

All the days of my life

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me *all the days of my life*. – Psalm 23:6 (NRSV)



All the days of my life will help us reflect on the past, focus on the present and prepare for the future as we gain appreciation for how God's goodness surrounds us and where God's mercy meets us in our everyday relationships.

We will tap into the creativity of Thomas Cole, 1801-1848, a renowned artist, to help us engage with *all the days of my life*. Cole created a series of paintings titled *Voyage of Life*, which move through four distinct stages: childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. The curriculum is designed for people in all stages of life.

Session titles

- I. Getting ready for the Voyage of Life
- II. The Voyage of Life: childhood
- III. The Voyage of Life: youth
- IV. The Voyage of Life: adulthood
- V. The Voyage of Life: old age
- VI. All the days of my life: goodness and mercy



Everence

Leaders guide introduction: All the days of my life

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me **all the days of my life.*** – Psalm 23:6

Greetings, fellow travelers

Life is made up of a series of adventures. Sometimes we travel with others and sometimes we travel alone. *All the days of my life* is a curriculum that invites us to take a look back as well as a look ahead -- to help us think through what can be learned as we go from one life stage to another. This document is a leaders guide with participant handouts that allow you to offer the curriculum to small groups or Sunday school classes.

God has provided many gifts to help us along the way as we try to faithfully complete our life's journey. They come in the form of God-given talents, learned skills and – most importantly – other people. How we use and share these gifts has an impact on how well we and those around us navigate this life.

Any trip requires resources to get us to our destination. As a stewardship and financial services agency, Everence helps people do the planning necessary to care for their financial needs, as well as share generously with others. We hope this curriculum will help you think through the best ways to use the many gifts God has placed in your care as we continue and ultimately complete the journeys set before us.

Voyage of Life: collection of 4 paintings

Many of us are visual learners, so Thomas Cole's paintings will help make this experience more engaging. If he were living today, he might choose different categories than childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. He may have expanded to additional stages such as adolescence, young adulthood, retirement, etc. But to stay true to Cole's context, we will use just these four categories and invite you to add your own 21st century experiences to his ideas.

The *Voyage of Life* collection is on display at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The prints are in the public domain, which means you can download and print these without needing permission. To print your own copies, you can go the appendix of this document and find the four prints or go to nga.gov and click on NGA images. Type Voyage of Life in the search box, and the prints should appear.

Curriculum overview

This series will encourage you to share your gifts of insight and personal experience and to receive from others as well. A variety of teaching and learning tools will be used along the way to make the experience educational and engaging. You will notice that metaphors involving boats and voyages are used throughout.

We also will include at the end of each session a *Stewardship moment* that will connect to the stage of life being highlighted. You can use these concluding comments as words to

send the group off, or you may want to tie them into the lesson more directly as they apply to your goals as the class facilitator.

At Everence, we believe that teaching our children and youths that all good gifts come from God cannot start too early. And it's not a message that ceases to be important at any stage along the way. If we are to serve one another well, (1 Peter 4:10) we need to be intentional in managing what we have so there will be overflow to spread around to others. This message is counter-cultural and one we can quickly lose sight of in our self-centered and materialistic world.

First you have to row a little boat

Another resource referenced throughout this curriculum is a book written by Richard Bode titled *First you have to row a little boat*. It is a series of reflections based on the experiences Bode had growing up and falling in love with sailing. When he was a boy, Bode was taken under the wing of a legendary sailor. As he applied the simple lessons of sailing, he became increasingly aware as he grew older that his sailing skills would serve him well in years to come. With generosity and wisdom, this sailor passes on not only his love of sailing but how it connects with the choices and actions we take in life.

How to use this curriculum

Curriculum materials for leader and participants: Sessions 1 - 6 are written for the group leader. There is also an appendix at the end with documents you are invited to copy and make available to the class for each of the six sessions. The sessions are set up in outline form, with subtitles and comments that you can read to the class verbatim or paraphrase as you guide participants through the activities and discussion questions.

Age and stage of your group is flexible: This resource can be used in an intergenerational group or for groups in a similar stage of life. Reflecting over past events and planning for the future are skills we don't often do in a group setting. We hope that entering into this study will help engage participants in these important practices.

Focus on God's goodness and mercy: Each season of life comes with its unique acts of goodness and mercy, as stated in the key verse for this study, Psalm 23:6. For each of Cole's four stages in the *Voyage of Life*, you will be invited to share where God's goodness and mercy have been made evident.

Enjoy the journey,

Beryl Jantzi
Director of Stewardship Education, Everence

Session I: Getting ready for the Voyage of Life

Lost-at-sea survival exercise

Have you ever felt alone? Does life sometimes feel like a boat adrift on an expansive sea? Thomas Cole, a painter from the 19th century, incorporates the imagery of a child growing into youth, manhood and old age in his series of four paintings titled, *The Voyage of Life*. He includes a variety of symbols to depict key themes of the Voyage of Life. For each life stage, Cole's boat takes on a different character as it experiences the storms and white-waters along the river of life.

To begin your time together, we have an exercise to get your group talking together and doing some problem solving. Ask your group to imagine what it might feel like to be lost at sea. Not a pleasant thought, I know. Below are instructions on how to introduce this exercise. You will find handouts for this activity, along with an answer sheet, in the appendix of this document.

Lost-at-sea activity instructions

You are adrift on a private yacht in the South Pacific. As a result of a fire of unknown origin, much of the yacht and its contents have been destroyed. The yacht is slowly sinking. Your location is unclear because navigational equipment was destroyed and because you and the crew were distracted as you tried to bring the fire under control. Your best estimate is that you are about 1,000 miles south-southwest of the nearest land.

Below (and attached in the appendix) is a list of 15 items that are intact and undamaged after the fire. In addition to these articles, you have a serviceable, rubber life raft (with oars) large enough for you, the crew and all of the items listed below. The total contents of all survivors' pockets are a pack of cigarettes, several books of matches and five, \$1 bills.

Your task is to rank the 15 items below in terms of their importance to your survival. Place the number 1 by the most important item, the number 2 by the second-most important, and so on through number 15, the least important.

Here are the items:

1. Sextant
2. 20 square feet of opaque plastic
3. Shaving mirror
4. 1 quart of 160 proof rum
5. 5-gallon can of water
6. 15 feet of nylon rope
7. Mosquito netting
8. 2 boxes of chocolate bars
9. 1 case of U.S. Army C rations

10. Fishing kit
11. Maps of the Pacific Ocean
12. Seat cushion (flotation device approved by Coast Guard)
13. 2-gallon can of oil-gasoline mixture
14. Small transistor radio
15. Shark repellent

In the appendix, you will find a handout with the 15 items listed, along with the above situation description and instructions. Make copies of this to hand out to the class. Invite the participants to work at this activity in groups of 3-4 and decide together on a ranking of these 15 survival tools. An answer sheet follows the handout on the next page in the appendix. Read through the answer sheet and have each team report how many of the rankings they had listed correctly. It's very unusual for any group to get them all right.

Boat themes in scripture

Invite the class to name out loud as many "boat" stories from the Bible as they can think of.

Here are some to keep in mind, along with biblical texts where they can be found.

- Genesis 6 – God calls Noah to build an ark and spares his whole family from the flood
- Exodus 2:3 – Moses escapes death in his wicker basket boat
- Jonah 1:3 – Jonah is cast off a boat due to his disobedience
- Matthew 4:21 – James and John leave their father, nets and boat to follow Jesus
- Matthew 14:22-33 – Peter leaves the boat to go to Jesus and tries to walk on water
- Mark 4:35-41 – Jesus is asleep in the boat, awakens and calms the storm
- Luke 5:3 – Jesus escapes the crowds on land and teaches from a boat
- John 21:1-14 – the disciples are fishing after the crucifixion, then Jesus appears on the shore
- Acts 27:44 – Paul is in a shipwreck near the island of Malta

After asking the class to share their ideas of boat stories from the Bible, fill in the gaps with examples listed above. You may want to read two or three of the stories to refresh your memories of their significance. Consider with the class how the use of boats in biblical times differs from or is similar to today.

Discussion questions

- What are some common themes you see among these boat stories?
- If you were to choose one boat story from the Bible that reflects a time in your Voyage of Life so far, which would it be?
- Identify a list of modern-day boats. If you were to compare your congregation to a particular type of boat used today, which would it be and why?
 - Cruise ship, tugboat, catamaran, canoe, ocean liner, fishing boat, speed boat, rowboat, submarine, sailboat, paddle boat, lifeboat, ferry, barge.
- What kind of boat reflects your life today?
- What excites and/or scares you about your voyage so far and what is yet to come?
 - Create two columns on newsprint or blackboard with the words "Excites" and "Scares." List comments made by the class.
- What kinds of voyages were people in biblical times asked to embark on? How do these stories encourage you?

First you have to row a little boat

Richard Bode begins his book, *First you have to row a little boat*, with these words:

When I was a young man I made a solemn vow that I would teach my children to sail. The exigencies (needs and demands) of life – money, work, location, and health – kept me from passing on to my children this legacy which I deem to be the essence of myself. I feel as if I have left something unsaid which I ought to have said, something undone that I ought to have done. I am filled with a lore which I learned as a boy, and I failed to pass it onto my sons and daughters, who will now fail to pass it on to theirs.

Take some time to reflect on Bode's comments above and discuss them together. To help get the conversation started, I have provided some questions below. All of the questions may not apply to all age groups, so be selective and come up with your own as well.

- What kind of mark or impression do you want to leave on those who will follow you?
- What commitments and distractions in your life keep you from fully engaging in your deepest desires to make a difference?
- How can money, work, location and health be either an opportunity to pass on a legacy or hinder our ability to do so?
- It is said that we face three types of failures in life. Given that we are all sinners (Romans 3:23) which of these three do you find the most challenging?
 - the sin of omission (having the opportunity to do good and not doing it)
 - the sin of commission (the wrong that we knowingly do)
 - the sin of no mission (failing to have any passion, direction or mission in life)

Stewardship and all the days of my life.

Preparing for a voyage involves planning. The adage, "Hope for the best and plan for the worst," is not biblical but is sound advice. In Luke 14:25-33, we are told that large crowds were traveling with Jesus and Jesus says, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him.*" (14:28-29)

Stewardship is one of the ways by which we plan for our Voyage of Life. At the end of some of the sessions, we will offer suggestions on financial skills and tools that we should collect as we move from one life stage to another. We might consider these as our financial survival kit and our way of planning and counting the cost in advance for the towers we may need to scale as we go through life. You can use these stewardship lessons as supplements to the main material or as concluding reminders of this important aspect of our walk of discipleship.

Stewardship quote

Stewardship is everything you do after you say yes to Jesus Christ. – Clarence Stoughton

Session II: The Voyage of Life: childhood



Cole prepared detailed explanatory texts for each painting in this four-part series. The following are Cole's own words about this painting.

A stream is seen issuing from a deep cavern, in the side of a craggy and precipitous mountain, whose summit is hidden in clouds. From out of the cave glides a boat, whose golden prow and sides are sculptured into figures of the hours: steered by an angelic form, and laden with buds and flowers, it bears a laughing infant, the voyager whose varied course the artist has attempted to delineate. On either hand, the banks of the stream are clothed in luxuriant herbage and flowers. The rising sun bathes the mountains and the flowery banks in rosy light.

The dark cavern is emblematic of our earthy origin, and the mysterious past. The boat, composed of figures of the hours, images the thought that we are borne on the hours down the Stream of Life. The boat identifies the subject in each picture. The rosy light of the morning, the luxuriant flowers and plants, are emblems of the joyousness of early life. The close banks, and the limited scope of the scene, indicate the narrow experiences of childhood, and the nature of its pleasures and desires. The Egyptian lotus in the foreground of the picture is symbolic of human life. Joyousness and wonder are the characteristic emotions of childhood.

Discussion questions

- As voyagers yourselves, how do this painting and description offered by Cole match with your own experience of childhood?
- If you were to paint the story of your childhood, what images might you use to describe where you have come from and what has shaped you most?
- What expressions of God's abundance and generosity do you see in Cole's depiction of life and from your own childhood experience?

- Reflect on some of the images described and depicted by Cole. Which communicate the most deeply to you and why?
 - The child as a voyager
 - The companionship of the angel
 - The imagery of river and cave
 - The figurehead on the bow of the boat holding the hourglass
 - The calm of the water and the narrow banks of the stream

Childhood as viewed in scripture

Children are a blessing

In Psalm 127:3-5, David describes children as a blessing from God and as a “heritage from the Lord.” We were all once children and some of us have had children of our own. We all have grown up with children – be they younger siblings, cousins, nieces or nephews.

- In what ways do children bless us?
- What lessons have you learned from children in your life?
- What childlike characteristics do you most admire?

Children require guidance

Proverbs 13:24 emphasizes that the love of children and discipline go together. This text has been used in some cases to exercise undue punitive discipline, but the principle stills stands that guidance and instruction are necessary.

- What were the valuable lessons you learned in childhood that came in the form of appropriate discipline?
- What happens when discipline and guidance are missing in the lives of children?

God speaks to and through children

1 Samuel 3:1-21 is a classic story of God getting the attention of the High Priest Eli through the young boy, Samuel, the son of Hannah and Elkanah. In verse 1 we read, “Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”

To expand your knowledge of Samuel and his family, you can pass out the quiz in the appendix. Invite people to test their memories of this story, then review the questions, giving the correct answers. If the test seems too advanced, you can use the quiz as an outline, explaining the correct answers as you go. The answers to the questions are also found in the appendix.

Two interesting comments stand out in this short verse. The first is that as a child, Samuel was someone viewed as a minister to God. Secondly, the word of the Lord was rare in those days and yet God was about to change all of that by reaching out to a child.

- In what ways do we encourage and validate the ways children minister to God in our congregations?
- How do we work at faith formation and faith validation with the children of our congregations?
- Has your church formed ways of celebrating steps in faith formation other than baptism?

First you have to row a little boat

Richard Bode in his book, *First you have to row your own boat*, writes the following.

The urge to sail first came upon me when I was 12. I stood on the shore and watched the boats dipping, righting themselves. It seemed like such a simple sport, far easier than hitting a home run or shooting an oversized ball through a metal hoop. I thought all I had to do was raise the canvas, let it fill with wind, and the boat and I would take off together like a soaring bird. But the first man to get me off the land and into a boat had a decidedly different idea. (pg. 7-8)

We all have aspirations and dreams as children. There are exciting things to do and places to go. Reflect on some of your childhood dreams and where they came from. What life skills did you want to learn as a child and who were the mentors you found along the way to help you start pursuing your dreams?

- Share one of your childhood dreams or aspirations.
- Who was the mentor who believed in you and helped you get off land and into your boat?
- How did your dream change or adapt as you moved through life?
- How have your early dreams impacted the kind of person you have become?
- What regrets do you have concerning unfulfilled childhood dreams?
- Do you have new dreams at your current stage of life?
- Consider these verses from Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17: "...your young men shall see visions; your old men shall dream dreams." What does that mean to you?
- How were God's goodness and God's mercy made evident in the mentors you had as a child?

Stewardship and childhood

Before we move on to the next life stage, think about how we can begin teaching biblical principles of stewardship with our children and grandchildren. All around us are messages from culture telling us that joy comes from having stuff and keeping what we have for ourselves. We are consumers, beginning the day we are born. We require the nurture and time and attention of adults around us and we get used to receiving it. But God has called us to be "stewards of the manifold gifts of God" (1 Peter 4:10). I would suggest that it's part of the human condition to consume, but to become stewards, we need mentors who model these values.

On a practical level, children learn by watching and mimicking. If we expect our children to grow into good stewards, they need to first see it in action. Secondly, they need to get encouragement and the opportunity to copy the behavior of adults. Children learn pretty quickly the joys of spending and acquiring. We need to be more intentional about teaching children to share and to save.

A child can open a savings account as early as his or her parents wants to begin instilling the value of saving. Sharing, whether it's toys or donating money at church, can never begin too early.

- How does your church help instill values of sharing and giving – specifically for children?
- What money messages do children in your extended family or church family hear through the words or actions of adults around them?
- What messages about money do you remember hearing as a child? How have they contributed to forming who you are today?
- When money issues came up in your childhood home, was it a relaxed or stressful conversation? How does that impact your feelings about talking about money today?

Session III: The Voyage of Life: youth



Cole's words about this painting

Confidently assuming control of his destiny and oblivious to the dangers that await him, the voyager boldly strides to reach an aerial castle, emblematic of the daydreams of "youth" and its aspirations for glory and fame. As the traveler approaches his goal, the ever-more-turbulent stream deviates from its course and relentlessly carries him towards the next picture in the series, where nature's fury, evil demons, and self-doubt will threaten his existence.

Only prayer, Cole suggests, can save the voyager from a dark and tragic fate.

From the innocence of childhood to the flush of youthful overconfidence, through the trials and tribulations of middle age, to the hero's triumphant salvation, the Voyage of Life seems linked to the Christian doctrine of death and resurrection. Cole's intrepid voyager also may be interpreted as a personification of the United States, itself at an adolescent stage of development. The artist may be issuing a warning to those caught up in the quest for "manifest destiny" that unbridled westward expansion and industrialization would have tragic consequences for people and nature.

Discussion questions

- As voyagers yourselves, how do this painting and description offered by Cole match with your own experience as a youth?
- If you were to paint the story of your adolescent years, what images might you use to describe where you have come from and what has shaped you most?
- What expressions of God's abundance and generosity do you see in Cole's depiction of life and from your own teenage experiences?

- Reflect on some of the images described and depicted by Cole. Which communicate the most deeply to you and why?
 - The youth as a voyager
 - The companionship of the angel and where the angel is now positioned
 - The imagery of the river and the shoreline
 - What does the imagery in the horizon suggest?
 - What, if anything, is different about the boat compared with the childhood painting?
 - What time of day is it now compared with the first painting?
 - How might this painting be different if Cole were living in the 21st century and commenting on current culture?

Youth as viewed in scripture

1 Timothy 4:12 reads, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Paul served as a significant mentor to young Timothy. Paul describes Timothy as a “youth,” but that can carry different meanings in different cultures and time periods. Some scholars suggest he might have been as old as his late 40s. This is all conjecture, but also is an interesting commentary on how age can be viewed differently based on culture and time period.

- According to tradition, Timothy died at Ephesus in 97 AD, when he was 80 years old.
- Paul directed two letters to Timothy: one from Macedonia about 65 AD, and one while Paul was incarcerated in Rome, awaiting his own death.
- Now if we subtract 65 from 97, we get 32 years.
- Subtracting 32 years from the age of Timothy when he died, we get: $80 - 32 = 48$, which is the age of Timothy when the letter 1 Timothy was written. Therefore, Timothy may have been about 48 years old when Paul wrote 1 Timothy with that reference to “*your youth*.” NOT SO YOUNG after all.

As we adapt this concept to our context, there is still important material here for how we affirm our youths and encourage them to use their gifts within the faith community.

- In what ways did the church affirm your gifts as a teenager?
- How does your congregation include youths in the work of the church?
- Which positions in the church are open to youth involvement and which positions have an unspoken or stated age requirement?
- Do you know what the dreams and aspirations of your youths are?
- In what ways are you tapping future leaders from this part of your church population? What more could you do?

Notice that in Cole’s picture, the voyager has his hand on the tiller. The tiller is the handle that directs the rudder under the boat, which in turn determines the direction the helmsman wants it to go. In the picture of childhood, the guardian angel was steering the boat. But now the angel is on the shoreline and the voyager has control. What might Cole be trying to communicate with this imagery?

As you look at your own life growing up, what decisions were you allowed to make during your teenage years? Did that responsibility come too soon or too late as you look back on that time of your life?

- How were you prepared to take on additional responsibility? How did that training prepare you for the life stages that followed?
- Do we tend to trust youths today more or less than previous generations?

Herman Melville (1819-1891) was the author of the classic tale, *Moby Dick*. Here is a passage from his book:

Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp – all others but liars!”

What images from Melville’s quote do you see coming through in Cole’s depiction of youth? Keep this passage in mind when we transition from Cole’s portraits of youth to adulthood.

Jesus in the temple

Luke 2:41-48a

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Every year, his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was 12 years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished.

Sometimes we hear this passage explained as if Jesus was teaching the teachers, but that misrepresents the context. The listeners would be sitting on the ground at the feet of the teachers, who were also seated. The rabbinical style of teaching used questions on the part of the students, from which discussion would arise.

In the course of the discussion, this intense boy of 12 was both listening and asking probing, insightful questions that indicated to all his depth of understanding. “Understanding” is the Greek noun *sunesis*, “the faculty of comprehension, intelligence, acuteness, shrewdness.” Everyone who heard Jesus on this occasion was struck by his understanding. At age 12, Jesus is listening to teaching in the temple during Passover. But 20 years or so later, he is the teacher in these same courts, and his many listeners are still struck with his insight and authority.

- Every year, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. What religious traditions in your family made an impact on you?
- What memorable moments during your youth had an impact on you and those around you?
- What aspects of church life did you gravitate to the most? Were there people you could talk to and learn from who shaped who you are today?
- How open is your congregation to including youths in conversations of faith and practice? Are there settings for intergenerational conversation like Jesus had?
- How do you think Jesus may have experienced the goodness and mercy of his heavenly father and his earthly parents in this story from Luke 2?
- What stories of goodness and mercy extended by God, parents or friends do you have from your youth?

Ecclesiastes 12:1-2

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"— before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain.

Keep in mind this text and the imagery the author creates and compare it with Cole's depiction of adulthood.

- Were there particular experiences and memories from your youth that have sustained you during later life challenges? What were they?
- What are some of your happiest memories of your growing-up years? How does it feel to relive and retell those stories?
- What settings do we have to tell our stories of faith formation to others – both young and old?

Stewardship and youth

Bode writes, "When we kill a dream within us we kill ourselves, even though the blood continues to flow within our veins." He suggests that many people resort to materialism as a way of covering up lost dreams. "I know a couple who uses shopping to dispel an unyielding sadness that seems to overwhelm them day by day." (*First you have to row a little boat*, pg. 24).

The first boat that Bode actually received came as a gift from someone who had outgrown its purposes. But for Bode, it was a perfect fit. Looking back on that gift from one of his mentors, he makes this observation.

The boy who dreams of a blue sloop, who finally possesses it, who uses it and then passes it onto another after it has lost his utility to him – that boy possesses a blue sloop for all his days. (pg. 25)

- Do you have a story of a gift you received (blue sloop) as a youth that you in turn were able to pass on to another boy or girl?
- What is the relationship between receiving and giving?
- What early lessons did you learn about the need to plan well if you expect to fulfill your dreams?
- How were the messages of stewarding our time and money modeled by parents, church and mentors during your youth?

Session IV: The Voyage of Life: adulthood



Cole's words about this painting

Storm and cloud enshroud a rugged and dreary landscape. Bare impending precipices rise in the lurid light. The swollen stream rushes furiously down a dark ravine, whirling and foaming in its wild career, and speeding toward the ocean, which is dimly seen through the mist and falling rain. The boat is there, plunging amid the turbulent waters. The voyager is now a man of middle age: the helm of the boat is gone, and he looks imploringly toward the heaven, as if heaven's aid alone could save him from the perils that surround him. The Guardian Spirit calmly sits in the clouds, watching with an air of solicitude the frightened voyager. Demon forms are hovering in the air.

Trouble is characteristic of the period of manhood/adulthood. In childhood there is no cankering care; in youth no despairing thought. It is only when experience has taught us the realities of the world, that we lift from our eyes the golden veil of early life; that we feel deep and abiding sorrow; and in the picture the gloomy, eclipse-like tone, the conflicting elements, the trees riven by tempest, are the allegory; and the ocean, dimly seen, figures the end of life, to which the voyager is now approaching. The demon forms are Suicide, Intemperance and Murder, which are the temptations that beset men in their direst trouble. The upward and imploring look of the voyager shows his dependence on God, and that faith saves him from the destruction that seems inevitable.

So does the voyager look stressed? Cole describes adulthood as a time of trouble. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "... in this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." This can be partly attributed to the fact that the older we get, there's more for which we are responsible. Many of us are parents and possibly grandparents, and some are caregivers for our aging parents, who are living longer. Multiple generations look to those in this stage a life for some level of stability and support. Sometimes, that can begin to feel overwhelming.

Take some time to reflect and discuss Cole's comments as they relate to his painting on adulthood. He does depict a fairly grim picture. But on the other hand, a lot of people around us are facing some pretty significant issues by the time they get to adulthood. Ask the class to offer their responses to both the painting and Cole's description. Use the following questions to help guide the conversation.

Discussion questions

- How has the river changed from youth to adulthood? What does this signify?
- What changes do you see happening to the boat? Where is the tiller? What is the voyager doing with his hands?
- Where is the angel and what does this suggest?
- What time of day is it? Does this have significance?
- How do you feel about Cole's depiction of the spirit world, demons and the absence of the garden-like coastline?
- What is Cole's view of God in relation to the posturing of the voyager?
- Would you like to have this print hanging in your living room?

Sometime in the past, you may have come across a simple test that identifies the level of stress or trouble you are under. A copy of this is in the appendix to provide as a handout in your class.

Take a moment and determine your stress level by adding up the stress points for each event that has happened over the last six months. This scale was developed by psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe in 1967 to measure the effects of stress on health. If you score more than 150 points, you are probably under significant stress.

Event	Stress points
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Jail time	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Loss of a job	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Health problem of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Gain of new family member	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change in line of work	36
Increased arguments with spouse	35
Large mortgage taken out	31
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in work responsibilities	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29

Major personal achievement	28
Spouse starting or stopping work	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with a boss	23
Change in work hours	20
Change in residence	20
Change in school	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18

Follow-up questions

- What have you learned from this exercise?
- Did you become aware of more trouble that you're dealing with than you expected?
- How much of this stress have you been living with for more than 6 months?
- How do members of your faith community care for each other and support each other in the normal and more intense times of life?
- If you have not yet reached this stage of life, how does all of this attention on trouble and increased responsibility for this older age group strike you?

We all know that life is stressful but sometimes, we aren't fully in touch with all that's going on and the impact that life's challenges can bring. It's not about eliminating stress entirely because that will never happen. But we can learn to better manage the trouble that comes our way.

- How do you cope with stress? What ways have you found to resist the temptation to be overcome by the spirits of the air that Cole depicts in this stage of life?
- What are the signals your body sends you when stress is getting the upper hand?
- Which people around you can you tell when it's starting to get overwhelming?

Given the fact that adulthood involves caring for the generations before and after us, we will become overwhelmed at times. How do we understand the words of Paul in Philippians 4:6?

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Notice that Paul acknowledges that worry is a reality of living in this world but there is an antidote to being overwhelmed by it. Both prayer and thanksgiving keep us balanced. To pray is to recognize that God hears and intervenes. Exercising thanksgiving is to remind ourselves that even amid the challenges, there is much good to buoy our spirits. This call to action is what we can do for ourselves. Our devotional life with the exercising of spiritual gifts helps us stay in the boat even when the white-water is raging around us. So let's thank God for the boat.

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul owns his own troubles.

And besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I am not indignant?

Discussion questions

- How does it feel to hear Paul say he also dealt with pressure because of the struggles people close to him were facing?
- What do you think Paul means when he says, do not worry? Is it possible to never worry?
- When is anxiety a natural part of life and when does it become a hindrance to our faith and witness to others that we trust God?
- How much of our worry and care is rooted in genuine care and concern for others? When does worry reflect more a sense of being self-absorbed?
- If you are in this stage of life, how have you experienced the goodness and mercy of God meeting you along the way? The following exercise that looks at the decades of adulthood may help you think about this question as well.

Consider the questions below that focus on various decades of adult life. Do the questions for your age group ring true? What additional questions would you add?

In our 20s, we ask

- Who am I and how am I different from my family of origin?
- What will I do with my life?
- Can I love and am I loveable?
- What parts of me and my life need correcting?
- Around what person or world view will I organize my life?

In our 30s, we ask

- How do I prioritize the demands being made on my life?
- How far can I go in fulfilling my ambitions?
- Who is part of my primary community?
- What does my spiritual life look like? Do I even have one?
- Why am I not a better person?

In our 40s, we ask

- Who was I as a child? What influences formed me?
- Why do some people seem to be doing better than I am?
- Why am I so often disappointed with myself and others?
- Why are limitations beginning to outnumber options?
- Why do I seem to face so many uncertainties?

In our 50s, we ask

- Why is time moving so fast?
- Why is my body unreliable?
- How do I deal with my failures and successes?
- How do my spouse and I adjust to the changes in marriage?
- Who are these young people who want to replace me?
- What do I do with my doubts and fears?

In our 60s, we ask

- When will I stop doing the things that define me?
- Who will be with me when I die?
- Why do I feel ignored by a large part of the population?
- What is my spiritual legacy?
- What is yet to be accomplished?
- What does old age look like and am I ready for it?

In our 70s, we ask

- Does anyone know who and what I once was?
- How much of my life can I still control?
- What can I contribute?
- Why this anger and irritability?
- Is God really there for me?
- Am I ready to face death?
- Will I be missed?

Stewardship in adulthood

If you have access to the Internet, you may want to show this video from Everence, titled “Growing Generosity,” to your class. It focuses on helping people think about the legacy they want to leave for others. The legacy we leave is a reflection of our values and beliefs. It involves getting our estates in order but at the core, it reflects our beliefs and values. This beautiful 3-minute video depicts an older adult pruning his bonsai trees and thinking about the world his grandchildren will inherit. I think you will enjoy it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPQIk0ShRI8>

Richard Bode says that in school, we learn of Euclid’s most important postulate – the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But that may not always be the case. Heading straight into the wind can stall forward progress or even push a boat backward. When facing the wind coming from the direction he or she wants to go, a sailor knows to zigzag or tack back and forth, angling away from the destination – until eventually he or she arrives at home. Opposition can come in many ways. Our journey may take us in a direction that appears to be away from what we seek.

Sitting and listening to people process their disappointments and frustrations may not seem productive – especially if you know the answer for what they should do. But the willingness to sit and listen may help another person discern what he or she needs to do. Listening to the meandering thoughts of a friend may seem like getting off course, when in fact it is helping him or her experience the wind of the spirit to find his or her way home. Time is more than money. Time is a gift we share so others can feel validated and discover for themselves which way the wind is blowing.

AARP and Demos.com did a study that highlighted these revealing statistics:

- Americans age 50-plus had an average combined balance on all credit cards of \$8,278, compared with an average of \$6,258 for people younger than 50.
- 34 percent of people age 50-plus said they used credit cards to pay for basic living expenses because they didn’t have enough money in their checking accounts.

- 49 percent said car repairs and 38 percent said home repairs were part of their credit card debt.
- 23 percent of those surveyed said their credit card debt included money given to pay for a relative's debt or given to relatives.
- 95 percent of the people surveyed had incomes between \$20,000 and \$99,000.

Finances clearly contribute to the stress or well-being that many people feel in this stage of life. Adults caring for older and younger family members can sometimes put their own future in jeopardy by trying to rescue others. If you haven't sought the counsel of a financial advisor, consider calling Everence to help you navigate life's uncertainties.

This is an area that Everence can help with. If you or someone you know struggles with debt, call our partners at LSS at (877) 809-0039 or visit [everence.com/LSS](https://www.everence.com/LSS).

Session V: The Voyage of Life: old age



Cole's words about this painting

Portentous clouds are brooding over a vast and midnight ocean. A few barren rocks are seen through the gloom – the last shores of the world. These form the mouth of the river, and the boat, shattered by storms, its figures of the hours broken and drooping, is seen gliding over deep waters. Directed by God, who thus far has accompanied him unseen, the voyager, now an old man, looks upward to an opening in the clouds, from whence a glorious light bursts forth, and angels are seen descending the cloudy steps, as if to welcome him to the haven of immortal life.

The stream has now reached the ocean, to which all life is tending. The world, to old age, is destitute of interest. There is no longer any green thing upon it. The broken and drooping figures of the boat show that time is nearly ended. The chains of corporeal existence are falling away, and already the mind has glimpses of immortal life. The angelic being, of whose presence until now the voyager has been unconscious, is revealed to him, and with a countenance beaming with joy, shows to his wondering gaze scenes such as the eye of mortal man has never yet seen.

Life and death is about one voyage ending even as another is beginning. We arrive at the final painting of this series on the Voyage of Life. It is now twilight. All is dark except for the glorious light emanating from heaven. The angel is now close enough to be within the voyager's grasp. The world around the voyager has faded into insignificance. The waters are calm, and so is our voyager.

Discussion questions

- What are your thoughts as you look at this final scene from the Voyage of Life?
- Did it end as you had expected?
- What emotions are communicated through this depiction of old age?
- What has Cole left out of the painting and description of this stage of life?
- How might you have painted it differently?

C.D. Frey is credited with writing a revised version of the familiar children's song, *Jesus Loves Me*. Read the words aloud and then have the group sing it together. The words are also on a handout in the appendix.

Jesus loves me

Jesus loves me, this I know, though my hair is white as snow;

Though my sight is growing dim, still he bids me trust in him.

Yes, *Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me,*

Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.

Though my steps are, oh, so slow, with my hand in his I'll go;

On through life let come what may, he'll be there to lead the way.

When the nights are dark and long, in my heart he puts a song,

Telling me in words so clear, "Have no fear for I am near."

When my work on earth is done and life's victories 'been won,

He will take me home above, to the fullness of his love.

C.D. Frey, Tennessee, in *The Bible Friend*

Old age in the Bible

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 aloud and ask class members to listen to the imagery used by the preacher in this text. Can you figure out the allusions to how the aging process affects our physical abilities?

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them;"²before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain;³in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly;⁴when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low;⁵when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets;⁶before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern,⁷and the dust returns to the earth as it was: and the breath returns to God who gave it.⁸Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.

Here's how some commentators have explained the imagery of the Teacher's language

Verse 2 failing vision

Verse 3 weakening hands, arms, legs

Verse 4 speech slows, eating less, sleep is light, hearing is declining

Verse 5 fear of heights and falling

Verse 6 death comes and life on earth ceases

Verse 7 flesh returns to dust

Verse 8 all things mortal fade away

Read Isaiah 46:3-4

³Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

Isaiah seems to have a more upbeat approach compared with the writer of Ecclesiastes. How much have you talked about issues of growing old, and how we can prepare for the opportunities and challenges of this stage of life? It's been suggested that in the 21st century, there are really three stages that make up the retirement years. Consider this more modern portrayal.

Three stages of retirement

Independent: the go-go phase

The go-go phase is active retirement. It is the early retirement phase when we tend to be physically and mentally capable of living a fairly active lifestyle. In fact, the phase may not be that much different than pre-retirement except that there may be more time to do things such as travel and hobbies.

For some, the go-go phase or the active phase will include work. It may be part-time work or consulting in the same field of their pre-retirement career or it may mean self-employment. Whatever the case, active retirement is really living the stereotypical retirement dream. Many retirees in this phase are busier than they were before retirement.

Interdependence: the kick-back phase

The next phase of retirement is where the body is telling you to slow down a little. Often this happens between the ages of 70 and 84. Life starts falling into patterns and the excitement of retirement becomes more stable. Sometimes this phase is known as the stable retirement phase. Many of you know retirees in this phase because they have very predictable patterns like banking on Mondays, groceries on Tuesdays, bridge on Fridays, etc. Part of the reason for these patterns is that energy levels are changing, and patterns help minimize effort and thought without compromising on the enjoyment of life. The older you get, the more important it is to find routines and patterns that give you comfort and security. In the latter part of this phase, your travel may move from plane rides around the world to bus rides within the county or state.

Dependence: the slow-down phase

The last stage of retirement involves increased dependence on others. In this phase, time and age play a role in slowing down activities and abilities. Sometimes this is mental, sometimes physical and sometimes it can be financial.

Often this stage requires some level of support from family, governments or service agencies. Again, this can be physical, emotional or financial support. Choices become much more limited. If people have not moved into an assisted care facility, they may require home care or live with family members.

With people living longer, we will see increased long-term care needs for our seniors – or for ourselves. As living costs increase, discussions as faith communities on how to address the needs of an aging population are essential.

Discussion questions

- What kind of plans have you thought about for your slow-down stage of retirement?
- In what ways do you feel you are preparing yourself and in what ways do you feel inadequately prepared?
- So much depends on whether we have immediate family nearby to help us with the challenges of this stage. What kind of conversations have you had with aging parents or younger family members about caring for each other during later life?
- What additional counsel would you be interested in receiving to better prepare yourself and other family members for this time of life?
- If you are in this stage of life or if you're able to spend time with people in this stage of life, how do they express having experienced the goodness and mercy of God that has met them in these years?

First you have to row a little boat

Bode discusses the inability of sailors to control the elements around them and how sometimes when the wind stops, it can become quite unsettling. His description below reminds me a bit of Cole's painting of old age.

My boat was drifting placidly on even keel, and I could plainly see the blinking lights of land in the gathering dusk. Even so, a tremor of fear swept over me. I had become addicted to motion, as if the sheer movement of the sloop gave meaning to my life, and now I was forced to face alone the frightening stillness of the sea. (pg. 73)

That need for activity and movement in our lives can take on an addictive quality. As we get older, we will at some point slow down. How we respond to that reality may depend on how comfortable we are with quiet and stillness to begin with.

- What are the virtues of being still and quiet?
- How do you understand the instruction offered in Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God."? What is David suggesting?
- Is it possible that God designed our bodies to slow down in order to slow down the rest of us as well – including our spirits?
- What is it about quiet, solitude and lack of activity that can sometimes be so disconcerting?

Bode describes how before a wind shift of several degrees, there is typically a calm. He makes the point that when we are required to slow down or stop our normal activity, one of the things we dread most is that when the wind returns, it may be from a different direction. Lack of motion and solitude can be ominous for some people. God has taught us that it's often in times of quiet that we can best hear God's voice and sense God's presence.

1 Kings 19:11-13

*The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a **gentle whisper**. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Discussion questions

- Have there been times where you have sensed God's presence and "heard" God's voice in the quiet and stillness of the day?
- How does this relate to the stages of life where we are required to slow down and be still?
- Where is God when we become more and more dependent on others?

Stewardship and retirement

It is so easy to put off what we feel uncomfortable talking about. Everence has many resources to help people and groups think through and plan for retirement and other life issues. Feel free to contact your local Everence office or visit everence.com.

If you are interested in exploring this stage of life more in depth, please consider the Everence End-of-life study series. Contact your Everence Church Relations Representative for more information on how to access this 6-session study.

Homework option for next session

Consider printing and distributing the *Where I'm From* handout at the end of this session so that class members can come prepared to share this overview of their lives with each other for the sixth and last session. The instructions are included at the top of the document.

Session VI: All the days of my life

In preparation for the sixth and final session, you may want to have Cole's *Voyage of Life* prints from the previous four sessions visible for all to see. One way to begin this session is to recite together Psalm 23. If possible, have the group say it by memory and ask them to read the text, with verse six as a focal point.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me **all the days of my life**.* Psalm 23:6

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Invite the class to consider how this prayer reminds us of God's actions in the present throughout the many events of life.

- God provides
- God leads
- God restores
- God comforts
- God is present
- God protects
- God brings reconciliation
- God goes before us

Discussion questions

- Name ways God has been present throughout all the days of your life.
- In what ways has God used other people to act on his behalf?
- What have you learned about God's abiding presence as a result of Cole's artistic testimony in the *Voyage of Life*?
- How does remembering events in our lives encourage us as we consider the uncertain future?

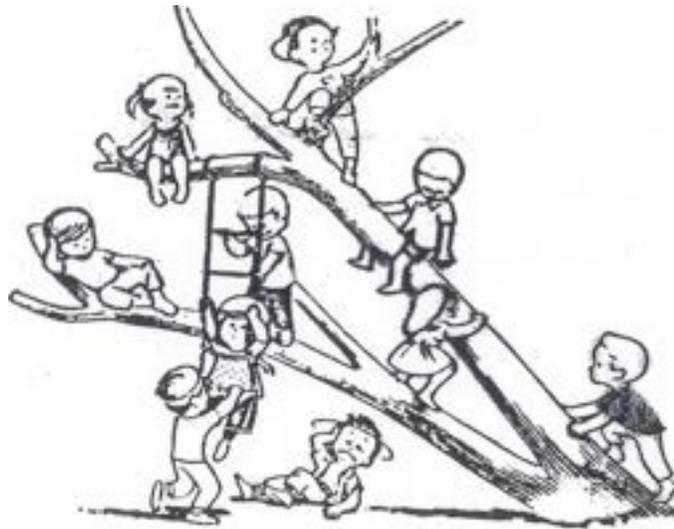
Children of God

We don't often step back to consider – all the days of our lives. Regardless of where we are on this timeline, we all would do well to stop, turn around and consider where we've come from and how it will shape where we are going. As an opening exercise, we have a visual in the appendix titled *The Children of God on the Tree of Life*. We invite you to make this available to class members and ask them to identify which child they most identify with based on his or her posture, position on the tree or other characteristic. We are all God's children regardless of our age and we are all called to be childlike (not childish) in our trust in God.

The children of God on the tree of life

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. Galatians 3:26

And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3



Discussion questions

- Which of these children of God on the tree of life do you most identify with?
- What does it mean to “change and become like little children” (Matt 18:3)?
- How do we retain a child-like attitude towards God?
- As you think over the last four sessions of the *All the days of my life* series, which children in the picture do you identify with as representing the present or previous stages of your life?
- As you look ahead to the next stage of life, which child do you hope to be like?

Where I'm from

We have included a final activity to summarize all that we have been talking about over the last several weeks. If you didn't distribute the *Where I'm from* handout from the appendix at the end of the last session, you can invite class members to work on it for a few minutes individually and then share as much as they have written.

Each of us has been formed by our experiences. Various people and places created home for us along the way. What pieces of your life have been significant in your Christian formation? George Ella Lyon is an Appalachian author and poet, with many popular children's books. Her poem, *Where I'm From*, begins in this way: *I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.)*

This exercise is a way to guide class members as they reflect on all the days of their lives, and write in key thoughts and memories they can then share with others.

Stewardship as a life-long quest

One final word from Richard Bode found in *First you have to row a little boat*.

There's an aspect to materialism that has to do with possession for its own sake, as if the goods we own are a measure of who we are. But there's another aspect that has to do with attachment to objects themselves long after they have ceased to serve their original purpose in our lives. (pg. 190)

Materialism is just one of the distractions that can challenge us in our lives. To fulfill the dreams of our youth and avoid the white-water of adulthood, we need to plan. Being good stewards requires preparation. It means getting good counsel along the way from people who understand our dreams and concerns.

If you want to learn more about how Everence can help you and your family at every stage of life, be in touch with your local Everence office or visit everence.com.



Everence

Everence helps individuals, organizations and congregations integrate finances with faith through a national team of advisors and representatives. Everence offers banking, insurance and financial services with community benefits and stewardship education. Everence is a ministry of Mennonite Church USA and other churches.

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Everence offers credit union services that are federally insured by NCUA. We also offer securities and other products that are not federally insured and are subject to loss of principal. Not all products are available in all states.

Lost at sea

You are adrift on a yacht in the South Pacific. Because of a fire of unknown origin, much of the yacht and its contents have been destroyed. The yacht is slowly sinking.

Your location is unclear because of the destruction of critical navigation equipment and because you and the crew were distracted trying to bring the fire under control. Your best estimate is that you are about 1,000 miles south-southwest of the nearest land.

Below is a list of 15 items undamaged after the fire. In addition to these articles, you have a serviceable rubber raft – with oars – large enough to carry yourself, the crew and all of the items listed below. The total contents of all survivors' pockets are a pack of cigarettes, several books of matches and five \$1 bills.

Your task is to rank the 15 items in terms of their importance to your survival. Place the number 1 by the most important item, the number 2 by the second-most-important and so on, through number 15.

- _____ Sextant
- _____ 20 square feet of opaque plastic
- _____ Shaving mirror
- _____ 1 quart of 160 proof rum
- _____ 5 gallon can of water
- _____ 15 feet of nylon rope
- _____ Mosquito netting
- _____ 2 boxes of chocolate bars
- _____ One case of U.S. Army C rations
- _____ Fishing kit
- _____ Maps of the Pacific Ocean
- _____ Seat cushion (flotation device approved by Coast Guard)
- _____ 2 gallon can of oil-gasoline mixture
- _____ Small transistor radio
- _____ Shark repellent

Lost at sea priority listing

1. Shaving mirror – critical for signaling air-sea rescue
2. 2-gallon can of oil -gas mixture – critical for signaling. The oil-gas mixture will float on the water and could be ignited with a dollar bill and a match (obviously outside the raft)
3. 5-gallon can of water – necessary to replenish fluid lost through perspiration, etc.
4. Can of U.S. Army C Rations – basic food
5. 20 square feet of opaque plastic – to collect rain water, provide shelter
6. 2 boxes of chocolate bars – reserve food supply
7. Fishing kit – ranked lower than food supplies because there is no guarantee that you will catch fish
8. 15 feet of nylon rope – used to lash equipment together and prevent it from falling overboard
9. Floating seat cushion – could function as a life preserver
10. Shark repellent – obvious
11. One quart of 160 proof rum – contains 80 percent alcohol and could be used as antiseptic for injuries. But will cause dehydration if ingested.
12. Small transistor radio – of little value because there is no transmitter
13. Maps of the Pacific Ocean – worthless without additional navigation equipment. It doesn't matter where you are but rather, where any rescuers are.
14. Mosquito netting – there are no mosquitoes in the South Pacific
15. Sextant – without a table and a clinometer, relatively useless



The child Samuel

Test your knowledge

1. What was the name of Samuel's father?
 - (a) Eli
 - (b) Elkanah
 - (c) Jonadab
 - (d) Shealtiel

2. What did Hannah promise to do if God would give her a male child?
 - (a) Fast once a week
 - (b) Never cut his hair
 - (c) Sacrifice her second born
 - (d) Not circumcise him

3. What else did she promise God?
 - (a) That she would teach him to be a priest
 - (b) That she would give him to the Lord
 - (c) That she would give him to Eli to adopt
 - (d) That she would never ask another petition of God

4. As Hannah prayed in the temple for a son, what did Eli think?
 - (a) He thought she was a gypsy
 - (b) He thought she was a fool
 - (c) He thought she had a familiar spirit
 - (d) He thought she was drunk

5. Why did Hannah name her son "Samuel"?
 - (a) Because she asked him of the Lord
 - (b) Because that was her husband's name
 - (c) Because he was a goodly child
 - (d) Because he was to be a Nazarite

6. How many children did Hannah have?
 - (a) 1
 - (b) 3
 - (c) 5
 - (d) 7

7. What did Hannah bring to Samuel every year?
 - (a) A coat
 - (b) A young lamb
 - (c) A clean robe
 - (d) A dove

Answers: 1. (b) 2. (b) 3. (b) 4. (d) 5. (a) 6. (c) 7. (a)





Stress levels

Some of you may have come across a simple test that identifies the level of stress we are under. Take a moment and determine your stress level right now, based on a chart developed by psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe. If you score more than 150 points on this scale based on events from the last six months, you are probably under significant stress.

Event	Stress points
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Jail time	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Loss of a job	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Health problem of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Gain of new family member	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change in line of work	36
Increased arguments with spouse	35
Large mortgage taken out	31
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in work responsibilities	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Major personal achievement	28
Spouse starting or stopping work	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with a boss	23
Change in work hours	20
Change in residence	20
Change in school	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18

Adulthood

Consider the questions below focusing on various decades of life. Do the questions for your age group ring true? What additional questions would you add?

In our 20s, we ask

- Who am I and how am I different from my family of origin?
- What will I do with my life?
- Can I love and am I loveable?
- What parts of me and my life need correcting?
- Around what person or world view will I organize my life?

In our 30s, we ask

- How do I prioritize the demands being made on my life?
- How far can I go in fulfilling my ambitions?
- Who is part of my primary community?
- What does my spiritual life look like? Do I even have one?
- Why am I not a better person?

In our 40s, we ask

- Who was I as a child? What influences formed me?
- Why do some people seem to be doing better than I am?
- Why am I so often disappointed with myself and others?
- Why are limitations beginning to outnumber options?
- Why do I seem to face so many uncertainties?

In our 50s, we ask

- Why is time moving so fast?
- Why is my body unreliable?
- How do I deal with my failures and successes?
- How do my spouse and I adjust to the changes in marriage?
- Who are these young people who want to replace me?
- What do I do with my doubts and fears?

In our 60s, we ask

- When do I stop doing the things that define me?
- Who will be with me when I die?
- Why do I feel ignored by a large part of the population?
- What is my spiritual legacy?
- What is yet to be accomplished?
- What does old age look like and am I ready for it?

In our 70s, we ask

- Does anyone know who and what I once was?
- How much of my life can I still control?
- What can I contribute?
- Why this anger and irritability?
- Is God really there for me?
- Am I ready to face death?
- Will I be missed?



Jesus loves me

Jesus loves me, this I know,
Though my hair is white as snow;
Though my sight is growing dim,
Still he bids me trust in him.

*Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.*

Though my steps are, oh, so slow
With my hand in his I'll go
On through life; let come what may,
He'll be there to lead the way.

When the nights are dark and long,
In my heart he puts a song,
Telling me in words so clear,
"Have no fear for I am near."

When my work on earth is done
And life's victories 'been won
He will take me home above
To the fullness of his love.

– C.D. Frey, Tennessee, in *The Bible Friend*

Where I'm from poem

Each of us has been formed by our experiences. Various people and places created home for us along the way. What pieces of your life have been significant in your Christian formation?

George Ella Lyon is an Appalachian author and poet, with many popular children's books. Her poem, *Where I'm from*, begins in this way: *I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.)*

In a similar manner, you are invited to reflect on your formation. Use the poem format below to create your own *Where I'm from* poem.

Format for poem

I am from _____ (specific ordinary item you had around your home growing up) and from _____ (another item from your childhood) and _____ (a specific memory).

I am from the _____ (home description, including adjective, adjective, sensory detail).

I am from the _____ (plant, flower, natural item), the _____ (plant, flower, natural detail).

I am from _____ (family tradition) and _____ (family trait), from _____ (name of family member) and _____ (another family name) and _____ (family name).

I am from the _____ (description of family tendency) and _____ (another family tendency).

From _____ (something you were told as a child) and _____ (another saying or value shared with you as you were growing up).

I am from _____ (faith/religious/spiritual beliefs you were raised with) and _____ (further description of these beliefs).

I am from _____ (place of birth and family ancestry) and _____ (two food items representing your family).

From the _____ (family story about a specific person and detail), the _____ (another detail) and the _____ (detail about another family member).

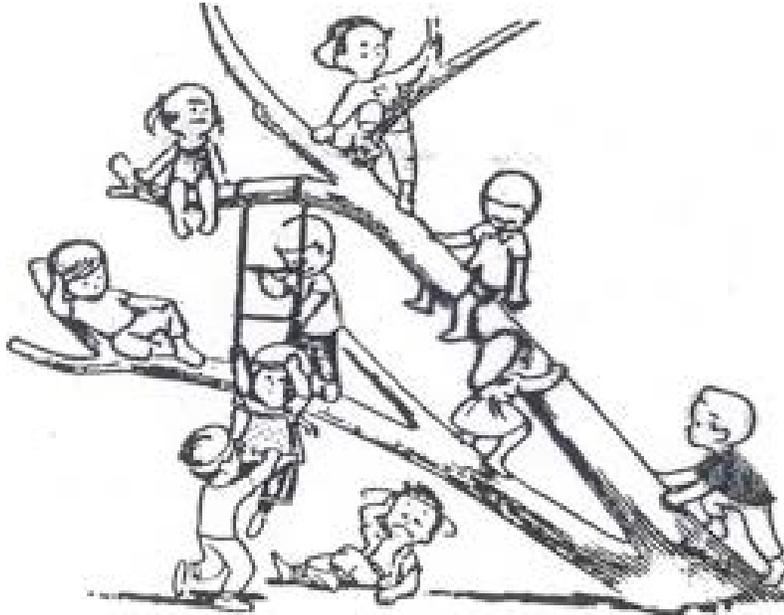
I am from _____ (location of family pictures, mementos, archives and several more lines indicating their worth).

– Adapted from Fred First, *Fragments from Floyd County*, www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com.

The children of God on the tree of life

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. Galatians 3:26

And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3



Discussion questions

- Which of these children of God on the tree of life do you most identify with?
- What does it mean to *"change and become like little children"* (Matt 18:3)?
- How do we retain a child-like attitude towards God?
- As you think over the last four sessions of the *All the days of my life* series, which children in the picture do you identify with as representing the present or previous stages of your life?
- As you look ahead to the next stage of life, which child do you hope to be like?