

Choosing a Braver Faith

This week's readings share a meditation on the difficulty of remaining true to God's command of love and have faith in the face of the world's dangers and contradictions. Many voices, from Abraham to the psalmist, to Jesus, to Paul, urge that we cling to a deeper, braver faith in God that insists on love.

Focus scripture: Matthew 10:40–42

Jesus' words provide a simple but difficult charge to those who wish to be disciples: to recognize Jesus and other prophetic voices in the most marginalized people in society, and to choose generosity. The action he suggests – to offer a cup of cold water to another – is quite small, but often feels impossibly difficult in our daily lives. Our love of money, security, social acceptance, can often drown out our braver loves – of family, the community, strangers, justice, and marginalized people. Love has always been, in some ways, counter-cultural and dangerous. Early followers of Christ themselves were targeted by authorities for upending social structures within their places of worship, calling slaves and masters equal. But they knew that to welcome the marginalized was to welcome Christ.

What this passage seems to suggest is that faith is not blind obedience, but rather an allegiance to a braver love that falls outside of our everyday comforts. It is a faith not in money or success, popularity or security, but in the love of God who commands only that we love God and others, especially the marginalized.

One of the most dramatic stories in the Bible when read carefully, **Genesis 22:1–14** seems to have the message of trust in a God of goodness. Many find this story harsh: Abraham hears a command to sacrifice his own son Isaac; Abraham prepares to do so and is stopped in the last second. Perhaps this passage does not show an example of Abraham's blind obedience to a God who asks costly sacrifices of him and his family but instead shows an example of Abraham's trust that God is not a God of harsh demands, but of goodness. One clue for this is that Abraham, when leaving his servants, tells them that both

he and Isaac will return: "We will worship," he says, "and then we will come back to you." He gives no indication that he believes his son will die; instead, he trusts in God's deliverance. Sure enough, the command is reversed and Abraham names the place of the scene, "the Lord will provide." Refusing to believe in his own fears of loss or of a God of vengeance, Abraham keeps his belief in a God who is good. Perhaps Abraham believes what Womanist theologians such as Delores Williams insist of God: that God provides a way out of no way.

Psalm 13 places as central the fear that underlies people's hesitance to maintain faith in trying times. The psalmist cries out to the God who the community of the time feels has abandoned them. But the psalmist does not let the feeling become an excuse to turn away from God or from God's mission of love and justice. Rather, writes the psalmist in verse 5, "I trust in your unfailing love."

Paul underscores this hesitation to love, given the world's distractions and perceived dangers, in **Romans 6:12–23**, through a theme of dying to sin – which we can interpret as fear or detachment – and life in the God of love. Living in obedience to the world's fears and separations between people leads to death, Paul believes, a death of love and of one's inner richness. Living in obedience to God's love leads to a life filled with inner joy.


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Read together, perhaps this week's texts present a joint command: Love, and not fear. Trust bravely and in the face of adversity, even under the threat of ostracism or danger. Love because of a trust in a God of love, a God greater than the world's threats. Love everybody that the world rejects, because in doing so you love God with an even greater faith.



Focus scripture
Matthew 10:40–42

Additional scriptures
Genesis 22:1–14
Psalm 13
Romans 6:12–23

 *Seasons of the Spirit*
is based on semi-
continuous readings of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

God of courage and peace, help us to follow your example and to love courageously. Help us to trust that your wisdom and care can carry us when the world threatens danger or harshness. Help us to be people of brave love and generosity. Amen.

Lesson Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

In a comfortable environment, many children this age enjoy welcoming others. When a guest is coming to their homes, children will help set the space, offer suggestions for games and activities, and look forward to the guest's arrival. When friends visit, many older children take the role of host quite seriously, making sure their guests have all they need. Sometimes children can be shy or feel awkward about welcoming others or being welcomed into new settings. They may also have been encouraged to keep a distance from strangers. Regardless of comfort levels, all children will learn from adults around them how and when to be welcoming.

Most children will have had an experience of entering a new place and new group. Older children have usually experienced the formation of cliques, aware of who is on the "inside" of a particular group. Some of the children in your group may have experienced exclusion. Some may have excluded others based upon appearance, ability, popularity, or ethnic origin. This session invites the children to reflect on the ways in which they can receive and extend hospitality.

Pray that your group will experience the Spirit of God within themselves and recognize that welcoming others is one way they can respond to God's love in their own lives.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 10:40–42, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 27).
- ❑ Set worship space with green cloth; bring candle and Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Come, Holy Spirit" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Activities](#)" (p. 109) and prepare squares for "Inside-Outside Squares" game.

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Welcoming God](#)."
- ❑ **Activity group:** nothing additional required
- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Hospitality in Bible Times](#)"

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Cooperative zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Signs of Hospitality](#)"
- ❑ **Music zone:** recording and lyrics for song "All Are Welcome" (pp. 8–9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #12 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** guest from hospitality ministry of church, construction paper, art and craft supplies
- ❑ **Art zone:** plastic craft string, drinking straws, beads, copies of flower pattern (on resource sheet "[Patterns](#)" p. 108), different colours of construction paper, blunt yarn needles; optional: craft silk flower petals or flowers, or craft foam flowers.
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** pieces of card stock, art supplies, envelopes

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*" (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



Choosing a Braver Faith

Scripture

Matthew
10:40–42

FOCUS To practice the kind of hospitality that Jesus taught

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce any newcomers. Share stories and experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle as you say:

This candle reminds us
of God's presence with us.
In this space, we hear stories
about God and God's people. (*Place Bible
beside candle.*)
In this space, we know God's Spirit
is with us.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Come, Holy Spirit" (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; and #13 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray (*Invite children to repeat each line after you.*)

Loving God,
thank you for this place
where we can learn and share.
May we be open to the work
of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Gather around the marked squares and review the instructions for the game "Inside-Outside Squares" on the resource sheet "[Activities](#)" (p. 109). Play the game until three children have reached the middle square. Finish the game by welcoming everyone to squeeze onto the middle square. Talk about how it felt to play this game. Sometimes we are on the inside of a group, and sometimes we are on the outside. Explain that in this week's Bible story Jesus talks about welcoming others.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Recall that Matthew's gospel has stories that helped people remember Jesus' teachings.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Welcoming God](#)" to present the story based on **Matthew 10:40–42**. Provide a few moments for children to talk about the question at the end of the story.

Wondering questions Use some or all of the following questions to wonder together:

- **What did Jesus say about being welcoming?**
- **What do you think it means that when we welcome others it is like welcoming God?**

Exploring the story further

(*To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.*)

Activity group (*for younger children*) Teach the traditional Indian way of greeting others. Put your palms together, as though praying, and bend from the waist as you say, "Namaste." (*nah-mah-stay*) Explain that one translation of the word *Namaste* is "the Spirit in me welcomes the Spirit in you." Practice saying this greeting to one another. Wonder together about some of the ways we might welcome others.

Bible research group (*for older children*) This group will have the opportunity to learn more about hospitality in biblical times. Distribute copies of

the resource sheet “Hospitality in Bible Times” and work individually or in pairs to complete the page. When finished, talk together about some ways that people are welcomed in your group and in the church.

Reporting Invite the activity group to teach the “Namaste” greeting and to share their ideas about making people feel welcome, and invite the research group to talk about what they have dis-

covered about hospitality in biblical times.

The Bible story and us

Offering hospitality was important in Bible times and it is important today. Ask:

- **What are some ways that we welcome others at home or at school?**
- **What can we do to welcome people to our group and to our church?**

Make a list of these ideas on newsprint.

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Cooperative zone: Scavenger hunt**

Invite children to play a game to evaluate signs of welcome in your church building. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Signs of Hospitality” for children to complete as they search for signs of welcome in the church building. When finished discuss the findings together. (Option: older children could prepare a report on what seems to be missing and present to church leaders.)



❑ **Music zone: Welcoming song**

Music can play a role in the welcoming ministry of the church. The chorus of the song “All Are Welcome” (pp. 8–9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #12 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9) is one that all children can learn. Teach the chorus, line by line, and then listen to the recording together, joining in on the chorus after each verse. Talk together about ways in which the group could be welcoming of newcomers.



❑ **Outreach zone: Hospitality project**

Most churches have a system for greeting visitors and newcomers and making them feel welcome. Invite your guest to talk about the hospitality ministry in your church. Then invite children

to use the supplies provided to make “welcome cards” which can be distributed by those engaged in greeting at worship services, or can be placed in the sanctuary.

❑ **Art zone: Welcome leis** *(for younger children)*

When we welcome others, we welcome God within them. Hawaiians welcome others by placing a lei (a Hawaiian word for “circle”) around their necks. Invite children to make welcome leis by using the flower pattern to cut flower shapes from paper or craft foam. Decorate these and then thread them onto plastic craft thread, alternating flowers with pieces of plastic straws. Tie securely and talk together about who to welcome with these leis.

❑ **Quiet zone: Reminder cards** *(for older children)*

This activity will encourage the children to take responsibility for welcoming others. Invite each child to choose an idea from the list generated at the end of “Engage” and print it in the middle of a piece of card stock. Decorate with art supplies and put the cards in envelopes, seal, and address to themselves. Mail these reminders to the children, or have them take their envelopes home and encourage them to participate in the activity noted on their cards.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song the song “As Long As We Follow/*Na Nzela Na Lola*” (p. 25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Teach the children a traditional Indian way of greeting others. Put your palms together, as though praying, and bend from the waist as you say, “Namaste.” (*nah-mah-stay*) Explain that one translation of the word *Namaste* is “the Spirit in me welcomes the Spirit in you.” Practice saying this greeting to one another.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: “(Name), the Spirit of God is in you.”

Reflect

How did the children express their experiences of welcome? How might this inform the hospitality practiced in your group? To what extent did they show the connection between welcoming others and welcoming God?



Welcoming God

based on Matthew 10:40–42

The question that ends the story
will start the children thinking
about this teaching and
how they welcome
others.

Some people followed Jesus because they heard the stories Jesus told about God and God's love. Others followed Jesus because they were there when Jesus healed someone they knew. Still others followed Jesus because Jesus healed them.

But some people travelled with Jesus everywhere. These people were Peter, Andrew, James, and John, fishers whom Jesus called from their fishing nets on the Sea of Galilee. Another was Matthew, who was a tax collector, a man not popular with the community. Along with them, Jesus selected seven others and gave them the power to heal.

These followers of Jesus became known as the "Twelve." Sometimes Jesus taught only them after Jesus had taught the crowds who gathered around him. However, Jesus

understood that many more people needed healing. But before the Twelve could go out to heal, Jesus had much to teach them.

Jesus warned the Twelve about places that were unfriendly to them. Jesus told them to leave those villages. Jesus assured them that the Holy Spirit would give them the words they needed. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. God will take care of you."

But Jesus didn't talk just about the problems they might face. Jesus also talked about the good things that would happen.

"When people welcome you, they welcome me," Jesus told the Twelve. "And when they welcome me, they are welcoming God who sent me."

The Twelve thought about Jesus' words. They thought, "So when we heal someone in Jesus' name, we are bringing God to that person."

Jesus continued, "If someone gives you even a cup of cold water because you follow me, that person will be rewarded."

The Twelve looked at each other. How would they be welcomed?



Hospitality in Bible Times

In the time of Jesus, hospitality was very important. People were expected to offer a special welcome to everyone, even complete strangers. This welcome was known as hospitality. Let's look at what that welcome involved.

An example of hospitality in the Hebrew Scriptures

Abraham was sitting in the shade during the hottest part of the day, which was really hot where he was. He saw three strangers standing nearby. To find out what Abraham did, read Genesis 18:2-5 and complete the following sentences.

Abraham

(Verse 2) Welcomed the strangers with a

(Verse 4) Offered them water to

(Verse 4) Invited them to

(Verse 5) And have

Even though the visitors were complete strangers Abraham was offering the kind of welcome and hospitality that was common at the time.

bow, wash their feet, sit in the shade, something to eat

An example of hospitality in the Christian Scriptures

In Luke's gospel, Jesus visits the house of Simon, a Pharisee. In this story Simon does not offer a proper welcome to Jesus, which would have been considered rude. Eventually Jesus spoke to Simon about his lack of hospitality. Jesus says,

"I came into your home, and you gave me no water for my feet.... You did not welcome me with a kiss ... you have provided no olive oil for my head" (excerpts from Luke 7:44-46).

People were also expected to offer food, as in Abraham's time.

Hey, fellow disciples, use the words in the box to complete the paragraph and find out more about hospitality.



These traditions were very _____. It was considered shameful and rude not to follow them. If you had no _____ in your house you were expected to go find some, even in the middle of the _____. For Jewish families to eat with strangers was to accept them as _____ and give them a place within the life of the _____.

family, food, friends, important, night



Signs of Hospitality

Go on a hunt to see where hospitality happens in your congregation.
Look for welcoming signs or symbols. Walk around the church building.
Imagine what it is like to come here for the first time. Fill out this survey.

-
- ☐ What signs of welcome do people see before they enter the building?
-
- ☐ If you are in a wheelchair, how will you come into the building?
-
- ☐ How does the entrance make you feel welcome?
-
- ☐ If you are a new family, who or what helps you find the church school rooms?
-
- ☐ Is there a place for babies or young children? Is it clean and safe?
-
- ☐ On Sunday morning, who welcomes people?
-
- ☐ If you come during the week, what helps you find the church office or the pastor's study?
-
- ☐ Do you see anything inside or outside the church building that suggests that some people are not welcome?

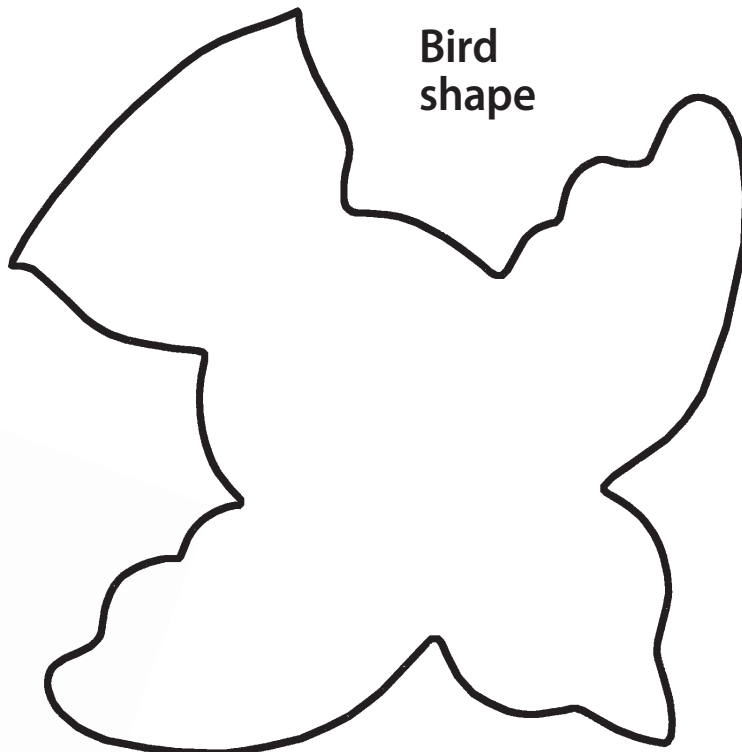
Talk with your group about what would make your church building more hospitable or welcoming. Select one idea to present to the leaders of your congregation.

Patterns

Hand shape



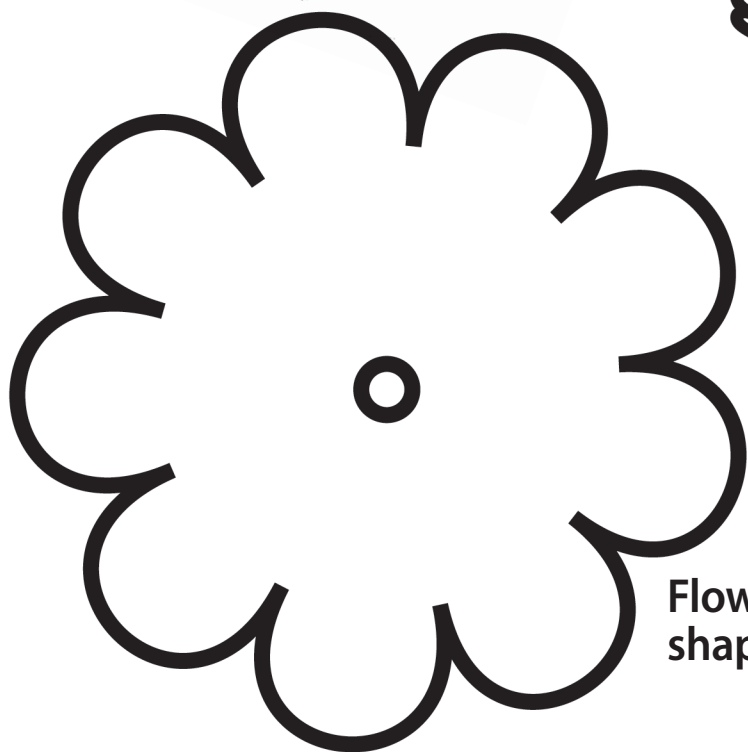
Bird shape



Child shape



Flower shape



Activities

Inside-Outside Squares

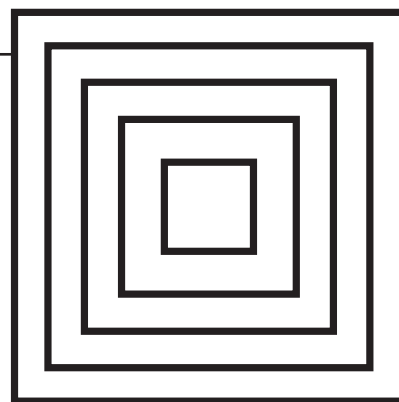
The point of the game: to reach the middle square. Once there are three people in that square, they are the joint winners.

Preparation:

Use masking tape to make a series of five concentric squares on the floor.

Instructions:

1. Gather around the outside of the squares marked on the floor.
2. Begin with three or four instructions for the children to step in only. For example, "Step into one square if you are wearing red."
3. Later, instructions can be given with both "step in and step out" parts. For example, "Step ahead one square if you have blue eyes; but step back a square or out if you have brown eyes."
4. When a child reaches the middle square, he or she stays there. The game ends when three children have reached the middle square.



Spot the Leader

One person is chosen as It and leaves the room. Another player is selected as the leader. The group is to watch the leader as unobtrusively as possible and do what the leader does. For example, the leader might start tapping a foot. Everyone in the group does the same thing. It is called back into the room and must try to spot the leader. Each time the leader begins a different movement the group must follow. Play stops when the correct leader is identified. The leader becomes It and a new leader is chosen.

Human Tangle

This activity works with five or more people. Recruit others to join you for this activity if you need more participants.

1. Stand in a circle and have children join hands with two different people. Do not take the hands of someone on either side of you or take both hands of the same person.
2. Notice the tangle that has been created. Explain that this tangle is like what happens when we do and say things that hurt community.
3. Invite the children to name loving actions and words that help mend and build community, such as saying sorry or playing with someone again after having a disagreement.
4. When a loving action or word is named, invite that child to choose a move that will help untangle the group, such as carefully stepping over or ducking under someone's arm. The child choosing the move doesn't have to be the one to perform the move.
5. Explain that the children can't drop hands but they can loosen their grip and rotate in order to do some twisting in a situation.

