



# Practices of Releasing

## Session 1: Lent Small Group Study Leader Sheet #1

### Planning Your Session

Gather items to create your space.

You will need stones, nails and ribbons for the check-in. Keep these in a basket. They will be used each week.

You will need a Bible. You may wish to explore different translations at [bible.gateway.com](http://bible.gateway.com)

Take time to consider norms with your group. This helps create safe and open space for good conversations.

### Preparing the Space

You may wish to create an “altar-table” with a purple cloth, a candle, and a basket with stones, nails and ribbons.

### Welcome & Candle-lighting

*Light a candle. The group may wish to say these words together:*

Your light is in our eyes.

Your beauty is in our hearts.

Your goodness is everywhere.

### Check in

*This is a time for participants to check in, make themselves present to the group and share how they are. There is no cross talk or discussion. As leader, start with yourself and go around the circle. If the group does not know each other well, begin the sharing with names.*

Invite participants to choose one object from the basket that helps them check in.

- a stone for something in their week that was dull or heavy;

## Planning Your Session

Download Audio Recording #1, “Original Goodness” to your laptop to play to the group.

There is a written script of the recording for this session.

Download and make copies of Participant Sheet #1, “Original Goodness.” The words to the candle-lighting and the prayer practice are on the participant sheet.

Read over the words for the Group Spiritual Practice. Be sure to allow spaces for silence in the prayer.

This session is designed for one hour but you can adapt for a shorter or longer time.

Use this space to make notes.

- a nail for something in their week that was piercing;
- a ribbon for something in their week that was bright.

In this first session, you might want to establish a group covenant. You might ask participants:

What do you need to make this group feel safe and allow you to participate as fully as possible?

What norms and values do we wish to agree to as a group? (examples: begin and end on time, share the air-time and not monopolize the conversation, respect one another’s opinions, decide what can be shared outside the group and what is confidential, pray for one another during the week, etc.)

## Scripture Focus

*Share this invitation with participants:*

Recall the last time you saw a rainbow. Hold the image in your mind as you listen.

Read Genesis 9:8-17, slowly.

## Listen

Listen to Audio Recording #1: Original Goodness

Janice MacLean introduces the Lent series and offers the image of ‘original goodness’ as a way of entering into the joy and pain of living. Janice is the creator and host of the Prayer Bench, an online ministry.

## Discussion Questions

*Choose a few questions. Stay with a question as long as there is energy and then move on. Don’t rush to complete the list. There are no right or wrong answers. We learn and grow from good conversation.*

What word, phrase or image do you take away from what you heard in the recording?

What experiences have you had that would lead you to affirm that “goodness is our real core?” What experiences cause you to question this?

Janice used this quote: “*We don’t have to figure out how to make ourselves good; all we need to do is remove what covers the goodness that is already there.*” What covers goodness in your life, or in the life of your faith community? What practices help bring you, or your faith community, to goodness that is already there?

Spiritual practices are the ways we are open to God in our everyday life. Which spiritual practices are best for you? Are there practices you take on, or give up in Lent? Why?

“...the last thing any of us needs is more information *about* God ... we need *more* God. “ - Barbara Brown Taylor.

In this season of Lent, how might you get “more God?” How might your congregation offer “more God” to the wider community?

## Group Spiritual Practice

### *The Breath of Life*

*Lead the group in this prayer practice, making the words your own.*

God is available and accessible to us as the very thing we all do constantly - breathe.

Begin by settling in your chair. Get comfortable. Then get more comfortable.

Take a few deep breaths noticing how good it feels to fill your lungs, noticing how your chest rises, then falls. Do this a few times, then relax into normal breathing.

Notice how your body feels. Wherever you notice tension or discomfort, try to imagine your breath surrounding that spot, soothing it, massaging it, surrounding it with warmth. Stay with this until you have acknowledged and comforted all the places your body is speaking to you. (*Allow silence here.*)

Turn your attention to your mind, your thinking. Is your mind busy and full of thoughts, lots of thoughts, loud and demanding? Well, just for now, tell your thoughts that you will get back to them later and let them fade into the background, not dismissing them completely but just turning down the volume, letting your mind rest and be fully present to this time of pausing. Rest here as calmness settles your mind.....

With a nice deep relaxing breath, shift your attention to your heart, your deeper self, your center. What do you sense is your spirit-health? What is your heart holding? Do you feel open or closed? As you can, imagine your in-breath filling your heart with love and healing light, while you exhale any heaviness or restriction that may be in the way of your being fully present to this moment. Continue to gently relax in your breathing until you sense you are ready. Amen.

(Written by Marilyn Burrell)

You may wish to use this prayer on your own throughout the week.

## Blessing

You may choose to sing or read the words of , “Spirit, Open My Heart” as a blessing and closing this week. It is in *More Voices #79* for United Church congregations. Or google it, and you can find the words.