



C R E S C E N D O

An Ascent to Vital Living

SMALL GROUP STUDY

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The Evangelical Covenant Church

MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES

CRESCENDO
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Crescendo: An Ascent to Vital Living small group study! This study is based on a framework for ministry to, with, and by boomers and older adults presented in Crescendo, a new initiative of Make and Deepen Disciples within the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). A book of the same name, written by Evelyn Johnson and Alan Forsman (rereleased in 2017) is also available. Reading the book isn't a prerequisite for this study, but our hope is that this study will pique your curiosity and stimulate interest in exploring the book and/or attending a Crescendo seminar in your area.

This study is designed with small groups in mind, but you may choose to use it for individual study or a large group setting with smaller breakout sessions. Each session consists of four parts, based on the elements of Christian worship: gathering, word, response, and sending. The sessions are designed for small or large groups and can be completed within a 90-minute time frame.

This study takes a deeper look at the SPICES framework presented in Crescendo. SPICES is an acronym that describes the framework for planning that can be used as we envision ministries by, with, and for persons in their pre-retirement and retirement years. The goal is to develop ministries that further the ongoing growth of adults in the later phases of life to be like the tree described in Psalm 1:3. "That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers" (NIV).

The elements of SPICES are:

Spiritual
Physical
Intellectual
Community
Emootional
Service

Why SPICES?

Just one whiff of nutmeg immediately brings to mind fond memories of my childhood: the anticipation of tasting a fresh batch of eggnog, handmade by my father, the first delicious bite of my mother's homemade sweet potato pies, snagging a tiny scrap of dough as my mother rolled out tea cakes. The aromatic property of this spice affected my senses in a way that left a positive imprint on my memory bank. This is the power of spices.

As we encounter spices in the Bible, we see how they are used to enhance flavor, provide fragrance, and even create soothing balms. In the context of Crescendo, the SPICES acronym symbolizes the added flavor and fragrance that can emerge during the later years of life. We see many examples of this in the Bible, such as in the lives of Caleb, Deborah, Elizabeth, and Moses.

Whether you are a boomer and beyond, a Gen Xer, or a millennial, there is something for you here. May your eyes and heart be opened to the possibility of replacing the phrase "retiring from" with "retiring to"—to the full and vibrant life that God intends for all!

SESSION ONE

Spiritual

“In many ways, aging well is about learning to let go of earthly things and clinging to God alone.”

— Missy Buchanan

Materials Needed

- Pencils and/or pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Copies of BLESS handout (optional) (Appendix 2)
- Copies of Spiritual Disciplines handout (optional) (link in Appendix 3)

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

In pairs or small groups share your response to the following questions:

- Describe your favorite movie.
- Describe a book you have read that you would recommend to others.
- Share one of your favorite Scriptures.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your response to two of the following questions:

- Describe a song or hymn that best describes the current state of your relationship with God.
- What are some spiritual disciplines* (e.g., prayer, journaling, walking a labyrinth) that have sustained you in your faith journey?
- Describe a biblical character who best reflects where you are in your faith journey.

(*Spiritual discipline: A practice that allows us to intentionally be in the presence of God in order to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. For a more detailed discussion of spiritual disciplines, see Appendix 3.)

WORD—40 minutes

Spirituality is the core of our being. Regardless of our stage of life, we are called to keep striving to become who God called us to be. That includes continuing to invite others to make a commitment to follow Jesus. The spiritual component is critical in the lives of older adults and shouldn't be overlooked. We never arrive, we are always seeking maturity as disciples. The Word of God is a treasure in which we make ongoing discoveries.

Activity

Engage with the following passages using the Lectio Divina practice of engaging with Scripture (Appendix 4). Write down what these passages say to you. Discuss your responses in pairs or small groups. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17, NIV)

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:12-16, NIV)

RESPONSE—20 minutes

A focus on the spiritual should balance evangelism and discipleship. One suggestion for an intentional evangelism approach is a set of missional practices described by the acronym BLESS (inspired by Dave Ferguson, author of *Discover Your Mission Now*). This BLESS initiative (Appendix 2) is being embraced by many churches and denominations, including the ECC.

Committed disciples continue in their growth through such practices as organized Bible study and classes in church history, worship, and theology. In addition, discipleship circles and spiritual direction may prove to be effective options.

All who choose to follow Jesus, regardless of age, are called to continually grow in their relationship with him and bear fruit. This requires intentional effort. Adele Calhoun describes the spiritual journey as a "marathon of seasons" during which each of us cycles through seasons of spring (a time of new growth), summer (a time of abundance and overflow), autumn (a time of transition between bounty and barrenness), and winter (a time of drought and emptiness). Spiritual disciplines help us to keep moving with intentionality through these seasons. In fact, some practices may be more suited to one season than another. A valuable resource for maintaining a healthy spiritual life is Calhoun's book *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group, and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- Which "spiritual season" do you believe you are currently in?
- What spiritual practices (or disciplines) have been most helpful to you in this season?
- How is Christ calling you to respond to what you've experienced in this session? Feel free to share reflections from the Word activity.
- Action item: What spiritual discipline will you commit to practicing this week? (Write it on the card provided and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

SESSION TWO

Physical

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”

— George Bernard Shaw

Materials Needed

- Pencils and/or pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Handouts of a finger labyrinth (downloadable copies can be found online)
- Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

This session’s icebreaker is a game of Simon Says. The group leader will call on different participants to lead the game while it is in progress.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your response to two of the following questions:

- Describe your favorite and least favorite games to play as a child.
- Describe one of your favorite Bible passages that uses imagery of the physical body.
- What is one physical activity that you enjoyed when you were younger? What made this activity enjoyable?

WORD—40 minutes

Regular physical activity is a key ingredient to maintaining one’s health and well-being, regardless of age. The body naturally goes through changes as part of the aging process, but regular physical activity can prevent many of these issues. Committing to behavior that benefits your body honors God and allows you to engage in more discipleship activities. Often the impact of the aging process on our body and mind can stir up negative emotions that may cause us to forget that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of the Most-High God.

Activity

Listen as the following passage from 1 Corinthians 6 is read. Then, using your finger, trace the labyrinth on the handout provided. As you work through the pattern, listen for what God reveals to you. Feel free to write down reflections of your experience. Respond to God in a time of individual prayer.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NIV)

Listen as the passage from Psalm 139 is read aloud. As the passage is read a second time, use the materials provided to draw what you hear, see, and feel. Feel free to write down reflections of your experiences. Respond to God in a time of individual prayer. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was

made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you. (Psalm 139:13-18, NIV)

RESPONSE—20 minutes

Staying fit is a proven means for maintaining one's physical health and extending life. Even those who don't start regular physical practices until their 80s and 90s can alter their futures. The human body really is truly fearfully and wonderfully made. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell states that it takes roughly ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field. That concept can be applied to physical exercise as much as to other habits. Practice doesn't necessarily make perfect, but it does make a difference!

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group, and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- What practices are you currently engaged in to enhance your physical well-being?
- What fears or concerns arose for you during this session? Feel free to share reflections from the Word activity.
- Action item: What activity to maintain or improve your physical health will you continue or commit to starting this week? This may be physical activity, getting proper sleep, adjusting your diet, or scheduling a checkup with your dentist or primary medical provider. (Write it on the card provided and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

SESSION THREE

Intellectual

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

—C.S. Lewis

Materials Needed

Pencils and/or pens
Blank 3 x 5 notecards
Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)
Handouts of “brain game” activities such as mazes and word games
(downloadable activity sheets can be found online)

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

The leader will provide you with a “brain game” activity. These activity sheets are designed to be completed individually, but feel free to ask a neighbor for help.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your response to two of the following questions:

- Describe your least favorite subject in school.
- Describe a piece of writing (book, poem, article, blog post, etc.) that has had a long-lasting impact on you.
- Describe a TV show, movie, play, or documentary that has had a long-lasting impact on you.

WORD—40 minutes

Intellectual wellness should be fostered in much the same way as one’s physical wellness. Contrary to what many believe, our brain cells grow continuously. All persons, regardless of age, can continue to stimulate brain growth by engaging in activities that challenge and expand the thought process. Some ways to maintain intellectual wellness are: maintain engagement in creative and stimulating mental activities, expand your knowledge bases (learn new information or skills), and use multiple resources to learn more about the world around you.

Activity

King Solomon is often referred to as the wisest person who ever lived. This activity will walk you through his life and encourage you to reflect on questions that can be applied in the pre-retirement or retirement years. Each section of this activity includes a Bible reading and a reflect/discuss section. The leader will close the time with a brief prayer.

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

We begin by revisiting the point in Solomon’s life when he received the offer of a lifetime from God. It was a “make or break” situation. Solomon could have asked for anything, but he chose wisdom.

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne

this very day. Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So, God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.
(1 Kings 3:5-15, NIV)

Reflect/Discuss

As you think back on your life, do you recall any "make or break" situations? What was at stake? What did you choose?

Solomon Puts His Wisdom to Work

What good is wisdom that goes unused? When Solomon ruled with wisdom, it got the attention of all of Israel. Not only did it earn him the admiration of the people, it drew their attention to God as the source of the wisdom.

Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So, she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne."

The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king.

The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'" Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."

The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"

Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice. (1 Kings 3:16-28, NIV)

Reflect/Discuss

It's not enough to have skills and gifts, we must put them to work. Since this session focuses on our intellectual lives, take a moment to create a list of things you know and skills you possess. Next, consider some ways that you could teach this information to others.

Solomon's Latter Years

Solomon was given divine wisdom and used it for the good of the people. During his reign, he fulfilled the dream of his father, David, and built a temple to honor God. He experienced quite the reign as king! Unfortunately, his later years did not fare so well.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD'S command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11:1-13, NIV)

Reflect/Discuss

Solomon's latter years were a far cry from the days when he was given divine wisdom and favor from God. This shift in his life is a good example of what not to do as we approach our own latter years. As you reflect on Solomon's life and inability to "end well," what are some takeaways that you can apply to your life?

RESPONSE—20 minutes

In the United States, society often places stereotypical limitations on older adults. Often people internalize these stereotypes without noticing it. Do you live under the assumption that your age prevents you from learning new skills and information? Are you intimidated or frustrated by those who may be younger than you—and perceived as more knowledgeable and skilled? Research indicates that "healthy older brains are often as good as or better than younger brains in a wide variety of tasks." More important, biblical accounts of the likes of Deborah, Caleb, Elizabeth, and Moses indicate that God uses individuals of all ages to accomplish his purpose.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group, and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- What are you doing now to stimulate your intellectual wellness?
- What, if any, barriers have you encountered when it comes to maintaining intellectual wellness? (This may include things such as time constraints, misperceptions of others toward you, self-doubt, etc.)
- Action item: What activity to maintain or improve your intellectual wellness will you continue or commit to starting this week? (Write it on the card provided, and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

SESSION FOUR

Community

“A proper community . . . answers the needs, practical as well as social and spiritual, of its members—among them the need to need one another.”

—Wendell Berry

Materials Needed

- Pencils and/or pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Small (approximately 4" x 6") pieces of scrap paper

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

This session's icebreaker is a game of Two Truths and a Lie. Using the materials provided, write down two things that are true about you and one thing that is not true about you. As time allows, participants will read their three items, and the rest of the group will try to guess which one is the lie.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your response to two of the following questions:

- How do you define “community”?
- Share a brief story about one of the truths you presented during the icebreaker.
- How have your needs for community changed over time?

WORD—40 minutes

The early Christians in Acts ate together, encouraged one another, prayed together, studied together, worshiped together, and gave to anyone who had need. They were a community and had favor in the larger community. The biblical word describing this community is *koinonia*. It is deeper than fellowship or social experiences. It is about mutual participation, transparency, unity, and interdependence.

Activity

Acts 2:42-47 describes the lifestyle of the early Church. It is regularly used as an example of true community. The passage ends by stating that the group living as a community resulted in regular commitments of faith by those who came in contact with them. In other words, this community both reflected God and drew people to God.

Step 1: Take some time to reflect on the passage below:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, NIV)

Step 2: In pairs answer this question: Describe a time when you experienced the importance of community. After the first partner responds, partner #2 will thank him or her for sharing their story and relate how hearing their story gives a deeper

understanding of them and of God. Then partner #2 shares their story and partner #1 will respond accordingly. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group.

RESPONSE—20 minutes

Experiencing community is critical to vital, joy-filled living. Community doesn't happen without intentionality. M. Scott Peck's model of community building includes four stages: pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness, and true community. Many communities of faith are living in a state of pseudo-community instead of the true community to which God calls us. The journey from pseudo-community to true community requires transparency, vulnerability, and a willingness to engage with the chaos that comes with being human. There must be a commitment to stick with the process in times of joy and sorrow—or even anger. The good news is that God is present with us on every step of the journey. (For more about Peck's four stages of community, see Appendix 5.)

It's important to remember that the early Church that we read about in Acts was a multiethnic and multicultural group. They experienced disagreements and issues of injustice such as when the Hellenistic widows were not being given the same care as the Hebraic widows (Acts 6). Instead of ignoring the problem, the disciples addressed the injustice in a way that honored God. Building true community requires intercultural competence, or a strong ability to connect to the world around you in a nurturing way. To grow in this area, consider building a BRIDGE:

- Be welcoming to new people.
- Receive input and learn from new people of different ages, races, socioeconomic levels, geographical areas, and faith traditions.
- Initiate common interest groups in your circle of influence.
- Develop closer relationships with family and long-term friends.
- Grow closer in relationships while grieving the losses of moves, illnesses, and death (create new beginnings).
- Expand connections outside of your existing community to enlarge your sphere of care.

Activity

In pairs or small groups, share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group, and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- When done well, community can be one of the best things to happen to us, yet failed attempts at building community can create pain and isolation. What concerns do you have about journeying with others in community?
- Action item: This week, what is one thing you will do to live more interdependently with others (how will you begin building or strengthening your BRIDGE)? (Write it on the card provided and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

SESSION FIVE

Emotional

“Old age is not a disease—it is strength and survivorship, triumph over all kinds of vicissitudes and disappointments, trials and illnesses.”

—Maggie Kuhn

Materials Needed

- Pencils and/or pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)
- Black and white handouts of emojis (downloadable images can be found online)
- Equipment (e.g., laptop and projector) for playing the movie clip

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

The leader will provide a collection of black and white images of emojis (cartoon images that represent various emotions). Select an image that stands out to you. Using the materials provided, color your image. In pairs briefly share why you chose your emoji.

Activity

Using the prompts provided, the group will play a game of Charades. Each player will be assigned an emotion that they are to silently act out for the group, until someone guesses the emotion. After playing a few rounds, break into pairs or small groups and share your response to the following questions.

- Anger, joy, sadness, and fear are some of the primary emotions with which we are most familiar. Of these, joy is often seen as a “good” emotion, while the others are considered “bad.” Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?
- Which emotion do you think operates as your “default,” the emotion that you tend to resort to without thinking?

WORD—40 minutes

Throughout the Bible we find numerous passages that call Christians to rejoice together, weep together, encourage each other, love one another, care for one another, be kind to one another, live in harmony, etc. These actions support emotional wellbeing.

Activity

In Philippians 4:4-8 Paul writes about emotional health. Start this activity by listening to the passage as it is read aloud. Spend a few moments reflecting on the words. Then the group will transition into a time of centering prayer (Appendix 6). Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group.

Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:4-8, NIV)

RESPONSE—20 minutes

In our previous session we established that true community requires people to be transparent and vulnerable. This can't be done unless we are emotionally healthy. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, the time of life beyond age 65 is when a person may struggle to accept life in its fullness. This means being able to come to term with victories and defeats, accomplishments and that which was not accomplished. Furthermore, during the later decades in this period we will face increased difficulties. It is an increasingly emotional time of life. Allowing God to replace what was with what can be will help maintain emotional balance.

If we have not yet learned how to maintain a healthy emotional balance, these stages of life may be especially difficult and troubling. Maintaining emotional health will enable us to navigate these seasons well and stand firm in the face of despair. Take an honest assessment of your emotional health. Could you benefit from a support group, managing transition study, counseling, and/or spiritual direction to give you greater clarity on how to move forward in this area?

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- When it comes to “getting in touch with your emotions,” most people either love it or hate it. Yet it is a necessary step toward good emotional health. Are you in the “love it” or “hate it” group? Explain your response.
- Action item: What is one thing you will do this week to improve your emotional health? (Write it on the card provided and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

SESSION SIX

Service

“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.”

—Audrey Hepburn

Materials Needed

- Pencils and/or pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Mini-jigsaw puzzles
- Other materials will depend on the service project you have selected

GATHERING—20 minutes

Icebreaker

In pairs or small groups complete the jigsaw puzzle provided by the leader. Briefly discuss this activity as a group.

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your response to two of the following questions:

- Consider a time when you were in need and a time when you were able to help someone else in need. Which situation was most difficult for you, and why?
- Is it possible to have negative motives for serving others? Explain your answer.
- If all of your financial needs were met, what would you do for 40 hours a week?

WORD—40 minutes

For Christians, serving others is not an option—it is a way of life. We cannot claim to be followers of Jesus if we do not serve others. The only choices we have in the matter are where, who, and how much time we invest in serving. In Philippians 2:1-4 Paul encourages the believers to put the needs of others above their own. God loves a cheerful giver, one who joyously gives of their time, talents, or treasure as a way to demonstrate their love for God.

Activity

Together as a group read Philippians 2:1-4 aloud. Then the leader will provide instructions for this activity, which is a service project. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:1-4, NIV)

RESPONSE—20 minutes

In a recent study, two-thirds of retirees surveyed noted that retirement is the best time in life to give back their time, talent, and treasures. Those who volunteered or donated expressed a stronger sense of purpose than those who did not. Another study of older

adults stated that 70 percent of those surveyed said that it was important to leave the world a better place. There are many ways to use our time, talents, and treasure to glorify God.

Many people are familiar with compassion and mercy-related service activities, such as stuffing envelopes for a local nonprofit organization, knitting blankets for infants at the local hospital, or contributing money toward a worthy cause. You may want to challenge yourself to volunteer outside your comfort zone in justice related service opportunities such as engaging in advocacy and education around issues of injustice. There is a growing need for people to volunteer with prison ministries, Bread for the World letter-writing campaigns advocating the end of hunger, tutoring and mentoring at-risk students, etc. Whether service is new to you or you're a seasoned volunteer, there is a place for you. When you leave this earth, how will you have made it a better place?

Activity

In pairs or small groups share your responses to the following questions. Close this activity with a time of sharing with the entire group and assign a scribe to record the action items.

- People have various reasons for why they do or don't volunteer and/or donate to charitable causes. How has this session impacted your views on this issue?
- Action item: This week, how will you use your time, talents, or treasure to help someone in need? (Write it on the card provided and submit it to the scribe.)

SENDING—10 minutes

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

Optional Session

“Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength.”

—Betty Friedan

Materials Needed

Easel board and markers for brainstorming session

Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music (optional)

Congratulations on completing the Crescendo: An Ascent to Vital Living small group study! Just as “retirement” is the beginning of a new season, we hope that the end of this study is just the beginning for you. This final session is intentionally less structured and designed to keep the conversation going and to encourage you to stay engaged, whether as an individual, a small group, or a congregation.

Each session focused on one element of the SPICES framework, giving you an opportunity to reflect on them individually and as a group. Each session included an action step; hopefully, these action steps caused you to consider deeper ways to engage in each area of the framework.

Activity #1

Review your reflections from sessions one through six. Write down some possible ways that you would like to continue growing in each SPICES area.

Activity #2

Ultimately the ideal goal for a SPICES ministry is to offer some form of experience in each area of spiritual, physical, intellectual, community, emotional, and service, while maintaining an overall balance. Below are some specific examples of how the framework could be applied. In pairs or small groups review this list. Discuss whether or not there are activities that might be effective in your context, and share any ideas you’d like to add to the list. Next, discuss the ideas as a large group; be sure that someone takes notes. Last, as a group, decide on one activity for each SPICES area that you all will help implement in your church.

SPIRITUAL

- Implement the BLESS initiative.
- Participate in organized Bible study.
- Provide opportunities to learn spiritual disciplines (prayer, meditation, journaling, etc.).
- Organize short-term discipleship circles.

PHYSICAL

- Provide health education and teaching.
- Initiate fall prevention sessions.
- Create group fitness classes at the church or in a local gym/community center.
- Organize health support groups.

INTELLECTUAL

- Organize book clubs.
- Watch movies or documentaries and host a discussion.
- Plan educational trips.
- Organize discussion groups on topics such as faith and politics, faith and the news, etc.

COMMUNITY

- Create a space in which church members can develop intergenerational relationships.
- Provide opportunities to develop intercultural relationships (i.e., participate in ECC Sankofa or Journey to Mosaic experiences), and gain intercultural competency (i.e., take the Intercultural Development Inventory).
- Make space for people to cultivate new relationships without fear.
- Provide opportunities to build “short-term” communities with a focus on topics of common interest such as housing decisions, being a caregiver, or making financial decisions.

EMOTIONAL

- Use your church bulletin (or announcements/newsletter) to share helpful tips for maintaining emotional health.
- Develop a Stephen Ministry.
- Provide information on how members can access the services of local spiritual directors or counselors.
- Create short-term small groups based on topics such as managing transitions, adapting to new physical realities, growing a marriage in later life, or embracing singleness (or being single again after divorce or death of spouse).

SERVICE

- Ministries within the church and its local sphere of care.
- Provide classes/seminars on how to mentor or coach others or to retool or develop new skills for volunteer activities.
- Develop special projects that tap into members’ areas of giftedness, knowledge, and experience.

MINISTRIES BEYOND THE CHURCH

- Provide educational opportunities to broaden understanding of justice issues such as poverty, mass incarceration, and oppression.
- Partner with local agencies engaged in advocacy for seniors in areas such as housing, home care services, medical services, or legal assistance.

In pairs or small groups pray for each other. The group leader will close with a final corporate prayer.

Appendix 1

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR LEADERS/FACILITATORS

While instructions for the activities are provided in each session, you may wish to read them aloud and provide any clarifying information. We also encourage you to adjust based on the needs of your context. *Please be mindful of the physical and cognitive abilities and needs of participants as you go through the activities, and adjust as needed.*

Prior to the participants' arrival, ensure that the meeting space has been set up in a way that accommodates all activities. If feasible for your context, you may wish to have music playing softly as participants get settled.

GATHERING (approximately 20 minutes)

You may choose to include a time for refreshments during the Gathering or Sending times if this is a practice in your context. Prior to the start of the icebreaker activity, you may wish to open with a time of prayer. To foster community, you may also wish to provide nametags each week.

You may find it helpful to take time at the beginning of each session to briefly review the SPICES elements; this will ensure that participants are oriented and understand the theme for each session. Also, note that an attempt was made to provide activities that incorporate different styles of learning, specifically visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. This means that participants may find some activities more challenging than others. Encourage them to be open to the Spirit and give themselves wholly to all activities.

WORD (approximately 40 minutes)

The introductory content in this section can be read aloud by you, or you may choose to invite different participants to read it aloud during each session.

Consider using a variety of methods for reading Scripture: 1) the leader reads the passages, 2) the leader asks for volunteers to read, or 3) the leader can use a recorded version of the passage, such as what's available through the YouVersion Bible app. You may choose to play music softly during portions of this component.

RESPONSE (approximately 20 minutes)

The introductory content in this section can be read aloud by you, or you may choose to have different participants read it aloud during each session. You may choose to play music softly during portions of this component.

SENDING (approximately 10 minutes)

Prior to the final corporate prayer, you may wish to open the floor for a time of prayer requests and praise reports to contribute to the fostering of community. It's a good idea to also pray over the action items submitted by participants.

Reflecting on activities: During the times of sharing with the whole group, you may need to provide prompts to get people started. Consider questions such as:

- What did you feel during this activity?
- What did you hear during this activity?

- What about this activity was difficult for you? Why?
- What did you enjoy about this activity? Why?
- If this was a new activity for you, is it something that you might try again? Why, or why not?

Suggested timing: The times for the session components is based on a 90-minute session. You will find that these times may need to be adjusted based on your context, class size, etc. Please feel free to make the adjustments that will be most effective and beneficial for your group.

Audio/Visual content: Be sure that you have the appropriate electronics—including speakers—if you wish to play music or recordings of Bible verses. Please carefully review the list of suggested materials in advance, to ensure that you are prepared for each session.

Digital content: Be sure to check the Crescendo website regularly, as it will be updated with helpful digital resources such as videos and downloadable slides.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Session 1

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- BLESS handout (optional)
- Spiritual disciplines handout (optional)
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Session 2

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Handouts of a finger labyrinth (downloadable ones can be found online)
- Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Note: The idea for this session's icebreaker is to spend time on a playful physical activity that is accessible to all levels of physical ability. Please be mindful of the physical abilities of your group and remind game leaders to come up with tasks that everyone in the group can do.

Session 3

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)
- Handouts of "brain game" activities such as mazes and word games (downloadable activity sheets can be found online)
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Session 4

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Small (approximately 4 x 6") pieces of scrap paper
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Session 5

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Coloring materials (markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons)
- Black and white handouts of emojis (downloadable images can be found online)
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Note: You may wish to distribute coloring pages for people to complete at home at their leisure (downloadable pages can be found online).

Session 6

- Pencils and pens
- Blank 3 x 5 notecards
- Mini-jigsaw puzzles
- Other materials will depend on the service project you have selected
- Your choice of an electronic device capable of playing music

Puzzle Activity Instructions

Distribute one puzzle per pair or small group, depending on the number of participants. Remove one piece from each puzzle, and include it with a different puzzle. Pairs/groups will quickly realize that they are missing a piece. As you see this happening, prompt them to reach out to the other pairs/groups for assistance. The objective is to provide a demonstration of how we may have something that can help someone else.

Note: If you are working with a limited budget, you can create your own puzzles by gluing an image to an 8 ½ x 11" piece of construction paper, and cutting it into puzzle pieces. If you do purchase puzzles, consider donating them to your children's ministry or another church or organization after you've completed the activity. Or save them for the next group of Crescendo participants!

Service Project

Because time is limited, it's recommended that your service project be something that can be completed in the space where your group regularly meets. You may choose to do a project directly related to your local congregation, a community organization, or an ECC cause such as Covenant World Relief (CWR), CHIC, Covenant Kids Congo (CKC), or Triennial.

If the service project requires any preparation for participants (e.g., dressing differently, traveling to a different location, sitting or standing for longer than usual, etc.), please be sure to provide enough advance notice.

Finally, to help participants think about future individual service opportunities, you may wish to compile a "starter list" of existing opportunities at your church as well as local community organizations.

Closing (Optional Session)

Easel board and markers for brainstorming session

Note: If you choose to use this time as a closing celebration, you may choose to provide refreshments and certificates of completion.

Appendix 2

BLESS INITIATIVE

Think of two or three people who do not yet know Jesus or have not committed to being in a life-transforming relationship with him. Pray for each of them; then, prayerfully consider how to BLESS them. Ask God to show you specific ways to engage them using this guide:

Begin with prayer.

Listen with care; listen for God's guidance and commit to listening to each person when with them.

Eat together; perhaps you will meet one for coffee, have another to your house for dinner, etc.

Serve others; serve them as you discern their desires and needs.

Share stories; story is important, so pay attention to their life story and share your own.

Appendix 3

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

If your group needs a more detailed explanation of spiritual disciplines, feel free to create your own handout or slide using this summary of Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines*: <http://www.soulshpherd.org/2012/07/spiritual-disciplines-list/>

Appendix 4

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading or Praying the Word)

Lectio Divina is a spiritual discipline in which an individual or group engages in a careful listening of God's Word, then shares a response. Guide your group using the following guide.

I. Lectio—Reading God's Word

What Christ the Word is trying to convey

- A. **One person reads aloud (twice)*** the passage of Scripture as others are attentive to some segment that is especially meaningful to them. The person reading reads slowly and distinctly with pauses.
- B. **Silence** for 1-2 minutes. Each person hears and silently repeats a word or phrase that attracts them.
- C. **Sharing aloud** (a word or phrase that has attracted each person): Simply repeat the word/phrase that spoke to you, no need to elaborate. You may wish to jot down the word or phrase in a journal for later reflection.

II. Meditatio—Reflecting on God's Word

How Christ the Word speaks to me

- A. **Second reading** of same passage by another person.
- B. **Silence** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?"
- C. **Sharing aloud:** Briefly share what the reading means to you. Use descriptors, such as I hear, I see, I feel, I was struck by.

III. Oratio—Responding to God

What Christ the Word invites me to do

- A. **Third reading** by still another person.
- B. **Silence** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "How is God calling me to respond?"
- C. **Sharing aloud:** Briefly pray spontaneously, expressing your response to God's call.

IV. Contemplatio—Resting in God

Being with Christ the Word

- A. **Fourth reading** by another person.
- B. **Rest in the Word**, in silence for 2-3 minutes.
- C. **Conclude** with a spoken prayer or the Lord's Prayer.

**Note: Your context and group size may require you to make adjustments. Other options for Scripture reading are: the leader can read the passages, or the leader can use a recorded version of the passage, such as what's available through the YouVersion Bible app.*

Appendix 5

M. SCOTT PECK'S FOUR STAGES OF COMMUNITY

If you are unfamiliar with Peck's four stages of community, you may wish to look at *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* or visit his website: <http://www.mscottpeck.com/html/scott-peck.html>. An Internet search will yield summaries such as this: http://atlc.org/members/resources/four_stages_community.html

Appendix 6

GOD-CENTERED SILENCE: Contemplative Prayer

Scriptures

Exodus 14:14; Psalm 46:10-11; Psalm 131; Proverbs 8:34-36; Isaiah 55:1-3; John 3:29-30; John 15:4; Matthew 26:40-41

DEFINITION

Prayer is the gift of God's loving presence; it is the gift of my loving presence to God; it is the gift of God's loving presence through me for others.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15:4)

Selected quotes

Centering prayer (contemplative prayer) is for those who want more—infinately more. It is for those who dare to believe that they are made to be intimate with God and the bearers of his life and love in this world. It is for those who truly love themselves, love themselves enough to put first things first: to give God this time, to give themselves this time in God, so that they can give to others quality time that is loving and creative.

—Basil Pennington

Contemplative Prayer is not a way of being busy with God instead of with people, but it is an attitude in which we recognize God's ultimate priority by being useless in His presence, by standing in front of Him without anything to show, to prove, or to argue, and by allowing Him to enter into our emptiness. In this prayer, God can show us His love. When we are empty, free and open, we can be with Him, look at Him, listen to Him, and slowly come to realize that He is a loving Father who loves us with a deep intimate affection. It is to know God *by heart*, rather than *by head*....

In silence we leave behind our activities, concerns, plans, projects, opinions, and convictions, and enter into the presence of our loving God, naked, vulnerable, open, and receptive. It is emptying ourselves of outside forces and influences, inner fears and distractions....

The first thing we often discover in silence is our restlessness, our drivenness and compulsiveness, our urge to act quickly, to make an impact and to have influence, and often we find it hard to withstand the temptation to return as quickly as possible to the world of relevance. But when we persevere with the help of a gentle discipline, we slowly come to hear the still small voice and to sense the gentle breeze of the Spirit.

—Henri Nouwen

GUIDELINES FOR THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING/ CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

1. Begin with a brief prayer of faith, take time to quiet down, and then ask the Lord to be personally present to you at the center of your being.
2. Express your love to the Lord with a word or phrase of adoration, a name for the Lord, or a term of endearment to call forth your love.
3. Whenever you become aware of other thoughts and distractions, return to the use of your prayer word of love.
4. At the end of your silence, pray a “thought-filled” prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer.

Guidelines based on the writing of Basil Pennington in Centering Prayer.

For more information on leading a group through centering prayer, consider this online resource:

https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sites/default/files/private/center_prayer_method_2017-01_0.pdf