaneous short trip, buy a major appliance, attend a rock concert, only to have a voice tell you, “You better not do that!” Did you figure out where that voice came from?

He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away.

—Raymond Hull

The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny.

—Albert Ellis

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

—Genesis 2:24

Whether or not you have children yourself, you are a parent to the next generation. If we can only stop thinking of children as individual property and think of them as the next generation, then we can realize we all have a role to play.

—Charlotte Davis Kasl

If a mother respects both herself and her child from his very first day onward, she will never need to teach him respect for others.

—Alice Miller

When you blame others, you give up your power to change.

—Unknown

We carry into our adult lives the explicit and implicit hopes and demands placed upon us by those who raised us. “You will be a teacher (carpenter, engineer, activist) like your parent.” Attending college or even finishing high school may not be what we really want to do with our lives. Our parents’ judgments influence us, with or without our conscious awareness. Whether we grew up poor or wealthy, bohemian or military brats, our choices may reflect our parents’ lifestyle—whether mimicking them or opposing them. We may be unable to choose what we want in deference to our parents. Or we may shock them. Parents sometimes comment, “I don’t know where (s)he gets that!” Unless we honor our individual hopes and dreams, we may be “trimming ourselves to suit everyone.”

Couples in a committed relationship are affected by these same apron strings. When one partner relies on his or her parents for help making decisions or for meeting emotional needs, the other partner feels insignificant. Revealing that one partner’s primary relation is with their parents can leave the other partner feeling betrayed.

In the other direction, apron strings also tie us to our children. We face the challenge of unknowingly placing restrictions on their lives. Whether we intend to or not, we may create a situation where our children feel there is a parental image standing on their shoulders, whispering continued suggestions in their ears. Do our children’s choices reflect their own dreams or our dreams? It’s a tough situation; if parents push too hard they may push their children out of their lives, yet not pushing could leave parents with the regret that they didn’t give their children a better start.

Letting go of children is one of life's hard tasks. A parent's first response is to help, to heal the bruised knee, to pay the bills. When we continue to do this, we may interfere with our child learning to be a responsible adult. Most of us have heard of parents continuing to bail out their children long after they realized it was an endless cycle. Cutting this string requires action from both parent and child and may be painful.

Often, we have difficulty realizing that we are tied to these strings. Having the courage to cut them calls us to look deeply at who we are and how we want to live the life we love.

Activities

Be prepared to share one of these during the group discussion.

- Do you feel responsible for anyone? What issues do you feel responsible for? Take some time to mentally package up the responsibility and then visualize handing it back to the person. Imagine handing them a box and them taking it. You are giving them back the power to make their own (good or bad) decisions.
- Do you feel someone is responsible for your actions? What issues are they responsible for? Take some time to mentally package up the responsibility and then visualize opening the box and giving yourself the power to make your own (good or bad) decisions.
- Living the life you love sometimes challenges you to let go of ideas and attitudes that no longer fit your journey. Are there ideas and attitudes that you would like to let go of? What steps would you take to begin this process?

Journaling Suggestions

- Imagine the apron strings that may hold you, either tied to your parents or to your children. Reflect upon the areas in your life where you might be interesting in cutting the apron strings and how that might help you on your journey.

Leader's Guide: Cutting Apron Strings Both Ways

Preparation before the Gathering

Using the string provided at the facilitators' meeting, cut enough strings about one foot in length so that each group member will have three. Bring the string and scissors to the meeting in case someone needs more than three. You will use the scissors in the closing activity.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

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

Today we light this flame . . .
for those who knew their small light
would not put us one spark closer to the truth
but who would not yield to dire predictions,
nor by cynicism
nor to common sense
their uncommon sense that it was their light
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---Barbara Pescan

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences: "How you are today?" Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it!

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (60 min)

Prior to sharing please read this quotation to help focus the group on deep listening:

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard.

If we want to see and hear a person's soul, there is another truth we must remember: the soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, and yet shy.

When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it, the soul will stay in hiding.

But if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself.

—Parker J. Palmer

Round 1 (15 min): Ask group members to share briefly an awareness they had of the feeling of “apron strings” in their lives, either toward their parents or their children. Be prepared to go first.

Round 2 (35 min): Group members, speaking in any order, can share more deeply an area of their lives where they recall “cutting apron strings” or might consider doing this at present and how this affected their life journeys or might help them presently on their journey.

Round 3 (10 min): Invite group members to share any additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Activity (5 min)

Give each person three pieces of string, and explain that they represent any apron strings in their lives, going in either direction—toward children or parents—or toward whatever each person feels tied to. Ask everyone to choose a word to represent the area of their life that each string represents. They may pass, of course. Invite group members to either cut or keep the apron strings they have identified.

Have group members place their cut strings on the table near the chalice. Those that are retained are up to the discretion of the group member.

Closing Words (1 min)

We have shared those things that we carry with us from our lives so far. Some of us have cut the strings to the past. Some of us carry them forward to another time and place. Honoring the choices each of us makes, we celebrate our understanding of how the experiences of our lives have both helped and hindered us. We are grateful for all that the many generations of our families have expressed in their love for us. We leave this gathering aware of the importance of listening to our own voices. May we go in peace.

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.