

# Learning to Dance

## Steps to Childless Acceptance



Facilitator's Guide

Mary Gorbey

# Learning to Dance

Steps to childless acceptance

## Welcome

"Learning to Dance – Steps to childless acceptance" is a childless support workshop for women and men. Thank you for joining us on this journey toward freedom and acceptance of your childlessness. You will find that while living a life childless is not what we had planned for ourselves, when we learn to dance, it will be a liberating, expressive experience. It is our hope that you leave this workshop with tools to live a better and happier life than what you have lived.

## About me

Ever since I was a child, I knew I wanted a family of my own one day. The years came and went, I got an education. I didn't get married so, I went to work overseas. After two years I returned home and completed a Masters' degree. After that, I got a job, began to work. Marriage didn't happen for me for a while and it wasn't for lack of trying. Then, I was finally blessed with a wonderful man and married at the age of 40. My husband and I tried to start a family of our own right away, but it never happened. I clung to Bible verses hoping for the miracle that would never come "With God all things are possible." (Luke) "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalms) etc. I comforted myself with these words. After three miscarriages and six failed IVF attempts, the realization that we would never have children of our own became a painful reality. On top of it all, by the end of our journey we were deemed too old to adopt.

After the initial shock and denial, I began to feel depressed, alone, bitter and angry. This is not the life I had planned for myself. I went back and forth between deep depression and self-medication – all the while, having to put on a brave face and somehow function, somehow keep it together when everyone around me was living my dream.

Now, I am slowly embracing and accepting this life that God has given me. I am beginning to understand that everything happens for a purpose. It's still a journey, triggers can come like a freight train and plunge me into deep sadness again but I am becoming stronger and it is getting better. I am on my way to claiming my Plan B.

While my life is not what I imagined, I am learning to feel at peace and I am learning to dance. Will you join me?

**Mary Gorombey**

# Introduction

## Who is this for?

This workshop has been developed for women and men who are infertile or childless by circumstance - seeking support and a way forward. Together we will embark on a journey of support and healing enabling us to become the whole people God intended us to be

It is for those childless women and men (couples and singles) who find they need to share their stories, discover their value in society, release their pain and grief and find a way to cope and move forward. This workshop has been developed for women and men who are infertile or childless by circumstance - seeking support and a way forward. The participants would be those individuals with no children and for whom the chapter of their lives on having or trying to have children is closed. This is not a workshop for those still trying to conceive, nor is it one for those experiencing secondary infertility (those who have a child but cannot conceive or give birth to another).

Together you will embark on a journey of support and healing enabling you to become the whole people God intended us to be.

**The facilitator** should be someone who himself or herself is childless and has suffered along the journey of infertility. They can be at any part of their journey still grieving, moving toward acceptance and well-on to acceptance.

The ideal group size would be roughly between 12 and 20. Any group larger than that, would have to make use of additional facilitators.

It is my conviction that the God of the Bible is a good God. He is the One who truly comforts us in our suffering. He is the One who created us to experience wholeness and value regardless of our condition and place. He through Jesus Christ is the source of all healing and Jesus Christ offers to carry our burdens (Matthew 11:28-30). Participants are invited from the Christian community in a local geographic area i.e. Brampton/Mississauga.

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### Tips for the Facilitator

If you are facilitating a workshop for the first time, you might find the following tips helpful:

- Smile, breathe and know that by the end of this workshop you will have helped childless men and women come closer to healing
- If possible, try to find out about your participant's in advance, determine if there are any special needs i.e. mobility issues, language/cultural differences that you should be aware of, how many men/women will participate
- Make enough copies of the participant's guide for all participants
- Arrive at the location of your workshop at least one hour before to prepare the room
  - Decorate the room to make it a welcoming energetic place, if there isn't a great view from windows, bring the outside in. Use plants, flowers (non-allergenic ones), artwork etc. to brighten the room.
- Greet participants as they arrive. In the interest of respect, inclusivity and safety acknowledge each participant. Not only does this demonstrate hospitality, it also lets participants know at the beginning that they are important and valuable.
- Because you are childless yourself, it may be difficult at times to separate your emotions from the topics and activities. This is something you must be able to do. This workshop is about your participants not you. Certainly some of the activities such as the River of Live activity and the Letting Go activity will welcome your emotion and empathy. However, you must demonstrate strength and self-control when facilitating.
- Don't be afraid of silence. During group activities, after asking questions, give participants time to answer. Extroverts may be quick to offer their answers, however introverts will need time to process the question and formulate their answer.
- Ensure an environment of safety and respect. Allow everyone the chance to share their knowledge and experience.
- Be flexible. The workshop should last approximately 4 ½ to 5 hours with breaks. The timing for activities is provided in both your facilitator's and participant's guide. Adhere to the timing as much as possible, but be flexible.
- Begin the workshop by establishing ground rules. Work on this together as a group. What rules should you establish?
- Although the topic is heavy, try to end both days on a positive, try to encourage participants to take hope with them.

### Why is this workshop needed?

In the developed world, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 4 men never realize what seems to the majority one of the most natural things – a family of their own. In Canada that number is around 1 in 6. (Day, 2017) Therefore in Canada, 25.8% of couples are living without children (Grenier, 2017). Other statistics indicate that 1 in 6 couples in Canada are affected by infertility (Kozicka, 2016). Statistics on infertile singles are virtually non-existent.

Because there is such an overwhelming emphasis on having children in our society, those suffering with infertility and childlessness often do so, alone and in silence. Those having experienced miscarriages, failed fertility procedures and countless medical tests exit the process traumatized and despite their best efforts, thousands of dollars spent, fervent prayers said, they still exit the process without realizing their dream of having a child. “The psychosocial issues facing those couples for whom biological parenthood doesn't come easily are profound and unusually daunting. The reasons for this are found in the intimate association of infertility with loss and grief, disruptive and invasive medical treatments, and repetitive cycles of hope and failure.” (Catherall, 2004)

Despite the high numbers of people struggling with infertility and childlessness, support for such individuals is sparse at best. Counselling services are available at most IVF clinics but they are available to people still on the trying to conceive (TTC) journey. There are very few helping people come to terms with their childlessness. While family and friends move on and develop their families, the involuntary childless feel left behind experiencing a lack of support. Their childlessness is a lonely experience and where strategies to cope are lacking, depression, anxiety and other health problems may arise (L. Lechner, 2007). Because of the absence of easily available support, those having experienced miscarriages and childlessness, find that they haven't properly worked through their loss. In some cases, where families have experienced miscarriage, they must grieve alone with little support. Those around them who should be sources of support, sadly add to the anxiety and feelings of low self-worth. Additionally, the pain and financial burden of unsuccessful attempts at having children puts a tremendous burden on a marriage.

Childlessness causes women and men to question their self-worth and value in society. For women especially, they grow up believing that one of their key roles in the world is to be a mother and raise children. With that taken away, they are left wondering what their role is. Some discover early on in their lives that they will never be able to have children due to health conditions. For others it takes years of testing and prodding and procedures to finally come to the end. And still there are others who because of

circumstance, never married, never found a partner with whom they could have a family. "Why don't you just adopt?" well-meaning individuals suggest. The process of adoption is no less difficult. Involving years of uncertainty, and the risk of heartbreak. Also, at the end of the day, adoption isn't for everyone.

Sadly, the Christian community provides less support to childless couples and individuals and with its heavy emphasis on families with children, the childless feel left out, lonely and out of place in the one place that should be welcoming and inclusive. Those fussy babies and restless children during the church service may be perfectly endearing to some others but the sound is painful for the childless. Seeing expectant mothers celebrated may cause others who will never share in that experience to be overcome with deep sorrow. Mother's Day services, Father's Day events, Christmas concerts, youth events etc. Words such as 'You can't know God's love until you have children,' or 'You don't know how to love until you have children' heard from pulpits are words hurtful enough to drive away the childless having them never to return. There is also a glaring lack of community for the childless. "The late 30s and early 40s are the loneliest because friends are parents, but not empty nesters." (Jones, 2014)

Furthermore: "Church groups for couples, singles, and women in their 30s and 40s consist almost entirely of parents who gravitate to each other to chat about potty training, children's soccer, and teenage angst. The childless feel sidelined. Criticisms take a spiritual edge with some arguing that procreation is God's command, not just his blessing. Too many pronounce infertility a sign of divine disfavor, leaving women reticent to admit their situation. Controversies over the morality of fertility options make discussions seem like minefields. The result: Church feels unsafe." (Jones, 2014)

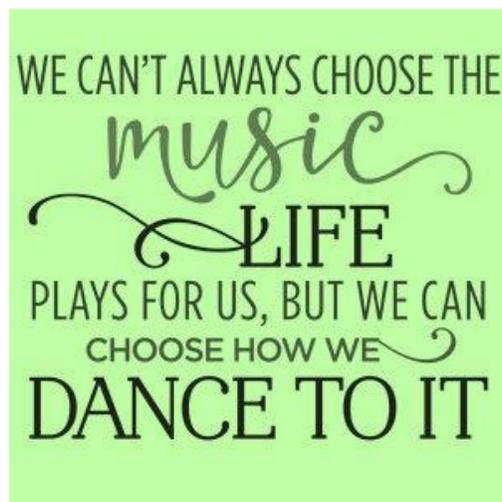
As Christians, we have to come to accept that all things happen for a purpose but re-identifying that purpose is extremely challenging. The childless need to find their place in a church community because God does not desire to see us in pain and suffering. We must find ways to unburden ourselves, continue the journey of healing. We must find ways to cope with the current stressors in our surroundings and find the means to move forward in peace and acceptance knowing that the pain will never cease, triggers will continually face us but that we are valuable and precious to God. He has a purpose for our lives and that He can do great things.

It is for these reasons that **Learning to Dance – Steps to childless acceptance** has been developed.

As Christians, we have to come to accept that all things happen for a purpose. Letting go of what we thought was our purpose and re-identifying it is extremely challenging

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and also liberating. God does not desire to see us in pain and suffering. He does not want us to feel incomplete. He wants to dance with us. Together we must find ways to recognize our pain, unburden ourselves and continue the journey of healing. We must adjust our life's choreography because we are valuable and precious to God. He has a purpose for our lives and He can do great things. **He wants to fill our dance card!**



## When to do the workshop

The workshop can be held any time that is convenient for the participants. A suggestion might be some time in the fall. Thanksgiving and Christmas are especially difficult holidays for those who are childless. Learning how to cope before these events may help participants survive the holidays with their emotions relatively in-tact

Because of the amount of material to be covered, the workshop should run for two days. A suggestion might be two Saturday mornings or two weeknights (leaving a week between meetings).

The timing of the workshop will affect the Letting Go exercise, where something will be planted as a symbol of letting go of participants' grief. Choose a bulb or seed to plant in accordance to the season. You can ask a hobby gardener or stop by a landscape nursery to ask for suggestions.

## Place and space

The ideal location of this workshop should be a comfortable and warm non-threatening place. Since the workshop is geared toward Christians, a church room can be this however, a room in a community centre may also be suitable. If a church room is used, care must be taken to avoid the use of children's Sunday school room and care must be also taken to avoid sharing the space with other programs i.e. Mom's and Tots, Kid's clubs etc. If possible a room above grade would be best. The room should have natural light. It should fit 15-20 people comfortably allowing for room to move around for some of the activities. There should be tables available in order to perform writing activities. The room should be able to be darkened so that viewing a short clip would be possible. Or the quality of the projector should be such that it would be bright enough to be visible in a brighter room. Walls should be such that paper can be stuck on them.

Food and beverages should be provided. Not only is it welcoming and demonstrates hospitality, it is practical as a 5



## Looking Ahead

- Day 1 Warm up – the pain of never
- Activity 1 – Examining views of childlessness
- “The Pain of Never” clip
- Activity 2 Learning to share our story
- Grief discussion and activity
- Day 2 Check in, review
- Coping with stressors
- Moving forward re-establishing harmony
- Developing our Plan B
- Finding our support network

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hour day without food and drink can be long and perhaps even unsafe for people with medical conditions requiring them to eat. It is up to the organizers to determine if lunch will be provided but it might be a good idea to encourage friendship among the participants. If it will not be provided, that needs to be communicated to the participants in advance.

### Desired outcome

This workshop will aim to give participants a place to learn of their value to God, to society, and to themselves. By the end of the workshop they will:

- Improve your ability to **identify** and **express** your feelings about your childlessness.
- Be encouraged to **move** toward **changing** your negative feelings about yourself into positive ones, affirmed by Biblical truths.
- Be better able to **share** your stories and to **unburden** yourself.
- **Engage** in an exercise to help you **release** your grief.
- Will be better equipped with coping strategies to manage stressors and your reactions to them.
- **Experience** a safe place where you and others experiencing childlessness can **build** community.
- **Learn** to better **let go** of your negativity and **move forward**.
- Be on your way to **creating** your "Plan B".
- **Receive** support on your journey of childlessness.

### What will be learned

The Content	Objectives
The Pain of Never	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will share the reasons for their childlessness.</li><li>• Participants will watch the testimony of Jessica Hepburn and reflect on it.</li><li>• Participants will express their initial feelings and emotions about childlessness and how they perceive it is viewed.</li></ul>
Sharing your Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will share their fertility journey through the River of Life exercise.</li><li>• They will share and listen to each other's stories.</li></ul>
Grief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants will read about grief related to childlessness.</li><li>• Participants will discuss the stages of grief theory of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and determine where they might fit.</li><li>• They will perform an exercise where they will let go of their negative feelings and grief related to their childlessness.</li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They will pray and worship together as a means of relief and healing.</li> </ul>
Adjusting your view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will identify and verbalize the negative feelings they have about themselves because of their childlessness</li> <li>• Participants will reflect on those negative words and phrases and share them in a general way with the group</li> <li>• A negative feelings inventory will be created</li> <li>• Participants will review a list of Bible verses which will affirm their value to God and to the world.</li> <li>• Participants will meditate on the verses and reflect on what personal instruction they will take away with them from the verses</li> </ul>
Coping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will read a quote and reflect on it</li> <li>• Participants will read about stressors and triggers</li> <li>• They will identify situations which are stressful to them because of being childless</li> <li>• They will identify what effects those stressors have on them</li> <li>• They will review and discuss coping strategies and select ones to apply.</li> <li>• They will create a role play and act it out in front of the group</li> </ul>
Moving Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will define the meaning of harmony for themselves and discover obstacles to achieving harmony</li> <li>• Participants will create and share an inventory of things they can do because they do not have children</li> <li>• They will identify their dreams – things they have always wanted to do by delayed doing</li> <li>• They will review a list of values and apply them to their dreams</li> <li>• They will choose the things that they still wish to do and formulate a plan to begin doing it</li> </ul>

## The Workshop

### Instructions for Facilitator

Thank you for your courage to lead this workshop. You may be on the path of acceptance of your childlessness yourself or you may be still on your journey toward it. In any case, I believe the contribution you will make will be real and relevant.

This is an emotional topic and one which may be difficult for some to talk about. Really, this may be the first time participants are able to meet people other childless people face to face and honestly, openly share their experiences and feelings.

You as facilitator should encourage such sharing. You should also be sensitive to the fact that some may not know how to put their feelings in to words. Some may find it very easy. In group activities while sharing, be careful not to call on people by name. Also, give opportunity for everyone to contribute who wishes to do so. Don't be afraid of silences, give participants time to formulate what they want to express.

Care must be taken to encourage a safe environment for all participants. Establishment of ground rules must take place. Participants must be assured that what they share will remain with the group. Participants must treat each other with respect understanding that they all may be on different parts of the journey. Some may have only recently miscarried or have found out their negative diagnosis. Some may be further along having accepted where they are. This is not the group to provide advice on how to conceive or what someone should have done. It is not the group to pass judgement on one another. Looking forward to the section of the program on coping, certainly that is the place where participants can share what works for them and what doesn't.

The workshop has been designed in such a way as to take into account different styles of communicating. Some may be more comfortable talking out loud, there will be opportunity for this. Some activities encourage quiet reflection.

It is my hope that at the end of this workshop, participants will come away feeling better about themselves. Hopefully, they will feel a sense of release and comfort. They will also find the strength and courage to move forward with positivity.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. “ Romans 8:28 ESV

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### Suggested Timing

Day 1	You are not alone	5 min	Day 2	Checkin	10 min
	Pain of never Solo	2 min		Your present tune	5 min
	Watch clip	5 min		Hearing a new tune	15 min
	Solo reflection on clip	2 min		Coping - quote reflection	5 min
	Group reflection on clip	5 min		Review Stress explanation	2 min
	How do you feel	10 min		Negative effects of stress	2 min
	Sharing your story	1 min		Coping with stressors	
	Drawing river of life	20 min		Identifying your stressors	15 min
	Sharing your drawing/story	15 min		Role Play Exercise	45 min
	Group reflection on activity	5 min		[Break]	
	[Break]			Finding your Plan B	
	Grief - identify personal loss	5 min		Finding harmony in your life	7 min
	Pair work - fertility loss	8 min		Benefits of harmony	15 min
	Come together reflection	7 min		Creating your vision	10 min
	Stages of grief	15 min		Examining your values	10 min
	Reflect on Jody day excerpt	10 min		Get organized	10 min
	Letting Go - writing letter	30 min		Drawing your support network	15 min
	Decorating Pot - Planting bulb	30 min		Discussion with partner	10 min
	Closing Liturgy	20 min		Closing prayer	10 min

Day 1 & 2 Total Length: approximately 4 hours each day with breaks

Add breaks where appropriate including a break for lunch.

## Materials Needed

1 Participant's Guide per person

Projector, Screen

Laptop with Internet Connection

Flip-Chart paper

Pens, Coloured pens, non-permanent markers, coloured pencils, highlighters

Notebook for each participant

Letter Sized Blank paper

Newsprint or other compostable writing paper

Terra cotta flower pots (one per participant)

Potting soil, enough to fill all the pots

Seasonal Seeds or bulbs

Tissues



Day 1

Warm up Activity

(In pairs) **You are not alone.** 5 minutes

Have participants begin to express their feelings about whether they feel alone in their childlessness.

Have participants read the brief list of childless statistics below and invite their reaction as a whole group.

**Did you know?**

- That 1 in 6 Canadians experience infertility (What is infertility?, 2018).
- **That our generation** boasts the most childless adults since the First World War? (The Rise of Childlessness, 2017)
- Famous childless men and women include: Jane Austen, Milton and Catherine Hershey, Evangeline Booth (daughter of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army), Rosa and Raymond Parks (civil rights heroine)
- **That** a German study found that 42% of charitable foundations were created by childless people. (The Rise of Childlessness, 2017)

The Pain of Never

**a) (Solo Activity) Reasons for your childlessness - 5 minutes**

Using the list of possible causes of childlessness, have participants take a moment and identify their cause.



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b) **(As a Group)** Watch the brief clip of Jessica Hepburn produced by The Fertility Network UK. (10 minutes)

As they watch, have participants think of how they feel about what Jessica Hepburn says. What words or phrases grab them. (5 minutes)

#Hidden Faces the Pain of Never: Jessica Hepburn <https://youtu.be/5OEDYZ19EuE>

- 1) Give participants a moment to reflect on the clip alone.
- 2) Have them share their feelings in a group. (5 minutes)

How do you feel about your childlessness?

10 minutes

In this exercise, have participants explore the feelings of their childlessness in more depth. Using the questions in the participant's guide.

Give participants time to process how they feel.

Take a moment and reflect on all the feelings that you are experiencing at this time. You must have memories coming to mind. Painful times.

Sharing your story

Have a volunteer read aloud the text under the title Sharing Your Story: **"We all have been through a lot and you probably feel totally alone in your pain. ..."**

River of Life exercise (40 minutes)

(Have participants do the River of Life exercise as described in the participant's guide. )

Drawing the River of Life (20 minutes)

(Duet or Trio) **Sharing your story (15 minutes)**

Have participants share their story in groups of 2 -3

(Ensemble) **Come together as a large group and reflect on the activity. 5 min**

## Grief



### Activity 1 Identifying our losses (20 minutes)

Have participants reflect on whether they grieved and how they did so during their infertility journey. Why is it that they did not grieve as they would have, the loss of a loved one.

### Activity 2 – Stages of Grief 10 minutes

Review the 5 stages of Grief as per Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her famous book On Death and Dying describes 5 stages of grief: **denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance**. Give examples of each, so that participants understand. Use the illustration in the participant's guide to help you.

Participants will receive the handout. **Stages of Grief and Childlessness** have them work in pairs and ask them to identify examples from their own fertility journey of when they displayed behaviours of the 5 stages.

Explain to participants that the stages are not a progressive list of stages but in fact, they could experience behaviours of multiple stages at any given time. There is also no time limit to how long they must spend in each stage.

### Activity 3 - Grieving your infertility. 10 minutes

Have a participant read the excerpt from Jody Day's book *Living the life unexpected* describing fertility grief found in the participant's guide.

Have the group reflect on the thoughts found there.

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### Activity 4 - Letting Go – 60 minutes

Explain to participants that the following exercise is meant to give a place for them to grieve and try to begin to heal and let go of any emotions that may be holding them back from life.

- a) Writing letters – assure participants that everything they write is up to them. They can be expressive as they wish. You may play soft, gentle music in the background to foster a more contemplative mood.

Some people may need a lot of time for this activity. Some will need less. It may be a good idea to explain the whole activity at once and give a time limit to cover the whole activity. That way, if someone wanted to spend more time writing they can, if someone would prefer to decorate their pot more, they can do that. The actual planting will only take a few minutes.

After you sense that everyone has completed the activity, have them reflect, using the questions in their guide.

### Closing activity 5 minutes

Recap the day. Ask participants to spend the week re-examining their feelings about your childlessness. Have them reflect on their grief, their letting go. Encourage participants to spend the week journaling, writing, drawing, pasting pictures reflecting on the day their feelings about being childless and their grief.

## Closing liturgy (20 minutes)

### **A Liturgy of Loss\***

## Welcome and Gathering

We meet in the name of Jesus Christ who died and was raised to the glory of God the Father  
His grace and mercy be with you

**And also with you**

**We come, Lord in sorrow. We cry to you from the depths.**

**We wait for you, Lord, and in your word is our hope.**

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength

*A moment of quiet*

## Prayers of Grief

Jesus said "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

Give us the faith to believe

That this is the pathway through life

You, who spent time in the wilderness,

Remember with us your struggling.

You, who were tossed in the centre of storms,

Remember with us the fear of that moment.

You whose friends slept through the agony of your heart,

Remember with us the loneliness.

**God of grace, in you is life**

**We thank you that you are with us in the storms**

**As well as by the still waters**

**That you are life and in our lives**

**We come before you today to bring our grief**

**For the times of pain and tears;**

**Times of not being understood by family and friends,**

**Times of longing and struggling,**

**Ties of searching and emptiness,**

**Times of giving up hope.**

**We come before you today to bring our grief**

**For the feelings of loss.**

**For the child we could never bring to birth**

**For all that we can never share with them.**

God of compassion,

You make nothing in vain

And love all that you have created,

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We commit to you our baby and our faded hope of having a child  
For whom we wanted to pour out such great love  
For whom we cherished many hopes and dreams.  
Grant us the assurance that our child,  
Though not seen by us, is seen and known by you  
And will share the risen life of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

We light a candle to remember the children we dreamed about;  
Whose lives is now held in love, in God's most tender care.  
We light a candle to express the longing of our hearts;  
The longing for the gift of a child.  
God who sees into the depths of our hearts  
And knows our words before we speak them  
We lay the burden of our grief at the foot of the cross.  
Remembering the dream that was not to be  
We lay down the sadness and the emptiness  
We release then into your transforming power  
Trusting that you know us and love us.  
We ask you to walk with us  
Grant us healing and strength.  
*(silence)*

O God, giver of all comfort,  
Look down on me who has known the joy of hoping for a new life within  
And the desolation of losing that life;  
Do not hide your face from my distress,  
But hear me when I call to you;  
Restore me to health in body and spirit  
And renew in me hope, faith and love,  
For we ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Prayer and Psalm of Thanksgiving and Healing

God of grace, in you is life.  
We thank you that you are with us in the storms  
As well as by the still waters  
That you are life and in our lives  
We come before you today to give our thanks  
That in our pain you did not leave us  
That in your mercy you tended to our wounds

## Prayer for Anointing

Holy Spirit come and be with us  
Guide and inspire us  
Let us know your power  
Power to heal  
Power to comfort  
Power to console  
Holy Spirit come and be with us  
**O give thanks to the Lord for he is good  
His steadfast love endures forever  
Out of my distress I called on the Lord  
The Lord answered me and set me free  
It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
Than to put confidence in princes  
I was pushed hard so that I was falling  
But the Lord helped me  
The Lord is my strength and my song  
He has become my salvation  
O give thanks to the Lord for he is good  
His steadfast love endures forever.**

*From [Psalm 118](#)*

We light a candle as a sign of hope that God is always with us, that he loves us and knows our hearts and our deepest desires.

See the light for your journey.

And believe that the Spirit always moves ahead of you.

Feel the warmth of the flame,

It is the warmth of the love of God for you

That love will surround you wherever you go.

Take into yourself the power of the Holy Spirit

That you may be given courage for the next step of the journey.

*(silence)*

## Dismissal

Jesus said "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So now, go in peace

May you know the grace of God.

May your saviour, who has your treasure,

Walk with you today and every day.

Amen.

**(Lowrie, 2017) \*Liturgy Courtesy of Lizzie Lowrie: A Liturgy of Loss.**

<http://saltwaterandhoney.org/blog/a-liturgy-of-loss>

Day 2

Welcome – 10 minutes

Make participants feel welcome. Acknowledge them all individually.

Check-in

By asking them how their week went.

Listen to their reflections on the past week.

Have participants reflect on the past week.

Introduce the topics of the day.



Looking ahead.

Today we will:

- Adjust our views of ourselves in light of God's Word
- Examine and practice strategies for coping with our childlessness and the stress that can come from that.
- Consider and formulate a plan to live our childless lives with purpose and meaning.

### Adjusting your view – Dancing to a different tune

This exercise is meant to aid the childless to reorient their view to how God sees us as supported in scripture.

Complete the exercise as described in the Participant's Guide

In Activity 1 take 10 minutes to encourage participants to share their negative views about themselves. Write the words and phrases on a flip-chart.

In Activity 2 encourage participant's engagement with the Bible verses. You may adjust the timing of this activity according to what is needed. It can be shorter or longer if needed.

## Bible Passages

### Isaiah 43

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

**Matthew 6:25-34 English Standard Version (ESV) Matthew 6:25-34  
English Standard Version (ESV)**

### Do Not Be Anxious

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?<sup>[a]</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

## **2 Corinthians 12**

On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## **Psalms 113**

Praise the LORD!  
Praise, O servants of the LORD,  
praise the name of the LORD!  
Blessed be the name of the LORD  
from this time forth and forevermore!  
From the rising of the sun to its setting,  
the name of the LORD is to be praised!  
The LORD is high above all nations,  
and his glory above the heavens!  
Who is like the LORD our God,  
who is seated on high,  
who looks far down  
on the heavens and the earth?  
He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people.  
He gives the barren woman a home,  
making her the joyous mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

## Coping

Have someone read the quote by Anne Lamott and reflect on it as a group. (5 Minutes)

Read and explain the definition of stress as in the handout.

Have group read the definitions of stress. Provide additional clarification if needed.

No matter how far along we are in our journey, we will always encounter stressors "unanticipated events that disrupt family life and can potentially damage individuals and their relationships." (Catherall, 2005) The use of the word "potentially" in this quote is important.

We will always encounter triggers that remind us of our stressors. How we react to the triggers is the key. That is when we learn to dance with the limp.

Review the following diagram – illustrating the negative effects of stress. 3 minutes



**Review and discuss the effects of stress on the individual using the following diagram**

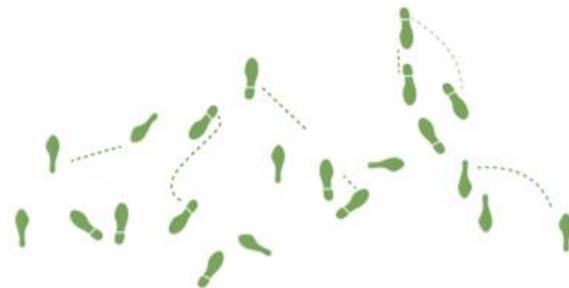


Have the group discuss the negative effects of stress and why it is important to be able to handle the stress in our lives. (3 minutes)

Review the information about the types of stressors.

Managing Stressors

**(As a group)** Review the handout **Blake Flannery's master list of coping strategies** (Flannery, 2016). Have participants add any strategies that are missing. (5 minutes)



## Learning to Dance - Facilitator's Guide

### Activity 3 - Identifying your Stressors – 15 minutes

In groups of 2-3, have participants identify situations that are stressful because of their childlessness. If needed give an example.

Continue with this activity as in the participant's guide.

### Activity 4 - Role play Exercise

Situational role play – 45 minutes

About role plays. Roleplays are very beneficial and therapeutic. With this exercise, it is important that participants feel safe enough to play their role as authentically as possible. However, they must be aware that emotions can be stirred up by such an exercise and they must be considerate of that for the other participants.

## Blake Flannery's (2016) master list of coping methods and skills

### **Diversions:**

- Write, draw, paint, photography
- Play an instrument, sing, dance, act
- Take a shower or a bath
- Garden
- Take a walk, or go for a drive
- Watch television or a movie
- Watch cute kitten/puppy videos on YouTube
- Play a game
- Go shopping
- Clean or organize your environment
- Read
- Take a break or vacation

### **Social/Interpersonal Coping:**

- Talk to someone you trust
- Set boundaries and say "no"
- Write a note to someone you care about
- Be assertive
- Use humor
- Spend time with friends and/or family
- Serve someone in need
- Care for or play with a pet
- Role-play challenging situations with others
- Encourage others
- Avoid social media

### **Cognitive Coping:**

- Make a gratitude list
- Brainstorm solutions
- Lower your expectations of the situation
- Keep an inspirational quote with you
- Be flexible
- Write a list of goals
- Take a class
- Act opposite of negative feelings
- Write a list of pros and cons for decisions
- Reward or pamper yourself when successful
- Write a list of strengths
- Accept a challenge with a positive attitude

### **Tension Releasers:**

- Exercise or play sports
- Catharsis (yelling in the bathroom, punching a punching bag)
- Cry
- Laugh

### **Physical:**

- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Get into a good routine
- Eat a little chocolate
- Limit caffeine
- Deep/slow breathing

### **Spiritual:**

- Pray or meditate
- Enjoy nature
- Get involved in a worthy cause

### **Limit Setting:**

- Drop some involvement
- Prioritize important tasks
- Use assertive communication
- Schedule time for yourself

## Moving Forward -Changing our Choreography

Take a moment to review what you have accomplished together today as in the participant's guide.

Introduce the next topic

### How to Find your Plan B

- Identify what's missing
- Create a vision
- Clarify your values and priorities
- Recognize what you can change and what you can't
- Get organized
- Foster your support network



### Activity 5 - Identify What's Missing - Finding harmony in your life

What is harmony? 5-7 minutes – have participants brainstorm what they think harmony is like.

Discuss why harmony is important and the obstacles to harmony. 5 minutes

### Benefits of Harmony – 15 minutes

Have participants consider the positives in being childless. The answers can be as big or as trivial as they would like. It may be beneficial and enjoyable to work in pairs .

**Benefits of harmony**

What things can you do because you are childless in each of these aspects of your life to create harmony?

**Personal**

**Family**

**Work**

**Community**

### Finding your Plan B

It's important for participants not to dwell in the negative. It's also difficult not to. So in this exercise, you will work toward moving forward in a positive way. Really encourage participants to think of as many concrete examples of positive change that they can. Their way forward may be something as simple as learning to play a musical instrument. It may be something as big as changing careers. Whatever the plan for change, it's important for participants to consider them seriously and commit to taking steps to realizing their vision.

### Creating your Vision 20 minutes

Have participants make an inventory of the things they would like to do.

### Examining your Values – 10 minutes

Examine the list of values as a group and have participants add any they wish to the list.

Explain that many times our dreams are not necessarily aligned with our values. For example, I may dream of buying a newer, bigger, nicer house but when I value material simplicity highly, seeking to acquire that house becomes less of a priority. This is why it is important for participants to examine their vision in light of their values.

### Get organized - minutes

Taking on something new may be daunting for many. The fear itself can be paralyzing, that is why it is beneficial for participants to break down their idea into steps. Helping identify the first step can help break down the fear.

### Identifying a Support Network

Have participants do the support network exercise to help visualize their network and where they need to build one. Have participants discuss their support network in pairs.

*My Action Plan*

<b>Things I have always wanted to do but delayed doing</b>	<b>My Values</b>	<b>Things I would still like to do in light of my values</b>	<b>The first step</b>	<b>The next steps</b>

## Learning to Dance - Facilitator's Guide

### Examples of Values

Security	Satisfaction
Freedom	Closeness
Adventure	Peace
Fun	Humour
Health	Contentment
Love/Connection	Comfort
Honesty	Learning/Growing
Passion	Being the best
Intimacy	Contributing
Commitment	Helping
Loyalty	
Positive Thinking	Other Values? (write any below)
Friendship	
Success	
Respect	
Happiness	
Self-Worth	
Entertainment	
Survival	
Excitement	
Escape	
Creativity	
Confidence	
Solitude	
Courage	
Gratitude	

## Final Words

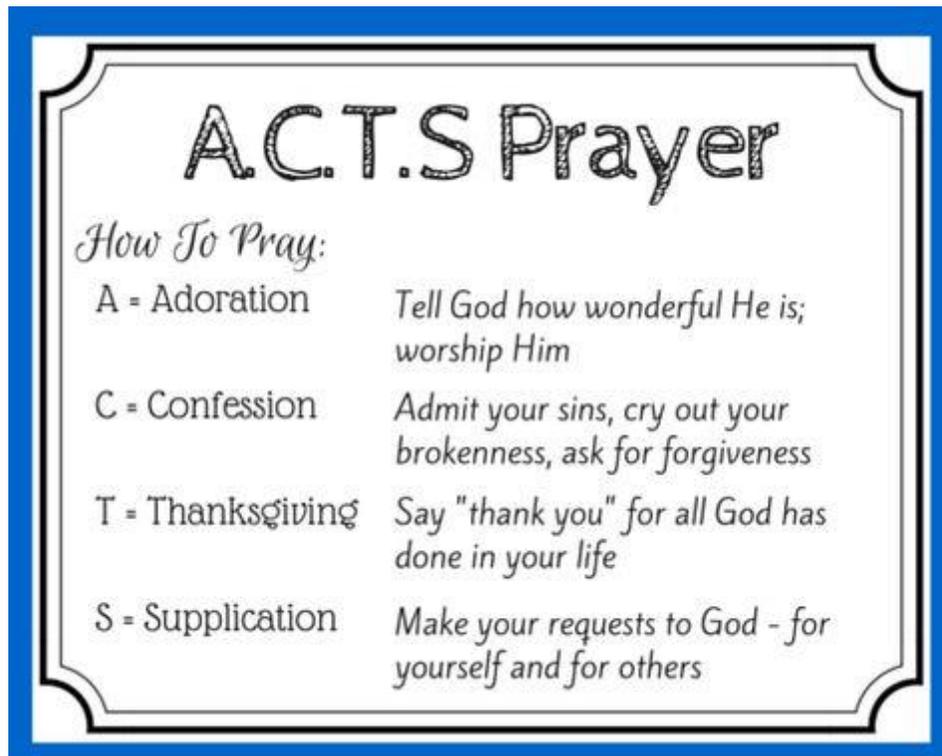
Read the final words and consider the questions about moving forward.

Is there a desire to stay connected? Is there a need to meet regularly? Discuss these questions freely.

## Closing Prayer

Close the workshop with prayer. There is indeed a lot to pray about. You should open the prayer or let the participants who are comfortable praying aloud to pray, give time for everyone who wants to pray to do so. Leave time before you close for anyone to pray silently. You may want to close the prayer with your own words or you can all recite the Lord's Prayer together.

A guide for how to frame a prayer is the A.C.T.S. model. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. You might find the image below helpful.



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