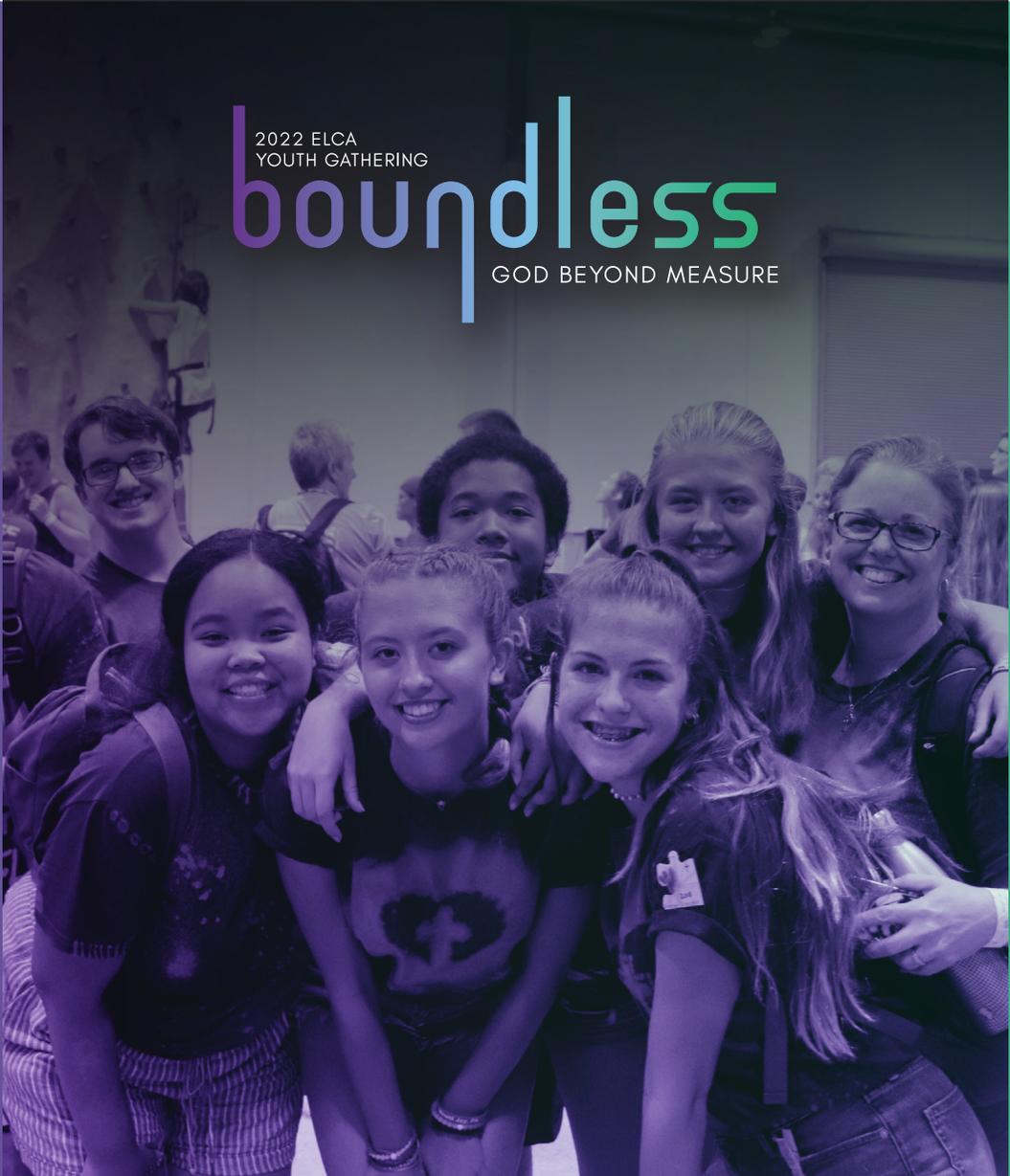


2022 ELCA  
YOUTH GATHERING

boundless  
GOD BEYOND MEASURE



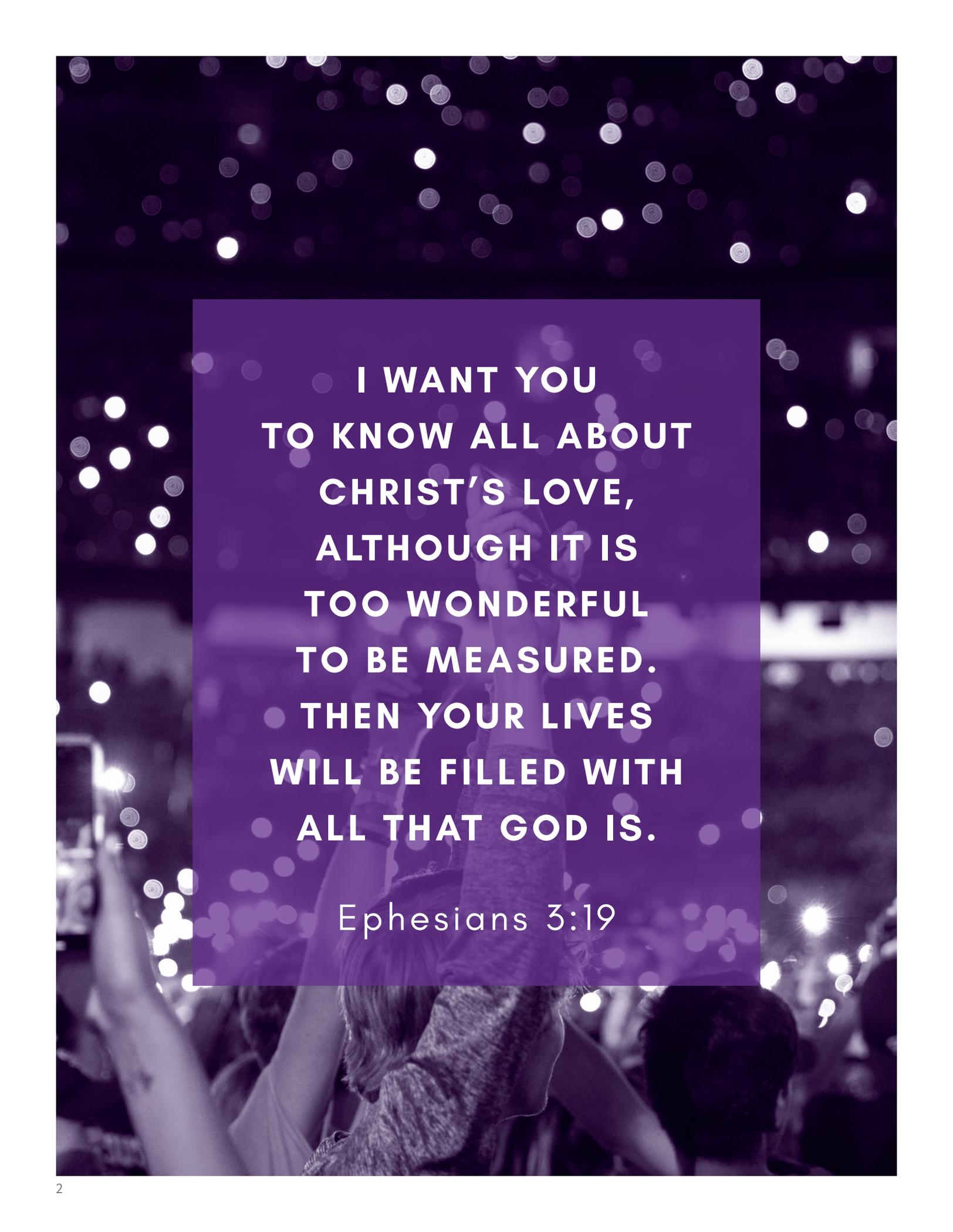
# GETTING READY

*A Youth Ministry Curriculum*

PREPARING FOR THE 2022 ELCA YOUTH GATHERING



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

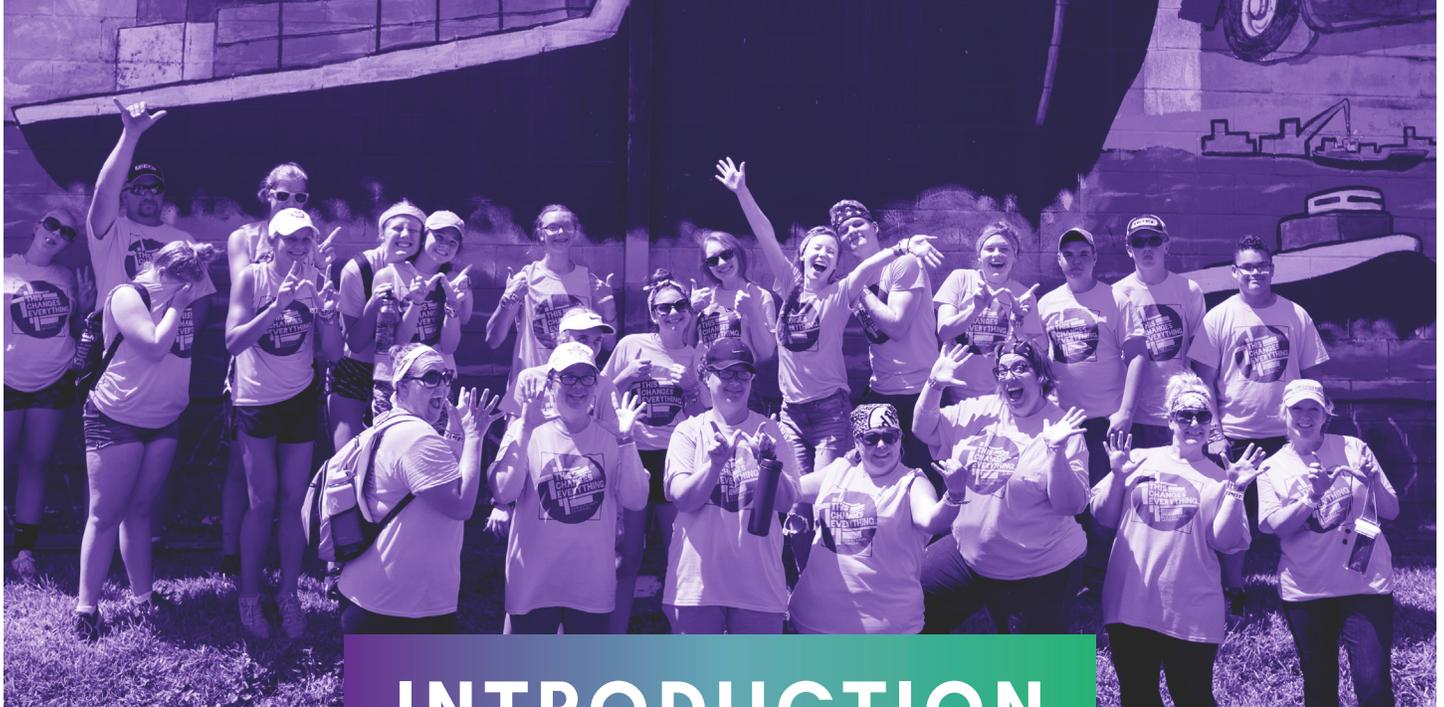


**I WANT YOU  
TO KNOW ALL ABOUT  
CHRIST'S LOVE,  
ALTHOUGH IT IS  
TOO WONDERFUL  
TO BE MEASURED.  
THEN YOUR LIVES  
WILL BE FILLED WITH  
ALL THAT GOD IS.**

Ephesians 3:19

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# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the Getting Ready Materials for the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering!

On behalf of the church, your youth and their families, thank you for taking on the role of adult leader. Your presence, preparation and planning will be a gift to the young people in your care. Thank you for investing in the faith formation of young people and yourself.

We designed this curriculum to help you and your group ponder the theme of the Gathering as you build relationships with one another. We have incorporated online alternatives for in person activities, in case that is needed. While there are many references and connections specific to the Gathering, this curriculum is also written for those who may not be attending and simply want to explore the theme of the Gathering and help their youth group grow closer to God and to one another. Know that however you use this curriculum, whether in person or online, as Gathering prep or a group retreat, you are the expert on your youth and their needs. Feel free to adapt it to your setting; trust your knowledge of your context.

We know that these last months of the pandemic season have imposed a collective trauma within our lives. Many of our families, communities, and churches have experienced the effects of the COVID-19 virus intimately through the loss of life, and the long-term health challenges stemming from infection. The pandemic has reoriented our lives and world in a way that many are only beginning to recognize and come to terms with, which will continue to and through our Gathering experience.

We acknowledge the heartbreaking reality of recent events in Minneapolis. We weep for the loss of George Floyd, Daunte Wright and the many others whose names we know and those we may never know. Tragedies such as these are challenging to discuss.

Sometimes the Getting Ready Materials reference these events directly, sometimes indirectly. However you and your group approach them, know that you are not alone in facing these challenges. Amidst all the struggles and sufferings, God's boundless love is with you. God's boundless love responds to pain and suffering. God's boundless love is the response to injustice and oppression. And God's boundless love through Jesus is the response to sin and death. These lessons will prepare us to respond with God's boundless love and be in solidarity with the community of Minneapolis, and all of the places where we live and serve throughout Creation.

There are five units in this curriculum to correlate with the five daily themes of the Gathering. Each unit has two sessions, each approaching the theme from a different perspective. In addition to exploring the daily themes, each lesson also provides opportunities for group building

and practical preparation for going to Minneapolis. We encourage you to review the [Overview for Adult Leaders](#) section at the beginning of each session before your group meets. In that section, you will find more specifics about the session, along with a list of necessary materials. We hope that you will use the full curriculum and the wealth of learning it provides, but we are also aware that some groups will need to adapt, so we have provided some guidelines to help with that as well.

Each lesson includes a take-home sheet for continued conversation and connection beyond the group. We've also endeavored to make song and video resources easily accessible. You can look for the Gathering Spotify playlist ([@elcagathering](#)), or on the [Gathering resources page](#), then search for each unit. We carefully curated the songs and videos to amplify the themes. Be sure to share them with your participants, as we think they are worth listening to and watching.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



**Bible** to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



**Video** to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



**Music** to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist ([@elcagathering](#)). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



**Computer** to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



**Social media** for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles:



[FB.com/YouthGathering](#)  
[FB.com/ELCAthetAble](#) [FB.com/ELCAMYLE](#)



[@elcagathering](#) [@elca\\_myle](#)



[@elcagathering](#)

Throughout the curriculum you will see various icons and fonts to help you along the way.

***Bold italicized font*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.

**Regular font** indicates the lesson plan.

Again, modify this curriculum in whatever ways best serve your group.

### Pro tips:

- If you have to cut part of a session, use the  to make sure you do not go over your meeting time.
- Cutting some of the questions after each Scripture reading is a good way to conserve time.
- Dig deeper with one or two questions instead of forcing or rushing through all of them. Become comfortable with silence to allow people time to think. Keep track of who hasn't spoken up as the session continues and consider prompting them for their thoughts.
- Be flexible and offer opportunities for youth to respond to these lessons with whatever learning styles they are most comfortable using.
- Invite youth to write, draw, talk quietly with a friend, or reflect on the questions in whatever way best engages them.
- If you have a large group, invite youth to discuss questions with a smaller group of peers sitting near them. This can make space for more youth to share while also providing an opportunity for youth who feel less comfortable sharing in the large group.
- If your group includes people with mobility challenges, make the activities more accessible by asking other youth in the group to accompany their peers and offer any desired assistance. This will build their capacity to partner with their peers at the Gathering.

Once again, feel free to adapt this curriculum, adjust it as needed and use it to its boundless potential.

Yours in God's boundless love,

Priscilla Paris-Austin and Steven Helm  
 Managers for the Getting Ready Materials

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## Copyright

Creation Liturgy – From the full liturgy “Celebrating Creation”  
by Kelly Sherman-Conroy, doctoral candidate, Native Theologian (Ogala Sioux)

Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment  
by Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas (reprinted with permission)

**WE ENCOURAGE ADULT LEADERS TO  
READ THROUGH AND CUSTOMIZE  
EACH UNIT. MANY YOUTH WILL HAVE  
EXPERIENCED UNIQUE AND DIFFICULT  
SITUATIONS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS  
RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC, RACISM,  
GRIEF, AND MORE. SOME ACTIVITIES  
MIGHT NOT BE APPROPRIATE/  
EFFECTIVE/IDEAL FOR YOUR GROUP.  
CONSIDER HOW YOUR PLANS FOR  
EACH MEETING MIGHT BEST TAKE INTO  
CONSIDERATION THE REALITIES OF  
THE YOUTH YOU ARE SERVING.**

# SUGGESTED USES FOR THIS RESOURCE

# 01

## Meeting once a month:

Each session is written to last 45-55 minutes. Your group will be equipped and prepared by dedicating one hour a month during the 10 months leading up to the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering.

# 02

## Meeting twice a month:

Every session is composed of three parts: “Gather,” “Word” and “Sending.” You will need to divide each session in half. The first half should start with “Gather” and end with the “Our head” portion of “Word.” The second half should begin with a review of the “Our head” portion and end with “Sending.”

# 03

## Meeting once a week:

Every session is composed of three parts: “Gather,” “Word” and “Sending.” A take-home sheet is included with every session. Lead “Gather” the first week, Word” the second week, review “Word” and end with “Sending” the third week, and use the take-home sheet lesson the fourth week. Each week, it’s also a good idea to re-read the Scripture and review the section from the previous week. Some sessions include additional resources with extra teaching material.

# 04

## Retreat option:

Friday evening: Unit 1 (“boundless love”). Saturday morning: Unit 2 (“boundless creation”). Saturday afternoon: Unit 3 (“boundless forgiveness”). Saturday evening: Unit 4 (“boundless invitation”). Sunday morning: Unit 5 (“boundless promise”). Should you choose to use the sessions from each unit selectively, we strongly advise not skipping “boundless promise” session two. This session includes an important covenant your group will make before departing for the Gathering.

*If you are looking for an amazing place to hold your retreat, check out the ELCA website for a list of camps and retreat centers near you. [www.elca.org/Our-Work/Related-Ministries/Outdoor-Ministry](http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Related-Ministries/Outdoor-Ministry)*

# SUGGESTED USES FOR THIS RESOURCE

05

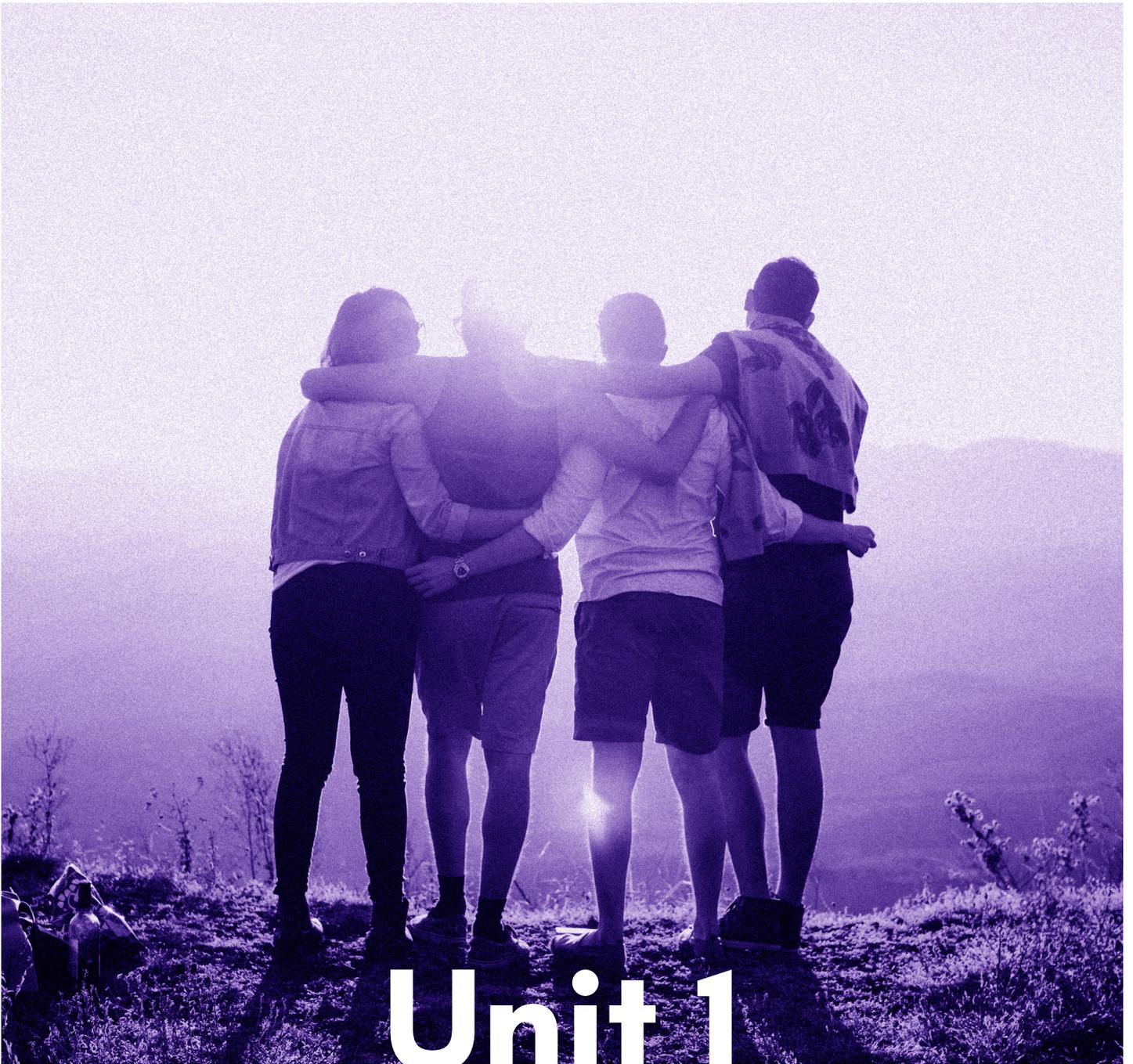
## Meeting online:

By now, your youth are very familiar with meeting in groups online. As you first begin these Gathering lessons, you might not be ready to gather in person. If so, these lessons are adaptable for online meetings through Zoom (one could also use Google Meet, Microsoft Teams or Skype). Some of the games in the lessons are intended to be played in person, however, they can be replaced with your favorite Zoom games. Zoom-friendly games include Trivia, Pictionary, Scattegories, Would You Rather, Charades, Guess Who, Scavenger Hunt and Bingo. A Google search can give you more online game ideas if you are in need of different options. Additionally, you make an effort to revisit the games you may have skipped, or repeat a group favorite. These games were designed with the lessons to connect your group with each other and with the themes of the Gathering.

Recognizing that many groups will use Zoom for online gatherings, there are a number of features that can help create a meaningful, interactive experience.

- **Chat** — This feature can help encourage sharing and conversation without talking over one another. It can also be a means for quieter members of the group to share their thoughts and ideas in an accessible space. For additional help and information, please see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-meeting-chat>
- **Breakout groups** — This feature can be helpful with moving from a large group gathering to a smaller format where more sharing and conversation can happen. Breakout groups can be of any size and configuration you would like. For additional help and information, please see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Enabling-breakout-rooms>
- **Sharing audio and video** — Throughout the Getting Ready Materials, you will see suggested videos and songs that can encourage reflection and conversation. Depending on your bandwidth and connection, you may choose to have your group view or listen to them on their own, or stream it through your hosting. For additional help and information, please see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360051673592-Sharing-and-playing-a-video>
- **Whiteboard** — This feature allows the host to share their screen as a virtual chalk or whiteboard for all participants to see. Similar to a board in a physical room, this feature can be helpful if you're brainstorming ideas, like a group covenant, or listing reflections on a passage of Scripture. For additional help and information, please see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205677665-Sharing-a-whiteboard>
- **Waiting room** — This feature allows the host to control who enters the room and when. This can be particularly helpful if you have a guest coming to your gathering, or if you need time with adult leaders before youth participants enter the space. For additional help and information, please see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115000332726-Waiting-Room>





# Unit 1



Author: Elizabeth Hood

# Unit overview

**This unit dives into the immense concept of God’s boundless love. As humans we are bound by our limits, judgments and brokenness, so our love is not boundless. We will pray, listen, laugh, learn and wonder about the greatness and fullness of God’s love in comparison to our love.**

The two sessions differentiate between God’s love and our love, not only for the world but also for ourselves. The hope is that you start by imagining what God’s love looks like for all of humanity and then begin to reflect on God’s boundless love for **you**.

**Session one:** God's boundless love for humanity (all you can imagine and beyond)

**Session two:** God's boundless love for us (self). How do we love ourselves with a boundless love like God’s? How does loving ourselves allow us to love others?

We will spend additional time in these two sessions to build a foundation for your group. Whether there are three or 30 of you, it is important to build a base of love, mutual respect and understanding.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- ***Bold italics*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



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FB.com/YouthGathering  
FB.com/ELCATheAble  
FB.com/ELCAMYLE



@elcagathering  
@elca\_myle



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#ELCAYG2022

## UNIT 1 – SESSION ONE:

# God's boundless love for humanity

### Overview for adult leaders:

In this lesson, we are diving into the vastness of God's love. We are exploring what God's love looks like for all of humanity. Our prayer is that this lesson will start to lay the foundation for your group. Love is the best place for us to start, trying to understand God's great love for humanity and how we can begin to share that love.

Videos and songs are important to this lesson. Please find a way to play this for your group. We encourage you to search for and print out lyrics so that people can listen and/or read along to get the full impact of the words of these songs.



#### “Love Has No Labels”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuGihHs>

#### “Who Is Your Everyone?,” Joe Davis Poetry

<https://youtu.be/xLSbVaN4QdQ>



#### “We'll All Be Free,” William Matthews, Lisa Gungor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgG0jltdeek>

*(Access this song and more via the ELCA Youth Gathering's "boundless love" playlist on Spotify [here!](#))*



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- Markers
- Paper
- Post-It notes
- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Lengths of rope
- (5) copies of “Love Box” skit ([available on page 18](#))
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant ([available within this curriculum](#))
- Copies of the lyrics to “We'll All Be Free” for each participant (We encourage you to do a web search for the lyrics.)

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



As participants enter your space, have music playing (see playlist) and either a large sheet of paper on the ground or several large sheets of paper around the room. On each piece of paper, in bold marker, write (large and bold): “Love is...” or “God’s love is like ...” or “Draw a picture of what love looks like.” Ask participants to take time to write on each sheet of paper as many words/pictures as they can think of; try to fill the papers. Once everyone has had a chance to write and/or draw, read some responses or ask participants to share. Allow them to read anything on the paper; they do not have to read their own response. (This gets people moving and talking. It also helps set the tone for your time together.)

### Invitation:

***You are invited into this space and this time with a daring vision to see God’s boundless love, which is so much wider, deeper, stronger and more powerful than you could ever possibly imagine.***

### Team building/ice-breaker:



Part of showing God’s love to one another is getting to know each other. One way we do this is by learning each other’s names. No name is too difficult to learn. It might be hard to pronounce and you may have to ask someone to repeat it for you, but do not assume they want a nickname or that their name isn’t worth learning — they are a child of God. Take the time to learn to say their name.

Another way to show care for someone is to ask for their pronouns: “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and my pronouns are ‘he, him, his,’ ‘she, her, hers,’ or ‘they, them, theirs.’” What is your name, and what pronouns do you use? Please make sure to acknowledge that naming pronouns can be a risk for some and a challenge for others. This will help you in creating a space that is both safe and courageous. You may be surprised to realize that someone has been longing to introduce themselves to you in this way. Even if you already know everyone’s names, ask again and add an interesting question such as, “What makes you feel loved?” (Example: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, my pronouns are she, her, hers. I feel loved when my mom sends me a text saying how much she loves me and adds a million emojis.”)

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***In Saint Paul’s letter to the church of the Ephesians, he wrote, “I want you to know all about Christ’s love, although it is too wonderful to be measured.”***

When you attend the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, how will you measure your experience? Will it be in miles traveled or days enjoyed? Could it be in hours of preparation or moments of anticipation? Will it be counted in a stadium crowd of 30,000 or in a small group of 13 praying in your hotel lobby? There will be so many ways to measure your week in Minneapolis. Any one of them will do, but none will be as significant as the measurement of love. Make sure you measure your Gathering experience in love. The distance we go to show love to one another. Our time spent with God’s people united together in love. The volume of love that fills a football stadium. Best of all, five remarkable days getting to know all about Christ’s love. A boundless love, too wonderful to be measured.

**Activity:**

For this activity to work you must explain it just as written. Depending on your group size you may want to divide into several groups, about six to eight people in each group. Once you have your groups, ask for a volunteer from each group ask that person to step aside from their group. If your group is gathering with social distancing guidelines in place, we suggest providing pieces of rope that participants would hold each end of to achieve the necessary space but still close the circle. Then read this exactly:

- **“Form a circle with your group.”**
- **“Get in close, tight circles.”**  
(Wait for them to do this. They should have nice, close circles, nothing special. It doesn’t matter whether they are touching or not. If you are modifying the activity to create more distance, hand out the pieces of rope for participants to hold and close the circle.)
- **“Now, my volunteer (or volunteers)...try to get into the center of the circle, without crawling on the floor.”**  
(Do not give any other instructions or answer any questions. Say only, “Try to get in the center of the circle, without crawling on the floor,” repeat it exactly if you have to and see what happens. Let them do this for about a minute.)
- What happens about 99% of the time is that the group chooses to not let the volunteer in. They will close up and do anything to not let them in. Some clever participants may choose to let them in, or the whole group might decide to do this. Let this be a launch pad for discussion.
- Questions to ask the group:
  - **Why did you decide to not let them in?**
  - **What were my instructions?**
  - **Why is that our instinct?**
  - (If a group chose to let them in)  
**Why did you let them in?**
- Wrap up: **I think we behave this way because we believe resources are limited. THIS is the exact opposite of God’s love. God’s love is not limited. It is not scarce. It is abundant. It is limitless. It is boundless.**

**Prayer (youth led/read):**

***Ever-loving God, help us as we try to comprehend the vastness of your love. Help us to love one another through a lens of kindness, compassion and abundance. Guide our time together, open our hearts and open our minds that we might catch a glimpse of God’s enormous love in this world. Amen.***

## word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives

*“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”*



Read this passage twice, then ask two different people to read it slowly. Tell each person to wait for your signal before starting to read. Allow time for awkward silence (30-45 seconds). Tell the group to take a deep breath after each reading.

***All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from [God]. <sup>16</sup>God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that [God’s] Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup>and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God’s] love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you and all of God’s people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. <sup>19</sup>I want you to know all about Christ’s love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. <sup>20-21</sup>I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. [God’s] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen. —Ephesians 3:14-21 CEV***

## Our head:

**As you listened to this passage three times, what words stood out to you?**



**We are deeply rooted in God’s love, a love so big it’s unimaginable. Yet we can understand how that love makes us feel. It should make us feel free. Let’s use a song to think about how God’s love makes us feel. God’s love liberates, so let’s listen to a song about being free.**



“We’ll All Be Free,” William Matthews — Pass out [lyric sheet](#). (If tight on time, stop the video between 2:10 and 2:30.)

- **How can we begin to understand God’s love?**
- **Let’s talk about what God’s love is.**  
(Ask your group for ideas, have people shout out. Below are some examples.)
  - Releases, liberates and frees you.
  - God’s love of justice, mercy, the poor.
  - God’s love is without limit, without condition, without end.
  - God frees us to love.
  - We can understand things only through our human lens, which is limited, but the Bible reminds us of an important promise: If it’s not for everyone, it’s not of God.
- Share this additional Scripture passage:  
**1 John 4:8: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”**



Let’s watch a video that demonstrates that Love has no label and no limits and no condition. God’s love is beyond measure: “Love has no labels” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuGhHs>

## Our heart:

After the video, we will ask some wondering questions. Feel free to break up into groups of two or three for discussion or talk as a large group, depending on what works best in your setting. Make sure to share with the large group the discussions you had about this.

- Wondering questions:
  - What keeps us bound? What limits our ability to love others?

- What does God’s love do? Frees? Liberates?
- What doesn’t God’s love do? Ask your group for ideas, have people shout out. Here are some examples: God’s love doesn’t... condemn, judge, restrict or weaken.
- When you return to your large group after small group convos share these words.
  - **God’s love never fails. That’s God’s love. Human love is messy. Complicated. Difficult. Everything that makes our love tricky is simplified by God. There is no box. No label. No definition. No bounds.**
  - **If it isn’t love, it isn’t God. Hear that. If it isn’t love, it isn’t God, because God is love.**
  - **Take a breath. That air in your lungs is love. Take another, breathe in deeper — that is God’s love. God is closer to us than our own breath. As plentiful as the breaths we take. God’s love is limitless. No end. boundless love.**

## Our body:

- Have five participants perform the “Love Box” skit (at end of this lesson)
- After the skit, ask your group:  
**Thoughts? Reactions?**
- Listen to their answers and then share with them this: **God’s love can’t be contained! You will be bursting to share it. It’s not about scarcity: God’s love is abundant! Love moves us ... to act. To cry. To change. To run into the streets sharing God’s love.**
- **What does God’s love move you to do?**



## Our community:



- “Who Is Your Everyone?,” Joe Davis Poetry  
<https://youtu.be/xLSbVaN4QdQ>
- **How does your church demonstrate God’s love?**
- **How have you loved a neighbor? An enemy?**
- Galatians 3:28: “Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek.” (Worldly divisions don’t define us — our relationship with God does.)



## sending

reflect on what we  
have learned and  
ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.
- Closing prayer (youth led/read):  
***boundless God, teach us to see what your love looks like in this world. Show us love. Remind us that we are loved beyond measure or comprehension, more than we could ever dare to dream. Helps us to experience it, be it and share it with everyone we meet. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.***



### Dismissal/blessing — call and response:

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the  
take-home sheet!***

## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

***Keep your youth connected with their congregation in the months leading up to the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering.***

Take advantage of opportunities to make the church aware of what you are learning and how you're preparing for the Gathering. Doing this will provide many benefits for the youth and adult leaders. Not only will the congregation members be made aware of the Gathering details, they will also be more likely to support attendees with their prayers and offerings.

A great way to start this process would be to perform the "Love Box" skit for your congregation. The skit is a fun and effective way to communicate the theme of God's boundless love. Talk with your worship leader to see if your youth would be able to perform the skit during a Sunday worship service. If that is not available, find a Sunday-school hour or fellowship opportunity to act out the play. Have fun as you teach your congregation all about Christ's love.

# “Love Box” Skit

(Five people are needed; please print this out.)

**Narrator:** Leilani finds herself in need of God’s love. She prays and receives a big box of God’s love. She’s pretty proud of that love and holds it out for everyone to see (an imaginary box in her hands).

**Friend #1:** Hey, Leilani I’m really sad. Can I sit with you for a little bit?

**Leilani:** Well, I’m really busy at the moment, Maybe later? (She sends them away.)

**Narrator:** Just then, Leilani noticed that the box of God’s love in her hands seemed smaller.

**Friend #2:** Hi, Leilani, I’m having a really hard day. Can I hang out with you and talk? Oh ... what’s that you have?

**Leilani:** What? This? It’s God’s love. I’m actually saving it for something else. I’m sure you can find someone around here to give you some.

**Narrator:** She sends them away. This time, Leilani notices that her box of God’s love has gotten even smaller. She starts to worry and decides to lock it away in her room for safekeeping.

**Friend #3:** Hey, I lost my dog. I’m so worried, I’ve been looking everywhere. Can you help me?

**Leilani:** Sorry, I have a lot going on right now and can’t help you.

**Narrator:** Leilani races over to her box and finds it empty. Distraught, she drops to her knees and asks God to forgive her. God does and gives Leilani another big box of God’s love. She has a huge smile on her face.

**Friend #1:** Oh, hi, Leilani. I’m still feeling pretty sad...

**Narrator:** Leilani looks at her friend and looks at her box of love from God.

**Leilani:** I’m sorry you’re feeling sad. Would it help if I just sat with you?

**Friend #1:** Yes, thanks so much. (They exit.)

**Friend #2:** Hi, I’m still having a hard day today.

**Leilani:** Really? I hope your day gets better! I want you to know you’re a great friend and I’m so lucky to know you. (Friend #2 smiles and walks away.)

**Friend #3:** Puppy! Puppy! I still can’t find my dog.

**Leilani:** Hey, I have some free time. Could I help you look for your dog?

**Friend #3:** That would be awesome.

**Leilani:** The more love I give, the more I get to share with my friends, family and neighbors. Thank you, God!

*End skit*

## Take-home sheet for Unit 1 – Session one:

# God's boundless love for humanity

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

Focusing on love is the best place to start to understand God's great love for humanity and how we can share that love with one another. We are deeply rooted in God's love, a love so big it's unimaginable, but we can understand how that love makes us feel. It should make us feel free.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Ephesians 3:14-21, or look it up in your Bible app (We were using the CEV: Common English Version.). Another piece of Scripture to help support these themes would be 1 John 4:8 - God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known God.

Share on social media a picture of that time you experienced God's boundless love. Make sure to tag us, using the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlesslove**.



### Wondering questions

#### (discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless love? What was a time when you experienced God's boundless love?
- How can our imagination limit or expand our understanding of God?
- What does it mean to have a life filled with "all that God is"?
- What are the things that we imagine but stop ourselves from asking?

### Prayer of the lesson:

boundless God, teach us to experience what your love looks like in this world. Show us love. Remind us that we are loved beyond measure and comprehension, more than we could ever dare to dream. Help us to experience it, be it, and share it with everyone we meet. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

### Dismissal/blessing – Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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## UNIT 1 – SESSION TWO:

# God's boundless love for us

### Overview for adult leaders:

God's boundless love for us (self). How do we love ourselves with a boundless love like God's? How does loving ourselves allow us to love others? We will dig deeper and explore some vulnerable feelings. Encourage youth that this is a brave space where feelings are okay. If you feel they aren't ready to dig deeply, give them a minute to breathe, relax and prepare.

Videos and songs are important to this lesson. Please find a way to play these for your group. Be mindful that visuals and sounds are important because we all learn in different ways. We encourage you to search for and print out lyrics so that people can listen to and/or read along to get the full impact of the words of these songs.



#### “Write a Love Letter to Yourself”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojUrs28LeGM>



#### Lauren Daigle, “You Say”

#### Tauren Wells, “Known”

(Spotify playlist [@elcagathering](#) or YouTube; no visuals needed, just the song)



**If you are doing this session online** be sure that you and all participants have the latest update of your online meeting software. Recent updates in Zoom include allowing emojis in the chat. This will come in handy for the first activity.

## *suggested supply list*

- Markers
- Lined notebook paper
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant
- Large paper
- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of song lyrics
- Post-It notes
- Pencils

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:

As participants enter, have music playing from Gathering Spotify (@elcagathering) “boundless love” playlist. Place pens and Post-It note stacks around the room, maybe four to five different areas. Each area should have a different question written on a large sheet of paper. Ask participants to stop at each one, write responses to the questions on Post-It notes and place these on the paper.

- Favorite thing about your heart?
- How do you feel when you use this emoji?



- What helps you know you are loved?
- Who loves you the most?
- What makes you lovable?

### Invitation:

**“When you start to feel like things should have been better this year, remember the mountains and valleys that brought you here. They are not accidents, and those moments were not in vain. You are not the same. You have grown and you are growing, you are breathing, you are living, you are wrapped in endless, boundless grace. And things will get better, there is more to you than yesterday.”**

—Morgan Harper Nichols (poet and artist),  
@morganharpernichols

### Team building/ice-breaker:



Arrange your group in a circle of chairs or couches, with enough seats for everyone but one person, who stands in the middle. You, as the leader, will start. You will say, “The person in the middle will say, ‘I love that I am a great listener!’ And anyone who thinks that they themselves ARE a good listener should get up and change seats. You can’t move to the seat next to you!” Everyone scurries to find a new seat, leaving someone in the center without a seat. That person will say, for example, “I love that I’m a good friend.” Make sure everyone gets a turn; sometimes people end up in the center a few times, so if that happens, yell, “Jesus loves all the little children!” and everyone has to move to a new seat.



**Zoom alternative could be “Something In the Room Reminds Me Of!” Ask the group to bring something to the screen that reminds them of the following: Something in the room that reminds you of your friends, then your family, and finally ask for something that reminds them of their faith. Allow time for everyone to show their item and give an explanation.**

### Prayer (youth led/ read):

**God, we invite you into this space, this holy ground where we gather to learn about your love for us. We often forget how precious we are to you, forget how worthy of love we truly are. Help to remind us of that love. Use this lesson and these words and feelings shared to help us love ourselves just a little more today than we did yesterday. Amen.**

## word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives

*“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”*



**All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from [God]. <sup>16</sup>God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that [God’s] Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup>and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply**

**rooted in [God’s] love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you and all of God’s people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. <sup>19</sup>I want you to know all about Christ’s love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. <sup>20-21</sup>I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. [God’s] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen. —Ephesians 3:14-21 CEV**

**us from God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. If you sin, God loves you. If you fail, God loves you. If you lie, God loves you. If you cheat, God loves you. If you’re depressed, God loves you. If you have anxiety, God loves you. If you’re angry, God loves you. If you’re sad, God loves you. Now I want all of you to add some responses. If you \_\_\_\_\_, God loves you.**

## Our head:

**This verse reminds us again how we are deeply rooted by our faith in God’s love and that it is too wonderful to be measured, working within us more than we could ever dare imagine. That is where we will start today. God loves you more than you can ever dare imagine.**

- How does that make you feel?
- Why is it important to know this?



## Our heart:

 Pass out lyric sheets for Lauren Daigle’s “You Say.” Ask your group to follow along with the lyrics, pay attention to the words being sung and how these words make them feel.

- After the song is over, read this lyric out loud: **“In you I find my worth, in you I find my identity.”**
- **What things do you think keep you from God’s love? From loving yourself?** (Ask participants to share responses.)
- Read this lyric out loud: **“Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up.” God’s love reminds us who we are. Our vulnerability gives us strength.**



## Bible response:

 Romans 8:38-39 (youth led/ read.): **I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love — not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, <sup>39</sup>and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate**

- Have participants add more, either out loud, on sheets of paper, or in a Zoom chat.
- **God’s love reminds us that we belong, we are wanted, we are desired and we fit in, even when everything in us screams that we don’t.**
- **God’s love reminds us that we are all equal. Every human is worthy of love. There are no requirements to be loved by God. There are no tests to pass. No classes to take. Nothing. Nothing you do can stop God from loving you with a never-ending, never-ceasing, unrelenting love. Nothing.**
- **My hope for you is that you begin to love yourself in that kind of way. What could stop you if you loved yourself that way? Who could stand in your way? In the next section we will explore these questions.**

## Activity:

 Write a love letter to yourself. (Watch this first as inspiration for what to write.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojUrs28LeGM>



Pass out paper and a pencil to each person in the room and give them five minutes to write a love letter to themselves. Play music in the background. If participants are willing, have them read their letter out loud, either in small groups, with partners or to the whole group.

- **How did writing the letter make you feel?**
- **How did hearing others’ letters make you feel?**

***Until 2015, the Orfield Laboratories in Minneapolis held the honor of being named the “quietest place on earth” by the Guinness World Records. The laboratory has an anechoic chamber that absorbs 99.99% of all sound. A person alone in this intensely quiet chamber can hear their own heartbeat, their pulse and even the noise their smile makes.***

Conversely, the loudness that filled the streets of Minneapolis as people marched and chanted in protest following the murder of George Floyd can flood our senses with a similar intensity. Our bodies may respond to these vastly different experiences with a similar heightened awareness. We may find ourselves overwhelmed in the midst of loudness and/or frozen by blaring quietness.

When we encounter such situations of either thundering silence or agitated noise, it can be helpful to ground ourselves in our bodies. One simple way to do this is through breathing -- an act so natural and critical to how we live that we rarely think about it, and yet we become immediately aware of it when, as happened for George Floyd, it is an impossibility.

Participants attending the Gathering may be drawn to the chaotic quiet of Orfield Laboratories or the peaceful noise of George Floyd Square. It’s important for us to consider the reason we are drawn to either location and our potential impact on this part of God’s creation, particularly before venturing into the neighborhood where people are living, breathing and recovering from trauma.

Ask yourselves, what are you seeking? If you are seeking a tourism experience, it may be best to visit a site that is set up to receive tourists, like Orfield Laboratories. If you choose to go to George Floyd Square, remember that you are entering someone's community. Consider how you will honor the hospitality of your hosts, what gifts might you bring, and how you can walk softly, listen deeply, and see the sacredness of the community.

You can learn more about George Floyd Square, its impact and significance by following ELCA leaders and others who have been on the ground there since before the incident:

## GATHERING CONNECTION

- George Floyd Global Memorial - [georgefloydglobalmemorial.org](https://georgefloydglobalmemorial.org)
- Marsha Howard on TikTok - [marshahoward38thstreet](https://www.tiktok.com/@marshahoward38thstreet)
- 38th & Chicago “George Floyd Square” on Facebook
- Twin Cities Interfaith Movement Chaplains - [tcchaplains.com](https://tcchaplains.com)
- Kelly Sherman Conroy, doctoral candidate - [kellysconroy.com](https://kellysconroy.com)

Let’s be honest, that while the addition of 30,000 Lutherans to the 3.3 million residents of the Twin Cities will certainly make God smile, the inclusion and presence of Gathering participants won’t make for a quieter location. So many of God’s people in one place will generate a loud, busy and crowded environment. For many of us, and for the communities we visit, such conditions can be overwhelming. It will be important to make use of quiet moments each day, to find peace among the excitement. Adult leaders can model this practice and aid their youth in finding needed moments of respite. Quiet time may be hard to come by, but an intentional time out to sit and rest can make a difference.

Be sure to find your own quiet chamber and take some moments to be still and hear the breath of God within you. Try this with your group: Take a deep breath and then let it out slowly. Breathe in peace ... exhale worry. Breathe in the love of Christ ... breathe out Christ’s love for others. Breathe deeply and slowly. Repeat as necessary. May these quiet moments give you peace and remind you of the boundless love God has for you.

## Our body:



**After this session, on your way out, draw hearts and messages of love for people as they come to your church. Heart. God loves you. You are loved ... etc.**

Pass out chalk as participants leave.

## Our community:



**How will people at our church respond to the chalk messages and drawings? How will it make them feel? In what other ways can you share God's love? Do you think a chalk heart or reading "You are loved" could brighten someone's day?**

## sending

reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 of your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

## Closing prayer: (youth led/ read)



**God of love, remind us that we are precious, we are adored, we are loved more than we could ever dare imagine. We are worthy of love. Even though there are days when we do not feel like we love ourselves, we know you never stop loving us. Nothing can separate us from your love. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.**

## Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

Leader: **God's love is ...**

Participants (place hand over heart): **boundless**

Leader: **God's creation is ...**

Participants (open arms wide): **boundless**

Leader: **God's forgiveness is...**

Participants (cross wrists): **boundless**

## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

**The 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering will be a dynamic week of faith formation for all who are involved. Some in your congregation will be aware of this, while others may not.**

As your group begins this curriculum, along with your registration and preparation for the trip, now is the time to announce to your congregation your commitment to the Gathering. Introduce the "boundless: God beyond measure" theme along with the accompanying Scripture of Ephesians 3:19 CEV. Plan multiple strategies to communicate your excitement and expectations for the event. Some of these may include making announcements during worship services, writing articles for the church newsletter, posting pictures and information on social media, or hosting an informal meeting to discuss the Gathering and show Gathering promotional videos and materials. Additional promotional ideas can be found on the Gathering website ([elca.org/Gathering](http://elca.org/Gathering)) or on page 19 of the Official Gathering Handbook.

As the word spreads around your church, the excitement will build. Invite the congregation to join with you in the process. Not everyone will attend the Gathering, but all can be included on the journey. This is your opportunity to let everyone in church know what it means to have their lives filled with all that God is.

Leader: **God's invitation is...**

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): **boundless**

Leader: **God's promise is...**

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): **boundless**

**Pass out the take-home sheet!**

## Take-home sheet for Unit 1 – Session two:

# God's boundless love for us

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here. Let the lesson continue in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

God's love for us is boundless. Our worth and value as a child of God is through who we are and whose we are. You can't love other humans without loving yourself. Self-doubt, lack of self-worth and knowing our value is something we all struggle with.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Ephesians 3:14-21, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version). Additionally, Romans 8:38-39 CEV: "I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future,<sup>39</sup> and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!" can help support the theme of boundless love.

### congregation connection

Share your love letters to yourself with your congregation and ask if you can lead this activity for others in the congregation.

#### Chalk hearts:

How will people at your church respond to the chalk messages and drawings? How will it make them feel? In what other ways can you share God's love? Do you think a chalk heart or reading "You are loved" could brighten someone's day?

Take a picture of your **#ChalkHearts** and post it to your Instagram or Snapchat story for your friends and family to see. It might just be the reminder of God's boundless love they need. Make sure to tag us **@elcagathering** and use our hashtags **#ELCAYG2022**, **#boundlesslove** and **#ChalkHearts**.



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## Wondering questions

### (discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless love? When was a time that you experienced God's boundless love?
- Does your worth come from "likes" and "views," or from God?
  - How do we shift our focus on finding our worth from humans to finding it from God?
- What is stopping you from loving yourself?
- What walls have you built up, what lies do you tell yourself?
- How can you love yourself more tomorrow than you did today?

## Prayer of the lesson:

boundless God, teach us to experience what your love looks like in this world. Show us love. Remind us that we are loved beyond measure or comprehension, more than we could ever dare to dream. Helps us to experience it, be it and share it with everyone we meet. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.



## Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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# Unit 2



**boundless***creation*

Author: Stephanie Luedtke

# Unit 02 overview

**God is the author of all creation, the one who made all that was, is and ever shall be. God is both *infinite*, without bounds of space or time, and *intimate*, closer than we can know or even imagine. What’s most amazing is that God invites us to be a part of creation. In Genesis, humans are charged with caring for creation and all that is in it.**

Throughout Scripture, humans are trusted with the task of creating new ways of being in the world, taking responsibility for it and helping it unfold in new and creative ways. Some theologians call this an invitation to be “co-creators with God,” citing Jesus’ promise that “you will do even greater things than these” (John 14:12). Not only do we have the important task of taking care of what God created, but we also have the freedom and responsibility to create in the world something that has not yet existed.

Creation stories are not just found in the book of Genesis. We learn of the unfolding of God’s creation throughout Scripture, including in several of the psalms. In this unit, we will explore Psalm 104:1-34, a joyful song recounting the wonders of creation, full of metaphor and imagery.<sup>1</sup> Our first lesson will concentrate on the celebration of God’s boundless creation, despite humanity’s tendency to put boundaries on it. In the second lesson in this unit, we will claim ownership of our harm of creation and explore ways we can take part in the ongoing creation of God’s beautiful world.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- ***Bold italics*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



**Bible** to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



**Video** to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



**Music** to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



**Computer** to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



**Social media** for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles below.

<sup>1</sup>For more detail on the poetic language (both English and Hebrew) in Psalm 104, see “The Creation Theme in Genesis 1, Psalm 104, and Job 38-42” in *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, <https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/index/books-of-the-bible/genesis/creation-theme-genesis-1-psalm-104-job-38-42/>



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## UNIT 2 – SESSION ONE:

# God's boundless creation

### Overview for adult leaders:

In this lesson, we will explore and celebrate God's boundless creation. Psalm 104:1-34 (printed in the Appendix) is the foundation of our lesson and is a poetic retelling of the creation story. Through this lesson, we will notice the wonder of creation, explore what it can teach us about God and offer prayers of thanksgiving for its presence in our communities and lives.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- Bibles for every two or three participants
- The book *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee
- Copies of creation litany
- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available within this curriculum)

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:

As participants arrive, invite them to think about their favorite animal (real or mythical) and pantomime it in pairs or groups of three. Participants will try to guess each other's animals.



### Invitation:

***I invite you to this space and this time with a daring vision to see God's boundless creation. We are created by God, and we create through God's love.***

### Team building/ice-breaker:

This is a quick and easy game to warm up participants to today's theme: God's boundless creation.



- Invite participants to sit close together in a circle.
- ***We're going to play "Telephone." One person whispers a sentence to the person next to them, and this person whispers it to the person next to them, and so on, until the message comes back to the first person. Our message today is really important. It's about our theme of the day. I hope you get it.***



*For Zoom say the message while muted, next person writes it down, then mutes to say or use breakout room to send two at a time.*

- The message: ***Curiously, the creator created creatures as crawly as crickets and as cute as koalas.***

### Prayer (youth led/read):

***Creator God, you made all that was, is and will be. We celebrate that your creation has no bounds and that we get to participate in it. Help us to appreciate the magnificent world you have made and to strive to care for it in a way that honors you. Amen.***

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***Minnesota is the state of 10,000 lakes, and the city of Minneapolis is home to more than 20 of them. Minneapolis is bisected by the Mississippi River and is also known for its wetlands, creeks and waterfalls. St. Paul and Minneapolis are nicknamed the "Twin Cities," but Minneapolis is also known as the "City by Nature" and the "City of Lakes." In fact, the origin of the city's name is water city. Mni is the Dakota word for "water," and polis is "city" in Greek.***

Such an abundant supply of water keeps Minneapolis connected to God's creation. All throughout the urban metropolis, residents are reminded of the creating and sustaining presence of water. When your group travels to Minneapolis for the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering, how will members encounter God's boundless creation? Will they find God in the steady current of the Mississippi River? Will they see God in the crashing waters of the Minnehaha Falls? Creation is filled with all that God is and that our lives can be. Even if it should rain on your group during their outside-Service Learning opportunity, may the downpour remind them of God's baptismal waters. Let God create a clean heart and a right spirit within you.

## word | learn about God's word and connection to our lives

"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."



**Today we will explore God's boundless creation through our study of Psalm 104. Did you know that the creation stories in Genesis are not the only ones in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)? Psalm 104 is a poetic telling of the creation story, full of metaphor and imagery. Let's start by hearing this reading with our entire bodies.**

### Our body:



Split the participants into small groups of two to five. Assign each of them a segment of Psalm 104:1-34. Two to four verses are ideal for each group. If you have a very large group, you can have larger small groups or have several groups assigned to the same segments of text. If you have a very small group, have them work in pairs on a larger segment of text.

- **Read over the verses assigned to you and come up with a living Instagram post that sums up the meaning of those verses. Create that scene (as if someone is about to take your picture), including all of the people in your group. You'll have five minutes to come up with your scene. After five minutes, I'll read the entire psalm. When I come to your verses, get into positions for your scene!**



For online meetings, consider using breakout rooms and taking a screen shot of the group enacting the picture.

- Read the psalm (note: we end at verse 34) and encourage participants as they create their scenes.



- Take it to the next level - Have someone take pictures of the scenes and post them, using the hashtags #ELCAYG2022 and #boundlesscreation.

### Our head:



Wondering questions:

- **What verses or images stood out to you?**
- **What surprised you?**
- **What didn't you understand?**
- **Verses 19-23 describe the beauty and importance of the dark night. Often, darkness is depicted as frightening or bad. How does this imagery help you understand darkness in a different way?**

### Our heart:



Read the book *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee to the group or show this YouTube video of a reading of it: <https://youtu.be/0itq-Uk43mE>

- **What does creation teach you about God?**
- **If God's creation is boundless, how do we bind it? Why?**
- **How can we listen to what the rest of creation is trying to teach us?**

### Our community:



**Old Turtle shows us how big God is but also how close God is to us at the same time. God is the author of all creation and the maker of our community, our neighborhood and our families. Let's share a creation litany together.**

- **A litany is a responsive prayer, with parts for both a leader and a group.**
- Hand out the creation litany and ask for a volunteer to read the leader's parts. Read the litany together.
- **We encourage you to take this litany home and make it your own. The take-home sheet has a challenge for you — try it and bring it back next time.**

# sending

reflect on what we  
have learned and  
ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 75-85 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.



- Closing prayer: (youth led/read)

***boundless God: We are overwhelmed with the power, the beauty, the peacefulness and the glory of your great creation. Fill us with your creative Spirit, so that we can participate with you in the ongoing creative work that is unfolding in the world. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.***

## Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the  
take-home sheet!***

## Creation litany <sup>3</sup>

**L: The Spirit of God be with you.**

**C: And also with you.**

**L: “The heavens are telling the glory of the Lord; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).**

**C: All around us are signs and wonders, fingerprints of the Creator. Praise be to God! “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it; and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1). All around us we find life; all the created world is related to us. Praise be to God!**

**L: Come, let us dwell in God’s work of art! Here in this wondrous world we are not alone. We shall share this life with the heavens and the earth.**

**C: With the waters and the land, with the trees and grasses, with fish, birds and animals, with minerals and creatures of every form, and with all people. Praise be to God!\***

**L: God is good, and everything God makes is good.**

**C: Praise to the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen! Amen.**

*\*Note the underlined words. Adapt this section as described in the Congregation connection to compose a creation litany that honors God’s creation in your area.*

<sup>3</sup>From the full liturgy “Celebrating Creation” by Kelly Sherman-Conroy, doctoral candidate, Native Theologian (Ogala Sioux).

## Additional resources

- What is the Leviathan?  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Leviathan-Middle-Eastern-mythology>



- Songs about creation:
  - “God of All Creation” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RgM3SA1xgE>
  - “God of Wonders” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CBNE25rtnE>
  - “All Creatures of Our God and King,” David Crowder Band  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSFK7UiH5Us>
  - “Earth and All Stars!” (ELW 731)
  - “Joyful, Joyful” (Sister Act 2)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfBGQplyT8>



- *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee  
<https://youtu.be/0itq-Uk43mE>
- Other worship resources on creation:
  - Creation Justice Ministries. <http://www.creationjustice.org/indigenous.html>
  - Resources for creation care from Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church.  
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/resources-for-creation-care>
  - The Green Bible (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

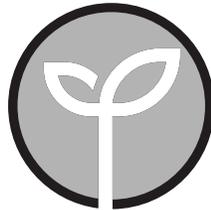
## Take-home sheet for Unit 2 – Session one:

# God's boundless creation

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow ... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

Dwelling in a Psalm of the incredible beauty of creation, we explored and celebrated God's boundless creation. Psalm 104:1-34 was the foundation of our time together, helping us to notice the wonder of creation, explore what it can teach us about God and offer prayers of thanksgiving for its presence in our communities and lives.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Psalm 104:1-34, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).



### Wondering questions

**(discuss these questions with someone at home):**

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless creation?
- What does creation teach you about God?
- If God's creation is boundless, how do we bind or restrict it? Why?
- How can we listen to what the rest of creation is trying to teach us?



Post your answers to these questions using **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlesscreation**.

### congregation connection

Here's a challenge for you this week: make your own creation litany.

- What natural features are part of your community? (waterways, mountains, etc.) [https://water.usgs.gov/wsc/map\\_index.html](https://water.usgs.gov/wsc/map_index.html)
- What animals and plants are important to your region?
- What indigenous communities have lived on the land that makes up your state? <https://native-land.ca/>
- Write your own creation litany that incorporates the people, places and creatures unique to your setting. Ask your pastor and worship leaders if you can include it in worship sometime soon.

### Prayer:

boundless God: We are overwhelmed with the power, the beauty, the peacefulness and the glory of your great creation. Fill us with your creative Spirit, so that we can participate with you in the ongoing creative work that is unfolding in the world. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

### Dismissal/blessing – Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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## UNIT 2 – SESSION TWO:

# God's boundless creation, going deeper

### Overview for adult leaders:

In this lesson, we will dive more deeply into Scripture about God's boundless creation. We will note the ways that humans harm creation, consider how we, too, are wonders of creation, and contemplate how we can participate in God's creative work. Be aware that the warm-up activity is incorporated later in this lesson. If participants arrive late, encourage them to take a moment to do the activity on their own.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- Bibles for every two or three participants
- Pens or markers
- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Newsprint/poster paper
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 41)
- Tape
- Post-It notes
- Easel with a backboard of some sort (optional)
- Markers or paint

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



• As participants arrive, play the song “Canvas and Clay” by Pat Barrett.

<https://youtu.be/OcDRp0zWGIw>

- Invite them to listen to the words of the song and write a brief answer to the question “If you were a piece of artwork, what would you be?” on a Post-It note.



*For online meetings, have students type in the chat but wait to hit send all at once.*

- Note: the “piece of artwork” can be general (“a sculpture,” “a painting of trees”) or more specific (“the Mona Lisa”).

### Invitation:

***I invite you to this space and this time with a daring vision to see God’s boundless creation. We are created by God, and we create through God’s love.***



### Team building/ice-breaker:



This activity has the purpose of showing participants what they have in common with others, how they are unique and asking them to consider what it means to “create.”

- **Let’s play a game that will help us learn about each other. Some things about us are pretty unique. Other things we have in common with each other. I’m going to read a series of statements. If the statement is true about you, raise your hand. If there are two or more people’s hands raised, they should join hands (even across the circle), not leaving out any raised hands. Once all hands are joined, the game is over.** (If you have time and interest, you can figure out how to untangle the knot of arms you’ve created.) **Here we go.**
  - **“I am an artist.”**
  - **“I have pets I care for.”**
  - **“I have siblings I help with.”**
  - **“I have made up stories, songs or games.”**
  - **“I sometimes come up with unique ways of doing things.”**
  - **“Someone has told me I had a good idea.”**
  - If all hands are not yet joined: **“I have tried something new.”** (That includes everyone.)



*The online adaptation for this game would be to have youth privately message the host a secret fact about themselves. Once the host receives all of the facts, the host then reads through them and youth vote on which fact corresponds with which person.*

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***A visit to the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden will make a great experience for any group attending the Gathering. The 11 beautiful acres of grass, hedges and trees compose the structure of an outside art museum. Visitors walking through the garden will discover 40 sculptures depicting a variety of color, design and whimsy. The garden represents our creations inhabiting God’s creation. It’s a meeting of the organic and the simulated, a place where the divine and the secular encounter one another. Together they speak to each other through a language of inspiration.***

By using their spiritual gift of creativity, the created follow in the footsteps of the creator. The results are an example of a creative God working through us. Visit the garden and see for yourself. Admission is free, and the garden is open every day from 6 a.m. till midnight. Discover a gallery of art made by human hands, framed by trees and lit by the sun. May it remind you of the divine creative spark that lives within you, and that you are invited to be co-creators with God. Remember, when God plants a garden, God calls you to care for it and beckons you to add to its beauty.

- **This game shows us that we are all participants in God’s creation. We not only care for it but help create it, too.**

### Prayer (youth led/read):

**Creator, what you have made is beyond our understanding, but you trust us with its care. Help us to see you in your word, in each other and in your world, so that we can be better caretakers.**

## word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives

*“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”*

**Today we will more deeply explore God’s boundless creation and our part in caring for it and helping it grow and thrive.**

### Our body:



Set up a large piece of newsprint/poster paper on a wall or easel. Depending on how adventurous you are, provide participants with either markers or paint.



See the resources in the introduction of the Getting Ready materials under “Suggested uses for this resource” for ideas to be able to use the whiteboard feature in a digital meeting.

- Invite participants to stand in line across from the paper.
- Assign one participant (preferably an adult, so all youth can participate) to be a silent counter. Every 10 seconds, they will tap a different youth and say, “Go!”



**I am going to read our creation poem, Psalm 104:1-34, and while I’m doing that, you are going to create it. One person at a time will draw/paint an image of what they’re hearing at that time. Every 10 seconds (assigned counter) will tap the next person, who will take over creating the piece of art. Let’s see what comes out in the end.**

- Read the psalm. Keep reading steadily and allow the “counter” to do their job. Whatever the finished piece looks like will be amazing.



- Take it to the next level — Take a picture of your final product and post it with #ELCAYG2022 and #boundlesscreation

### Our head:



Discuss the following questions:

- **How did you hear the psalm differently this time?**
- **What surprised you?**
- **Which part of the psalm speaks to you the most?**

### Our heart:



**+** Read this verse: **“For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 NJKV).**

- **What does it mean to you to be God’s “workmanship”?**

If participants are comfortable sharing, discuss what they wrote on their Post-It notes during the warm-up: “If you were a piece of artwork, what would you be?”

### Our community:



**+** **“So God created humans to be like [God’s self; God] made [all of us]. God gave them [a] blessing and said: Have a lot of children. Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth” (Genesis 1:27-28).**

- **Sometimes people read this verse to mean that humans should exert power over creation. Another way to read this verse is that we have the responsibility to care for creation. Now we will explore a story of someone who takes their role in caring for creation very seriously.**

Choose one of the following stories to watch/read. If you have time, feel free to explore more than one. They are all great.



- Venice Williams, urban farmer. “Alice’s Garden: Solutions for Clean Water in Milwaukee,” AmericanRivers.org, <https://www.americanrivers.org/rivers/films/alices-garden/>.
- Sean Sherman, chef. “The Sioux Chef’s Indigenous Menu,” *CBS Sunday Morning*, Nov. 18, 2018, <https://youtu.be/w-V0uZfzX4>
- Paul Douglas, meteorologist.
  - “Paul, what’s going on with the weather?” As a TV meteorologist, I get that question a lot these days. As time goes by it gets harder to answer. How is the weather where you live? Is it what you remember growing up? No? It’s not your imagination. Our weather is a hot mess. It’s almost as if Mother Nature picked up the remote control, put the seasons on fast-forward, and dialed extreme weather up to a 10.” (Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas, *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment*, p. 11).
  - “Today we humans are changing the chemical composition of the atmosphere. We are fiddling with the planet’s natural thermostat — poking at the climate system with a long, sharp, carbon-tipped stick, and then acting surprised every time the weather bites back. And the weather is biting back with increasing frequency and ferocity. We are the volcano, conducting an experiment that’s never been done before — on a planetary scale, on the only home we have: God’s home.” (*Caring for Creation*, p. 16).

Wondering questions

(after watching/reading one of the above):

- **How have humans harmed each other and/or other aspects of creation?**
- **Think about local and national climate events as examples to ponder (Texas winter storms, California wildfires, Oklahoma earthquakes, etc.).**
- **What redemption do you see in this story? How has health or equilibrium been restored?**

- **What more must be done?**
- **What are you ready to do to repair what humans have broken?**

## sending

reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.



### Closing prayer (youth led/read):

**Creator God, you are an artist, and you make us artists, too. You care for us, and you show us how to care for each other. Stir in us the desire not only to keep your earth and its inhabitants safe but also to participate in the unfolding of creation that is still occurring. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God’s power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.**

### Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

Leader: **God’s love is ...**

Participants (place hand over heart): **boundless**

Leader: **God’s creation is ...**

Participants (open arms wide): **boundless**

Leader: **God’s forgiveness is...**

Participants (cross wrists): **boundless**

Leader: **God’s invitation is...**

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): **boundless**

Leader: **God’s promise is...**

Participants (cross on another’s forehead or hand): **boundless**

**Pass out the take-home sheet!**



## Take-home sheet for Unit 2 – Session two:

# God's boundless creation, going deeper

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow...that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

Dwelling in God's boundless creation, we went deeper into Scripture about God's boundless creation. We looked more closely at the ways that humans harm creation, consider how we, too, are wonders of creation, and contemplate how we can participate in God's creative work.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today:, Psalm 104:1-34, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).

Here is some additional Scripture to help support these themes:

- Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created humans to be like [Godself; God] made men and women. God gave them [a] blessing and said: Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth."
- Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV): "For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

### Wondering questions

**(discuss these questions with someone at home):**

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless creation?
- What does it mean to you to be God's "artistry"?

Post your answers to these questions using **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlesscreation**.



### congregation connection

We considered our role in participating in creation and caring for what God has made. We watched or read a story of a person who takes their part in caring for creation very seriously, and discussed what we could do to care for creation.

- What small steps are you willing to take to help repair humanity's relationships with one another and the earth? If you are doing this lesson in December, consider using reusable or recyclable gift wrapping.
- As a family, church or community, can you commit to taking that step?
- Let us know what you're doing at #ELCAYG2022 and #boundlesscreation.



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## Prayer:

Creator God, you are an artist, and you make us artists, too. You care for us, and you show us how to care for each other. Stir in us the desire not only to keep your earth and its inhabitants safe but also to participate in the unfolding of creation that is still occurring. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.



## Dismissal/blessing – Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.

## Additional resources:

- ELCA resources
  - Creation care liturgical resources: [Webofcreation.org](http://Webofcreation.org)
  - Grassroots creation care organization, <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>
  - ELCA social statement Caring for Creation, <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>
  - ELCA Environmental Advocacy staff: Ruth Ivory Moore, <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy#Issues>
- Kids who make a difference for the earth: "Greta Thunberg Isn't Alone. Meet Some Other Young Activists Who Are Leading the Environmentalist Fight," CNN.com, Sept. 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/28/world/youth-environment-activists-greta-thunberg-trnd/index.html>
- Creation care role models:
  - Venice Williams, urban farmer. "Alice's Garden: Solutions for Clean Water in Milwaukee," AmericanRivers.org, <https://www.americanrivers.org/rivers/films/alices-garden/>
  - Sean Sherman, chef. "The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Menu," CBS Sunday Morning, Nov. 18, 2018, <https://youtu.be/w-V0uZfzX4>
  - Paul Douglas, meteorologist. Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas, Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment (New York: HarperOne, 2008).
- "Canvas and Clay" by Pat Barrett, <https://youtu.be/OcDRp0zWGIw>.



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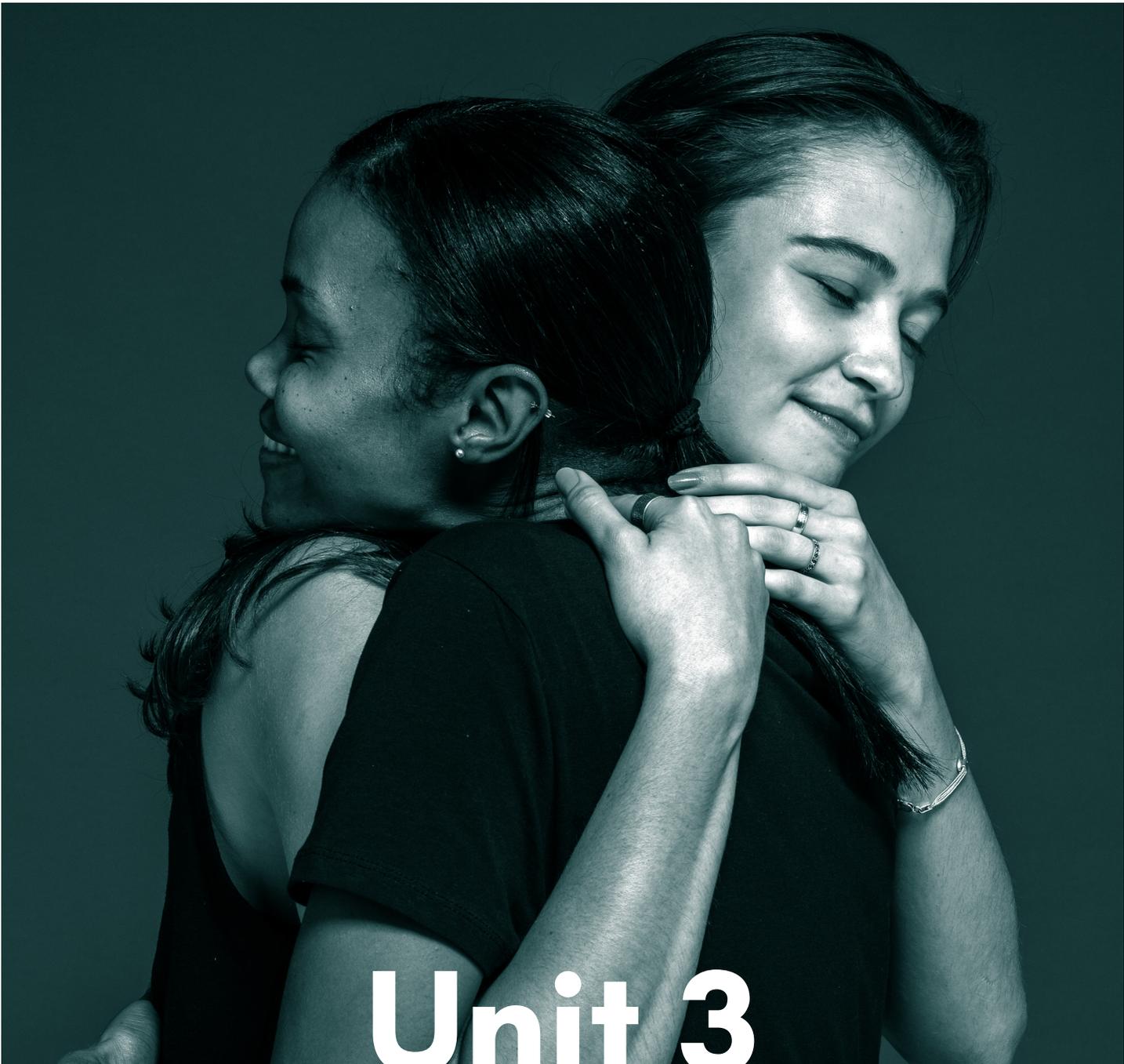


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# Unit 3

 **boundless***forgiveness*

Author: Charles Newman

# Unit 03 overview

In this unit we will talk about and experience God’s boundless forgiveness for us and through us. Forgiveness has always been a highly valued characteristic of Christians. Christ’s death on the cross was for the purpose and promise of forgiving all our sins — not just some, but all. Christ urges us to forgive others as well, without regret. Jesus is quite emphatic about this point, even saying that we should forgive repeatedly. But the truth is, it’s not that simple. While we long to know that God forgives us all our sins, yet sometimes we can be reluctant, hesitant or even fearful of forgiving others. The challenge is that God’s boundless forgiveness is a gift for each of us and learning to share that forgiveness helps us in knowing the freedom of feeling forgiven.

**Session one:** The focus is on God’s boundless forgiveness for us. The parable of the Prodigal Son shows the deep love of a father (our creator/parent) for the lost child. God the parent stands waiting for the time when each of us children will be ready to return home and embrace one who loves us deeply. Some participants in your group may find themselves in a position similar to that of the child in the parable, estranged from a parent or friend, by choice or by circumstance, and feeling unable to return to the relationship. As a leader, be conscious of those who may be aching to reach out and begin to mend a broken relationship.

*Content warning: Session two is about how we can forgive those who hurt us. This may bring to the surface unspoken pain, hurt or trauma in you or your participants. This will be a challenging lesson for anyone who has been hurt deeply, whether by abuse, crime or personal, systemic or other trauma. As a leader, you are encouraged to venture gently through this session, always encouraging participants that forgiveness can take time and that God’s boundless love and forgiveness continue to be with them as they struggle. If you are the one struggling with this lesson, take this opportunity to bring in another adult to partner with you on this whole unit.*

**Session two:** The focus here is on how we can share in God’s boundless forgiveness by forgiving others, even those who hurt us deeply. In this session, we learn about Joseph from the Hebrew Scriptures and how he learned to forgive. From Joseph’s experience, we can learn how to forgive others who have hurt us. Together, we will ponder a pathway to sharing God’s boundless forgiveness, even when it’s hard or when we might not be ready.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- ***Bold italics*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



**Bible** to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



**Video** to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



**Music** to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist ([@elcagathering](#)). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



**Computer** to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



**Social media** for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles below.



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## UNIT 3 – SESSION ONE:

# receiving God's boundless forgiveness

### Overview for adult leaders:

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the most memorable stories in the Bible, illustrating the radical nature of God's boundless forgiveness. In this lesson, we'll explore our sinful nature and the grace of God's boundless forgiveness.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to use the whiteboard feature in a digital meeting and share videos effectively in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 51)
- Post-It notes or scraps of recyclable paper, and a writing utensil
- A football or something of similar size that is safe to play with
- Print or projected image of Rembrandt's *The Prodigal Son*, [http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/prodigal\\_son\\_large.html](http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/prodigal_son_large.html)

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



- As youth arrive, have music from the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering) playing. Show participants the famous Rembrandt painting [The Prodigal Son](#) but **do not** display the artist or title. Also, **do not** tell the participants anything about the painting.
- Have the participants guess what is going on in the story. Whom do they think the people are and what are they doing in the painting?
- Provide Post-It notes so participants can write their guesses and stick them on the wall around the painting.



### Invitation:

*I invite you to this place and this time with a daring vision to experience God's boundless forgiveness for you.*

### Team building/ice-breaker:



- **We are going to play a game of “Steal the Bacon.”** Divide your group into two even teams. You will need one person to be the leader or umpire.
- **Now that our group has been divided in half, each team must form a single-file line that is parallel to the other team. The two teams should then turn to face each other and take a big step back, leaving room between the teams.** Assign each person in line a number, counting from one to how many people you have in a line. Then place the “bacon” (this could be a football or something of similar size) in the space between the teams.
- **The umpire will call out a number. The players on each side who are assigned that number are the players for that round. No other team members leave their side of the field.**
- **Neither player may touch the other player until someone touches the bacon. Once a player touches the bacon however, the other player may tag them. If a player can grab the bacon and carry it back over to their own side, that team scores a point. If a player is tagged after touching the bacon and before they return to their own side, the team that tagged them scores a point.**

## GATHERING CONNECTION

*Downtown Minneapolis is home to the longest continuous indoor pedestrian walkway in the world. The Minneapolis Skyway links numerous buildings, spanning 69 blocks and covering seven miles. This amazing walkway alleviates foot traffic on the streets, keeps pedestrians warm in the winter and gives a great view of the street below. Using the Skyway, a person can walk from business to entertainment, find dinner and return to their hotel without ever stepping outside.*

Jesus had his own skyway view of the world. From there he saw the people down on the street below. Jesus saw their needs, their hurts and their sin. Knowing what needed to be done and what it would cost, Jesus responded. He left the comfort of a heavenly sky and came down to earth to be with us. Jesus came to serve, love, forgive and redeem.

What could Jesus' example mean for us? We know doing the hard stuff, the dirty work, and leaving our comfort zone behind is never an easy job. Sometimes loving others and forgiving others can go wrong, breaking our hearts and costing us everything. Because of this, many times we choose not to get involved. God will ask, “Who can I send?” Sometimes we reply, “Find someone else.” No one understands hurt and forgiveness the way Jesus does, yet God forgives us every time we turn away. God forgives us every time. That's because God's forgiveness is as boundless as the sky. I wonder what it would look like if we could forgive as Jesus does?

Note that the sequence of play usually involves the two kids running out and hovering over the bacon, waiting for a slight advantage to grab it and run back before the other player can react. The game is over when a predetermined number of points are scored, or when all numbers have been called – you decide.



**Zoom Game Alternative: Steal the Bacon Scavenger Hunt.** Ask youth to search their house for an item in an attempt to find it, and be the first to bring the item back to the screen. The first item announced is Bacon. The second is a Ball. The last item announced is a Bible.

Gather the whole group back together and take a moment to settle in. Share with them: **Today we'll be talking about God's boundless forgiveness.**

**Continue with a prayer (youth led/read):**

**God, our parent, we hurt others with things we say and do, as well things we don't say or do. Yet you long to forgive us. Guide our hearts that we can seek your forgiveness and trust that it is boundless. Please help us to experience our actions with your grace. Help us to remember that boundless forgiveness is your gift to us, if we but ask. Amen.**

**word** | learn about God's word  
and connection to our lives

"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."



**Today we are going to tell the story of a guy who ate with pigs. Of course, the story is deeper than that. It's the story of how a father welcomed his son home. We will learn that no matter how far away from God we may run or find ourselves, God will always love us and we can always find our way back to God.**

## Our head:



Read Luke 15:12-32:

- Read the parable through one time. Pause after the reading to allow time for participants to take it in. Then briefly reflect on the following questions.

**Luke 15:12-32: 12 The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons. <sup>13</sup>Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. <sup>14</sup>He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.**

**<sup>15</sup>He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs.**

**<sup>16</sup>He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.**

**<sup>17</sup>Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"**

**<sup>20</sup>The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.**

**<sup>21</sup>The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."**

**<sup>22</sup>But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup>Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.**

**<sup>25</sup>The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"**

**27The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf.” 28The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.**

**His father came out and begged him to go in.**

**29But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. 30This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”**

**31His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”**

Explore one or two of these questions with participants:

- **What do you think kept the son away so long?**
- **Who do you think is looking for forgiveness in this story? Who needs it?**
- **What are the different kinds of separation you notice between people in this story? Who do you think is more separated from whom?**
- **The painting we guessed about as you entered today is *The Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt. How did our story line up with your guesses from earlier?**
- **What do you notice in the painting now that you know the context of the story?**

### Our body:



- Divide the participants into no more than four groups, give each group a section of the story (The creative retelling of story is available on page 50.) and have them come up with a creative way to share their part of the story. Make sure to involve every person in your group because once you're done, we will have a chance for each group to share their retelling of the story. As best you can, show us what you think Jesus was trying to get across through this story.

- Give the groups five minutes to plan. Then, retell the whole story.

### Our heart:



- Help participants recall times when they have been like each character in the parable.
- When, if ever, have you been like the younger son, who felt too ashamed to ask for forgiveness?
- When, if ever, have you been like the older son, who always did what he was supposed to do yet was unable to forgive his sibling?

Wondering questions (choose one or two):

- **What would you do if you found yourself alone and estranged from your family?**
- **What might keep you from reconciling a broken relationship? (pride, fear of rejection, self-destructive behaviors, etc.)**
- **Put yourself in the place of the younger son. How do you imagine he felt to be welcomed home and forgiven?**

### Our community:

**Search for opportunities to seek the forgiveness of others throughout the week. This might mean asking a sibling or parent for forgiveness because you said something hurtful. It might mean speaking to a classmate you ignored or excluded because you were with another friend. Remember that seeking forgiveness is like the Prodigal Son coming home: some people will respond with forgiveness like the father, but some may respond with bitterness like the elder brother. This is OK, and we'll talk about it more next time.**

## sending

reflect on what we  
have learned and  
ask questions

- **Feeling as if we don't deserve or need forgiveness can keep us from asking for it. But God's forgiveness is boundless. Next session, we'll wonder together what it would be like to be the father in the parable, who offered both sons forgiveness.**
- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

### Closing prayer (youth led/read):

**God of boundless forgiveness, you know our hearts, hear our prayers and care about all that concerns us. You understand the burden we carry and how we want, more than anything, to know your forgiving love. Help us to remember that you always forgive and that you desire to extend that boundless forgiveness to us and through us. Help us to forgive as you do. Amen.**

### Dismissal/blessing — call and response:

Leader: **God's love is ...**

Participants (place hand over heart): **boundless**

Leader: **God's creation is ...**

Participants (open arms wide): **boundless**

Leader: **God's forgiveness is...**

Participants (cross wrists): **boundless**

Leader: **God's invitation is...**

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): **boundless**

Leader: **God's promise is...**

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand):  
**boundless**

## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

*As a congregation, we are invited by God to experience boundless forgiveness every week.*

Many of our community worship services begin with an order of confession and forgiveness. As we enter into worship, we are given this moment to come before God admitting that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. Our God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God grants us forgiveness, and our worship begins. The next time you attend church and hear the pastor proclaim God's forgiveness of our sins, look around the sanctuary. Notice a room full of God's children, pardoned and freed by the power of forgiveness. By the way, you don't need to wait for Sunday morning to be forgiven. God's boundless forgiveness is there for us, all day and every day.

*Pass out the  
take-home sheet!*

## Creative retelling of the story

*Hand out sections of the story to participants to have each create part of the story. When they are finished, have them present the story to each other in order.*

### Group 1:

<sup>12</sup>The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

<sup>13</sup>Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. <sup>14</sup>He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

### Group 2:

<sup>15</sup>He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

<sup>17</sup>Finally, he came to his senses and said, “My father’s workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.’”

### Group 3:

<sup>20</sup>The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup>The son said, “Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son.”

<sup>22</sup>But his father said to the servants, “Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup>Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found.” And they began to celebrate.

### Group 4:

<sup>25</sup>The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants over and asked, “What’s going on here?” <sup>27</sup>The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf.” <sup>28</sup>The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. <sup>29</sup>But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. <sup>30</sup>This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”

<sup>31</sup>His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”

## Take-home sheet for Unit 3 – Session one:

# receiving God's boundless forgiveness

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

With the parable of the Prodigal Son we explored our sinful nature and the grace of God's boundless forgiveness, which is available to all of us. In a world of broken relationships, the parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us a lesson of deep love, hope and, yes, forgiveness.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Luke 15:12-32, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).

Other Scriptures to explore:

- Ephesians 4:31-32: Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. 32 Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.

### Wondering questions

**(discuss these questions with someone at home):**

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless forgiveness?
- Is there more than one way to express forgiveness?
- Who do you need to forgive right now?
- From whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

### congregation connection

Pay close attention in worship to what you feel during the confession and forgiveness. What words stand out to you?

If your congregation doesn't have confession during this season, where in the liturgy do you hear words of forgiveness? During the peace, encounter each person as a beloved, forgiven child of God. Greet someone that you usually don't. Talk to your family about how that felt.



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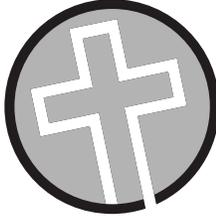


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### Prayer:

God of boundless forgiveness, you know our hearts, hear our prayers and care about all that concerns us. You understand the burden we carry and how we want, more than anything, to know your forgiving love. Help us to remember that you always forgive and that you desire to extend that boundless forgiveness to us and through us. Help us to forgive as you do. Amen.



The story of the Prodigal Son that we spent time with in this session paints a picture of the long road that the younger son walked to come back home to find forgiveness and reconciliation. Find the longest road or path you can fit into a picture to post on social media. Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessforgiveness**.



### Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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## UNIT 3 – SESSION TWO:

# living God's boundless forgiveness

### Overview for adult leaders:

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.” (from “Loving Your Enemies” Martin Luther King Jr., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*)

It does not take one a long time to figure out that forgiveness, while it may be hard, has an interesting way of bringing incredible good out of incredibly bad situations. Forgiveness feels good to the person offering it and the person receiving it. Holding onto hurt, pain, anger and grudges hardens our hearts, as it did for the elder brother in the Prodigal Son story. It's not easy, but God intends for us to live and feel the freedom that comes from both receiving and extending forgiveness. Together, we will ponder a pathway to sharing God's boundless forgiveness, even when doing so is hard.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share videos effectively in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 59)
- Copies of closing prayer
- Poster paper
- Some old XL T-shirts, red ones if available. Have enough T-shirts to hand out one to every three to five participants. On the night before the session, ball up the T-shirts, dip them in water and keep them in the freezer until the session begins.
- Enough balloons for every participant

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:

 Have poster paper on the walls or butcher paper on a table as participants enter. Play music from the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering) in the background. Ask participants to write or draw about a feeling of anger, despair, suffering or pain that they are currently experiencing or recently have experienced. Allow their work to hang on the walls throughout the lesson.



### Invitation:

***I invite you to this space and this time with a daring vision to experience God's boundless forgiveness.***

### Team building/ice-breaker:



***Online game alternative - "One Word Story." Going around the digital circle, participants contribute one word apiece for a few rounds until the group has created a story. The leader can talk through the end result of the story as well as the creation along the way. Feel free to play this through a couple of times, processing what it felt like to have the story go in directions that participants might not have wanted or imagined.***

Our ice-breaker today will be the frozen T-shirt challenge. This is a fun but difficult team challenge that will be used to illustrate the pain of a heartbreak. You will need to divide your group into teams of three to five people. Give each team a balled-up T-shirt that has been dipped in water and kept in a freezer overnight. Try to use old T-shirts that won't be missed should they be damaged in the game. Sizes XL or bigger are a better fit for the challenge. If available, use red shirts. A balled-up red shirt will look more like a heart.

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called life." Born in Minneapolis in 1958, Prince was a chart-topping singer-songwriter for more than four decades. His music is celebrated the world over for its passionate lyrics and funky rock rhythms. Both onstage and off, Prince lived his life as an expression of love.***

A passionate, compassionate, forgiving and indiscriminating love. Prince understood the challenges we all must face in "This Thing Called Life." His music expressed that the best way to overcome life's struggles was through the practice of love and forgiveness. By 1993, Prince had changed his stage name to a single, unpronounceable character that fans referred to as the "Love Symbol."

In a 1997 interview Prince stated, "Compassion is an action word with no boundaries," poetic truth that might have been found in a psalm. Prince's life was a symbol of love; withholding forgiveness was never his brand. Prince passed away from this earthly life in 2016, but his music and message live on. Such art has the power to endure, to outlive the artist, and to go on for future generations to discover and inspire. Love has that same power, and forgiveness will never go out of style.

***"We all have our problems, some big, some are small. Soon all of our problems will be taken by the cross." —Prince, "The Cross"***



Have a classic heartbreak song ready to play during the game. We suggest “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor.

- **Today we are going to hear another story of God’s boundless forgiveness. A story where relationships are restored even after painful heartbreaks. Asking for forgiveness can be a challenge. Extending forgiveness can be even harder. In today’s challenge, we will be working together in teams.**
- After the group is divided into teams of three to five people, continue with the following instructions. **It’s time for the frozen T-shirt challenge. I’m going to give each team one balled-up T-shirt that has been frozen overnight. The T-shirt is representative of a heart. The object of the challenge is for the teams to break the heart, open up the T-shirt and try to pull the shirt over one of their teammates. The first team to wear their shirt will win the challenge. The teams cannot use tools, hot water or heaters to break their frozen shirts. Only their combined strength and abilities are allowed. Additionally, I will play a popular heartbreak song during the challenge. The game will be over at the end of the song. At that time, whichever team is closest to wearing their shirt will win. Furthermore, the challenge is to break the heart/shirt, not anyone or anything else. Let’s not cause any damage to people or property. Any questions? Ready? Go!**

Continue with a prayer (youth led/read):

**Merciful Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to us in spite of our faults and failure. Teach us to let that blessing of boundless forgiveness continue to flow through us and out into the world. Help us demonstrate your boundless forgiveness today.**

## word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives



*“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”*

### Our head:



Have a youth read Genesis 50:15-21 (CEV).

**<sup>15</sup>After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers said to each other, “What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?”**

**<sup>16</sup>So they sent this message to Joseph: Before our father died, <sup>17</sup>he told us, “You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you.”**

**Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped.**

**When Joseph heard this, he started crying.**

**<sup>18</sup>Right then, Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said, “We are your slaves.”**

**<sup>19</sup>But Joseph told them, “Don’t be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided. <sup>20</sup>You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that [God] could save all these people, as [God] is now doing. <sup>21</sup>Don’t be afraid! I will take care of you and your children.” After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.**

- **There’s a familiar saying, “Don’t get mad, get even,” that sums up the world’s philosophy of how to deal with someone who wrongs you. But in contrast to the world’s way, God urges a radical approach when we are wronged: we are to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).**
- **When Joseph’s brothers approached him, he wept. This shows his tender heart. Then, he reassured his brothers. Whereas the CEV translation we studied reads, “I have no right**

**to change what has God decided,” in the New Revised Standard Version, Joseph asks, “Am I in the place of God?” (50:19). Even though Joseph was the second most powerful man on the face of the earth, he remembered that he was not in God’s place.**

**when you’re tempted to withhold forgiveness or to seek vengeance against someone who has wronged you: Am I following God’s will? Joseph was powerful in the world’s eyes, but he knew he was never big enough to take God’s place. How might we take our proper place with God?**

Wondering questions (choose one or two):

- **What makes forgiveness so hard?**
- **Why is forgiveness important?**
- **Would you be able to forgive someone who hurt you as Joseph’s brothers hurt him? Why or why not?**

Our heart:



**Being forgiven is great. Forgiving others is hard, but Jesus enables us to forgive.**

 Option 1: Watch this video for inspiration *If you choose this option, we recommend skipping or abbreviating the body section (forgiveness balloon) to keep the lesson under 60 minutes. (Content warning: descriptions of violent crime and trauma).*

“Why Forgiveness Is Worth It,” TED Talk (15:53)  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_montana\\_the\\_real\\_risk\\_of\\_forgiveness\\_and\\_why\\_it\\_s\\_worth\\_it/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_montana_the_real_risk_of_forgiveness_and_why_it_s_worth_it/transcript?language=en)

Wondering questions:

- **What steps did Sarah use to get to a place of forgiveness?**
- **What was the essential question she needed to ask herself?**
- **Does Sarah’s journey to forgiveness look like one you could make? Why or why not?**

 Option 2:  
Dig into the Bible story



Wondering questions:

- **What steps made it possible for Joseph to get to a place of forgiveness?**
- **Does Joseph’s journey to forgiveness look like one you could make? Why or why not?**
- **Joseph’s question is a good one to ask yourself**

Allow participants to come up with a list of ways that we cannot “be in God’s place.” Before closing out their brainstorming, be certain they’ve covered these key points.

- Be honest with God about our feelings. Speak the truth in love.
- Give it to God. Allow God to be the judge.
- Remain humble. Remember, you are not God.
- Don’t use your power to make the other person “pay” for what they did.

- **Joseph could have said, “I forgive you, now get out of my life.” Instead, he provided personally for his brothers and their families (50:21). His words of forgiveness proved themselves in his kind deeds long after the facts. Words are nothing if they aren’t backed up by action. If you say that you forgive someone but couldn’t care less what happens to that person, you haven’t really forgiven. A forgiving spirit shows itself in kind deeds.**

If participants are struggling with this, it can be good to note that it took time for Joseph to reconcile with his brothers. He provided for them, but he did not live with them. He remained in Pharaoh’s court and the brothers in the land apart from him (Genesis 47:1-12). It’s okay to keep our distance from those who have hurt us.

Our body:



“Forgiveness Balloons”:

- Hand out one balloon to each participant. Have them walk around the room reading and looking at the words and images of pain they drew at the beginning of the session. For each item they read, blow one breath into the balloon. When they have looked at all the papers, they should return to their seats without releasing any air from the balloon.



If meeting online, and youth don't have balloons, group leader can illustrate this activity with a balloon of their own.

- **The pain in our lives has been surrounding us all through our lesson. It may be hard to imagine being forgiving for some of these situations. But let's see if we can get to forgiveness by following Joseph's (or Sarah's, if you watched the video) example.**
- **Blow up your balloons about half full. At any point, as we go through each step, you can take one of three actions:**
  - 1. add air/pain to the balloon,**
  - 2. release air/pain from the balloon or**
  - 3. do nothing.**
- **There's no judgement here in your choices. These are your feelings. Let's see if this helps.**

Proceed by reading the steps below. If you watched the video, read only the title of the step and the additional boldface phrase(s). If you dug into Scripture, you can read additional, non-bold phrases. Pay attention to what your group may need to hear. It's OK to skip some phrases and choose others.

- Analyze your emotions: Ask yourself hard questions. Am I easily offended? Did this person intentionally try to hurt me? Was this an accident? Can I see the other person's perspective? What is the hurt I feel? Remember that it's OK to be angry when hurt and that naming the pain is an important part of healing.**
- Realize God has forgiven you: You can forgive someone without being OK with what happened. You can forgive someone without trusting that person for a very long time, or ever. Forgiveness is about letting go of hurt and pain. By keeping in mind how much God has forgiven us, we can be better equipped to find the freedom to forgive others.**
- Pray for yourself: Ask God for help in letting go of the pain. Forgiving people who have inflicted harm and pain on us is impossible without God's love and forgiveness working through us.**

- Pray for your offender: This might be really hard or feel awkward. Trust God to be the judge. Remember that God will work things out according to God's timing and plan. It's OK if God's timing says, "Not right now." Be authentic in prayer.**
- Depend on and trust in God: Ask yourself, Am I ready to forgive? Can I let the pain go? As we forgive others and rely on God, we learn to depend on and trust in God because God is the only one that will never let us down. God is the true provider for peace, joy and love. God is trustworthy. God will always be there for you.**

Close this activity by having the participants let go of their balloons. Fuller balloons will careen around the room; smaller balloons will deflate in place.

## sending

reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- **What happens when we hold onto our hurt and pain?**
- **How have you overcome hurt or negative feelings in your past? How long did it take?**
- **What advice would you give someone who is hurting?**
- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

### Closing prayer (youth led/read):

**Today was a hard lesson. Learning to forgive is hard, and I am proud of each of you for the work you have done. We're going to close our time with a prayer of forgiveness. If you are able, join me in reading this prayer out loud. If not, pray this silently or just sit back and listen.**

(Make a copy of this prayer to give to participants, so they can pray with you.)

***God of forgiveness: I bring to mind (name). I bring them before you. I feel hurt by them. Right now, I confess any negative feelings I have about them. Help me forgive the wrongs they have done toward me. Unbind me from any deliberate or unintentional things they have done that have caused me pain and from any grudges I may hold. In the best way that I know how, I forgive them. I release them to your boundless forgiveness. Thank you that, as I am praying now, you are freeing my inner self to live again, free from resentment, pain and bitterness, because God's power and work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.***

**Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:**

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the  
take-home sheet!***

## Take-home sheet for Unit 3 – Session two: **living God's boundless forgiveness**

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies." (from "Loving Your Enemies" Martin Luther King Jr., A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Genesis 50:15-21, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version). Here is some additional Scripture to help support these themes:

- Luke 17:3-4: So be careful what you do. Correct any followers of mine who sin, and forgive the ones who say they are sorry. 4Even if one of them mistreats you seven times in one day and says, "I am sorry," you should still forgive that person.
- 1 John 1:9: But if we confess our sins to God, [God] can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.

### Wondering questions

#### (discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless forgiveness?
- What happens when we hold onto our hurt and pain?
- How have you overcome hurt or negative feelings in your past? How long did it take?
- What advice would you give someone who is hurting?

### congregation connection

Let your congregation know that your group is learning about God's boundless forgiveness.

Reach out to members of your church and invite them to share a personal story of forgiveness. Find a few willing people and invite them to attend your next youth meeting. Ask the members to share from the heart their personal stories of forgiveness. You may also ask them the wondering questions above. Ask any follow-up questions as well. Be sure to thank the people for sharing their stories.

With their consent, take a picture with the person who shared their story of forgiveness with you and post it to social media. Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessforgiveness**.



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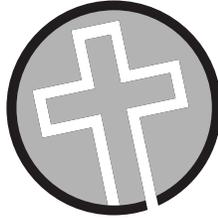


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## Prayer

Merciful Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to us in spite of our faults and failure. Teach us to let that blessing of boundless forgiveness continue to flow through us and out into the world. Help us demonstrate your boundless forgiveness. Amen.



## Dismissal/blessing — call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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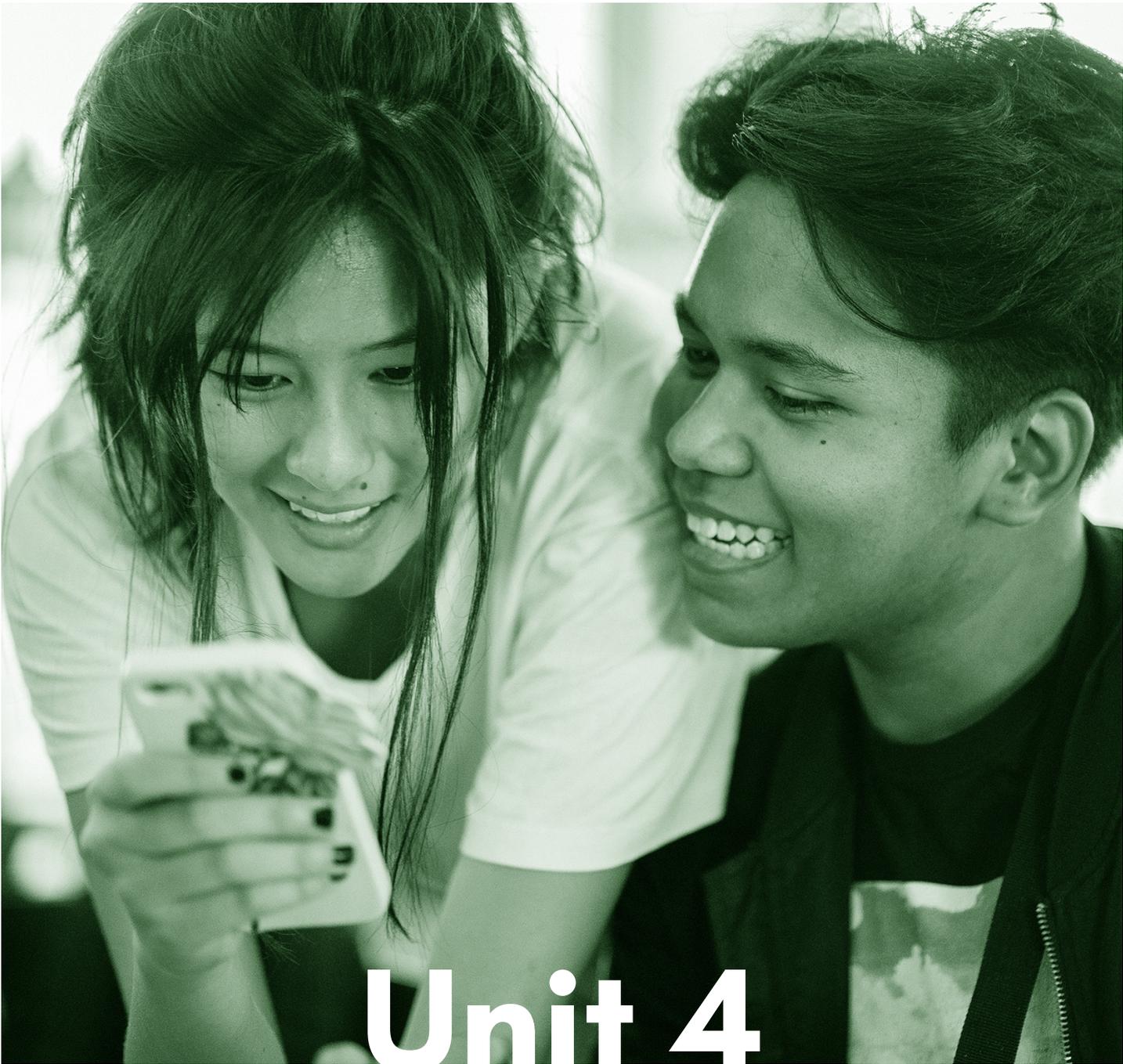


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# Unit 4



boundless *invitation*

Author: Adam Fairchild

# Unit overview

**In Unit 4, we will examine the theme of God’s boundless invitation. This unit is designed to introduce how God invites us into God’s story in our communities, our churches and our world.**

This unit is intended to be explored in two complementary sessions. The first session focuses on God’s invitation to Mary in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. In this story, we see a beautiful example of how God’s invitation extends to the most unlikely and unexpected of people, times and spaces.

The second session delves into our response to God’s boundless invitation. It’s important to know that our calling as Christians is to respond to God’s invitation through the example of Christ. Our response to this invitation occurs both individually and in the communities in which we belong. One aim of this session is for youth to reflect on where they experience community in their lives and how they can respond to God’s invitation in the company of their peers at school, at home and at church.

We encourage you to review the “Overview for adult leaders” section at the beginning of each session outline before your group meets. In this section, you will find more specific goals for each session. You will also find a list of necessary materials and Gathering-related announcements within the curriculum.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- ***Bold italics*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



**Bible** to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



**Video** to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



**Music** to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist ([@elcagathering](#)). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



**Computer** to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



**Social media** for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles below.



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## UNIT 4 – SESSION ONE:

# God's boundless invitation

### Overview for adult leaders:

This session is designed to introduce your group to God's boundless invitation through the story of Mary in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The story of Mary is a particularly good example of how God's invitation is truly boundless, as Mary was a poor, unwed teenager when she first heard God's invitation. Instead of seeking out the high and mighty, God chose to appear among the least of all people, which shows us that God invites everyone to be part of God's story.

Make sure that you do the warm-up activity for this session. Many of the questions and reflections for this session rely on the youth's Post-It note responses. If a youth arrives late to the session, invite them to fill out a Post-It note when they arrive and add it to the large sheet of paper.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in the chat or on a whiteboard and to share videos in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Post-It notes
- Large sheet of paper
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles

# gather | building of your group

## Warm-up:

- As youth enter the meeting space, give them each a Post-It note. Invite them to think about a time when they were invited to something — maybe a birthday party or a sports game — or invited to do something difficult, such as audition for a school play or try out for a sports team. On their Post-It note, have them write how that invitation made them feel.
- After youth fill out their Post-It notes, have them stick them on a large sheet of paper clearly visible to everyone in the space. Make sure that each youth fills out at least one Post-It note before you move on to the invitation.



## Invitation:

***I invite you at this time and in this space, with a daring vision, to experience God’s boundless invitation, which comes at the most unexpected times to the most unexpected of people.***

## Team building/ice-breaker:



- ***We’re now going to play a game called “Signs.”***
- Have the group sit in a circle, with one person volunteering to be “it” and leave the room momentarily.
- Those left in the circle will designate one person to be the leader. That leader is responsible for choosing and changing a pattern of various motions, which the rest of the youth will have to mimic once the youth outside returns to the room. For example, the leader may start clapping, then switch to whistling, then switch to snapping. The rest of the group will follow their lead as quickly as possible. The returning youth must stand in the middle of the circle and watch very carefully to figure out which of the other youths is the leader.
- Repeat twice or three times, with the leader becoming the youth outside for the next round.



***For online meetings, the person sent out of the room is sent to a breakout room while the group determines the person responsible for switching up the sign, and then the person is brought back once the group has started.***

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***Five hundred years before Columbus, Viking explorers from Scandinavia were the first Europeans to set foot in North America. Leif Erikson — like his father, Erik the Red — was a courageous explorer in search of a new world. Erickson was a convert to Christianity who gathered a crew after hearing news of an unexplored coast spotted west of Greenland. He and his crew sailed west and landed on the shore of modern-day Newfoundland around the year 1000. Almost 900 years later, Scandinavian and German immigrants were looking for freedom and opportunity in North America. They found their new world in Minnesota and made it their home.***

In summer 2022, Minneapolis, Minnesota, will host the ELCA Youth Gathering. The people of Minneapolis are inviting us to explore their city and make ourselves at home. Will this be your first expedition to Minnesota, or have you explored it before? Your visit to Minneapolis is an opportunity to sample a variety of cultures, from that of its native Dakotan inhabitants to that of its most recent settlers. An experience as rich and diverse as this will certainly be one to enjoy. Better still, the Gathering will be a time of faith formation like no other, an opportunity to explore what God is inviting you to discover. A new world and a new life, filled with all that God is.

- Connection/transition: ***In this game, the leader invited other members of the circle to follow their pattern. Sometimes, our leader would do the same action several times in a row. Other times, the action changed every few seconds. Throughout this game, we were invited to follow the leader's directions and signs, which would continue and change at different points.***
- ***We similarly are invited by God to follow God's actions in our world. When we look to God through Scripture and in the world around us, we can see how God invites us into certain actions and patterns of life.***

### Opening prayer:

***God of invitation, we give you thanks for gathering us here together today. We ask that you guide our conversation and inspire in us a sense of wonder so that we can experience how you invite us into your story. We bring before you our questions and our imaginations, our thoughts and our dreams, in hope that you will continue to reveal to us the boundlessness of your love and invitation. Amen.***

## word | learn about God's word and connection to our lives

*"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."*



***Today, we are going to talk about God's boundless invitation.***

## Our head:



We see many examples of how God invites people just like you and me throughout the Bible. Today, we are going to focus on the story of God's invitation to Mary, found in the beginning of Luke. Since today's story is a little long, we're going to break it up into pieces. Would someone be willing to read Luke 1:26-38?

- Make sure that everyone in the group has a Bible and is following along with the story.
  - <sup>26</sup>One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee <sup>27</sup>with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. <sup>28</sup>The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. <sup>30</sup>Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, <sup>31</sup>and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. <sup>33</sup>He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." <sup>34</sup>Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!" <sup>35</sup>The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. <sup>36</sup>Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. <sup>37</sup>Nothing is impossible for God!" <sup>38</sup>Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And the angel left her.***
- After the youth finish reading the text, continue with the next series of prompts.
  - ***Could anyone give a quick summary of what was just read?***
  - ***Where do we notice invitation in this part of the story? Who is invited? Who is the one inviting?***
  - ***I wonder how Mary felt when she received God's invitation. Based on what we read, how would you describe Mary's feelings about God's invitation?***

- **The story of God’s invitation of Mary doesn’t end here. It actually continues into the next few verses, where we can see how Mary processes and responds to the boundless invitation of God. Would anyone be willing to read Luke 1:39-55?**

**A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. <sup>40</sup>She went into Zechariah’s home, where she greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, her baby moved within her. The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. <sup>42</sup>Then in a loud voice she said to Mary: God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have. <sup>43</sup>Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? <sup>44</sup>As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. <sup>45</sup>The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise. <sup>46</sup>Mary said: With all my heart I praise the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and I am glad because of God my Savior. <sup>48</sup>He cares for me, his humble servant. From now on, all people will say God has blessed me. <sup>49</sup>God All-Powerful has done great things for me, and his name is holy. <sup>50</sup>He always shows mercy to everyone who worships him. <sup>51</sup>The Lord has used his powerful arm to scatter those who are proud. <sup>52</sup>He drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power. <sup>53</sup>God gives the hungry good things to eat, and sends the rich away with nothing. <sup>54</sup>He helps his servant Israel and is always merciful to his people. <sup>55</sup>The Lord made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his family forever!**

- After the youth finishes reading the rest of the story, continue with the following series of prompts.
  - **Could anyone quickly summarize what just happened in the story?**
  - **How does Mary respond to God’s invitation?**
  - **Was Mary’s response to this invitation similar to or different from what you expected?**
  - **How do you imagine you would have responded to receiving this invitation from God?**

## Our heart:



**It’s important to know that when the angel Gabriel visited Mary, she was just like us in many ways. She was probably the same age as many of us gathered here today, and she probably felt a wide range of emotions as she received God’s invitation, just as we might respond to invitations differently than our peers.**

**We’re now going to revisit the Post-It notes that we wrote on as we entered this space.**



**If you are meeting online, revisit the whiteboard image from the beginning of the meeting.**

**Do I have a volunteer who would be willing to read the Post-It notes on the paper?**

- Invite one youth to read through the responses. Ask the youth to begin each response by saying, “When I was invited, I felt \_\_\_\_.”
- After reading through each response, ask the wider group the following questions. Give time for a few responses.
  - **Did you notice any common feelings we have when we receive an invitation?**
  - **What differences do you notice between the Post-It notes? Why might we respond to an invitation differently than our peers?**
  - **Do invitations from different people affect how you feel about the invite?**
  - **When you get an invitation, how might you prepare for what you were invited to? (For example: If someone was invited to a birthday party, they might buy a gift or make sure they were available to go to the party.)**
  - **I wonder if Mary felt the same way about God’s invitation as we feel when our friends invite us. Could we use any of the Post-It notes on the paper to describe how Mary felt after God’s invitation?**

## Our body:



We're now going to do the following activity. **This game is called "Red Rover."**

- In this game, youth are invited to form two lines facing each other. The first team agrees to call one player from the other team and chants, "Red Rover, Red Rover, we invite [player's name] over." The person called runs to the other line and attempts to break the chain formed by the linking of hands. If the person called fails to break the chain, this player joins the team that called Red Rover. But, if the player successfully breaks the chain, they may capture either of the two players whose link was broken by the dash, bringing them back to their original team. Teams take turns calling out "Red Rover" and challenging a player on the opposing team.
- The objective of the game is to end with the most players on your team by maintaining the integrity of your chain. The game ends when all the players end up on one side.
- After playing the game once, youth are invited to return to their regular seats within your youth group space and continue with the rest of the session.



**Zoom Alternative - Would You Rather** - Ask the group a few "Would You Rather" situational questions. Follow up by asking them why they picked their answer. Here are three example questions. 1) Would you rather go to the past to meet your ancestors or the future to meet your great - great grandchildren. 2) Would you rather have a rewind button or a pause button for your life? 3) Would you rather invite or be invited?

## Our community:



**The story of Mary's invitation shows us God's boundless invitation in several ways. Mary was the last person expected to bring God's child into the world — she was young, unmarried and poor. Despite these perceived bounds, God still chose Mary! God's invitation of Mary was boundless because God invited someone with few qualifications and many doubts to be a part of God's story.**

**Just as Mary did, God continues to take normal people such as you and me — people with doubts, stresses and questions — and invites us into God's boundless story of love, justice and accompaniment. In the story of Mary, we see God looking beyond the expected and the ordinary to show us that the invitation to follow God extends to everyone and that God's invitation is boundless.**

**We're going to end today's session by thinking about what God's boundless invitation means for our communities. With two or three people sitting near you, discuss the following questions:**

- **What might God be inviting you to do? What might God be inviting our youth group to do? What might God be inviting our congregation to do? Who might God want us to invite?**

**In school, in church and with our friends, we play the important role of responding to God's invitation. We've only begun to think about Mary's response to God's boundless invitation, and that's OK. Next session, we'll think even more about what God may be inviting us to do and how we can respond to those invitations.**



**Before we end today's session, we're going to spend time with the first few minutes of the song "We Say Yes" by Housefires. Pay attention to the lyrics of the song, as they demonstrate how we respond to God's boundless invitation.**

Link: <https://youtu.be/DFNgtfpGXJw>. It is a long song, so play only through 2:58.

## sending

reflect on what we  
have learned and  
ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.



### **Closing prayer (youth led/read):**

***God of invitation, we thank you for our conversations, our questions and our friendships. We are grateful for your boundless invitation, which welcomes all of us into your story. Through the example of Mary, teach us that you invite all of us — even the most unlikely and unexpected — into following you. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God’s power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.***

### **Dismissal/blessing — call and response:**

Leader: ***God’s love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God’s creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God’s forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God’s invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God’s promise is...***

Participants (cross on another’s forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the  
take-home sheet!***

## Take-home sheet for Unit 4 – Session one:

# God's boundless invitation

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

We talked about God's boundless invitation through the story of Mary in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The story of Mary is a particularly good example of how God's invitation is truly boundless, as Mary was a poor, unwed teenager when she first heard God's invitation. Instead of seeking out the high and mighty, God chose to appear among the least of all people, which shows us that God invites everyone to be part of God's story.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Luke 1:26-55, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).



### Different lens:

- Another lens to understanding Mary's response to God's boundless invitation, called the Magnificat, is one of few hymns appearing in the Bible. Along with Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and the psalms, the Magnificat shows us how people responded to God's invitation through music. Throughout the past two millennia, these songs have inspired countless Christians to respond to God's boundless invitation.
- For an example of a contemporary hymn based on the words of the Magnificat, see "Canticle of the Turning" (ELW 723), <https://youtu.be/F9QeTmRCpW4>.

### Wondering questions

#### (discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless invitation?
- What would we consider the "bounds" of our world? I wonder how God's invitation might break those bounds?
- I wonder how we can tell about God's boundless invitation to someone in our lives this week?



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Think about the leaders of your congregation. These leaders could include pastors and deacons, members of your congregation’s council or leaders of other ministries.

Once you think of a leader, find time to talk with them before or after worship. Tell them about what you learned about God’s boundless invitation and ask them how they got invited into leadership in your congregation. After hearing their story, ask them where they notice God’s boundless invitation in your congregation.

What does God’s boundless invitation mean to you? Post your answers to this question on social media with the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessinvitation**.



### Prayer

God of boundless invitation, we thank you for our conversations, our questions and our friendships. We are further grateful for your boundless invitation, which welcomes all of us into your story in our communities, church and world. Through the example of Mary, teach us that you invite all of us — even the most unlikely and unexpected — to follow you. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God’s power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. In your name we pray. Amen.

### Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

- God’s love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God’s creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God’s forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God’s invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God’s promise is (make the sign of the cross on another’s forehead or hand) boundless.



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## UNIT 4 – SESSION TWO:

# responding to God's boundless invitation

### Overview for adult leaders:

This session is designed to expand upon what your group discussed in the previous session. We know that God's invitation is boundless — now what? In this session, youth are encouraged to think about the communities in which they belong as sources of support as they respond to God's boundless invitation through reflection and action in their community.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Post-It notes
- Blindfolds
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles
- Paper (to write/draw on)

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



- As youth enter the meeting space, give them each a Post-It note. Invite them to think about the communities to which they belong — maybe a sports team, maybe school music programs or maybe even your church's youth group. Ask the youth to write on their Post-It notes one or two groups of their peers that they would define as a community. We'll revisit this question later in our time together, so make sure youth hold onto their responses.
- When everyone is present, move on to the invitation.

### Invitation:

***I invite you, at this time and in this space, with a daring vision to experience, hear and respond to God's boundless invitation, which calls us into a life of reflection and action within our communities.***

### Team building/ice-breaker:



Find a friend

- Invite everyone in your group to form pairs, then have one youth put on a blindfold. After half the group is blindfolded, scatter several smaller objects throughout your room (these objects could include shoes, water bottles, hats, etc.). Invite (and help) the youth who are blindfolded to line up horizontally on one side of the room and the youth who can still see to line up on the opposite side of the room.
- The object of the game is for the blindfolded youth to cross the room and meet up with their partner without touching any of the objects scattered across the floor. After you say "Go!," the blindfolded youth should try to slowly make their way across the room, relying on the verbal instructions from their partner to avoid the objects on the floor.

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***God's invitation is for all. We have learned through these lessons that God includes us in a divine purpose for love, creation, forgiveness, invitation and promise. When we assemble in Minneapolis from July 24 through 28, we will engage in these purposes with others by our side. Together we will witness them, experience them and inspire others to grow in faith as we live these lessons in our daily lives. God's invitation is for you.***

In Minneapolis you will be invited to something new each day. These daily invitations include: Service Learning to take part in meaningful community service and reflection, Interactive Learning to engage in a variety of exciting ministries and Synod Day to worship and share fellowship with friends from your geographical region. At the end of every day, you are invited to attend a Mass Gathering inside the U.S. Bank Stadium. There, you will hear inspiring speakers and enjoy uplifting live music. On Saturday morning, join the closing worship at the stadium, with a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. To learn more about the daily Gathering schedule, please see page 41 of the Official Gathering Handbook or visit [www.elca.org/YouthGathering/Schedule](http://www.elca.org/YouthGathering/Schedule).

If a blindfolded youth steps on an object, guide them back to the side of the room where they began and, as time allows, have them try again or switch who is blindfolded.

- Quickly process the activity: ***What was easy about the activity? What was difficult about it?***
- Connection: ***In this activity, you were invited to walk across a room, unaware of the obstacles that you would face. To succeed, you had to rely on the guidance and help of someone else. Our response to God’s invitation works in a similar way: we don’t know what we will face when we respond to God, but through the support of our friends and our community, we can succeed in following God’s call.***

### Opening prayer:

***God of boundless invitation, we gather here before you today with our questions, thoughts and dreams. We ask that you guide our conversations as we think about your boundless invitation and what it is that you are calling us to do — both by ourselves and in our communities — as a response to your call. Enable us to notice your voice calling us in our present moment and giving us the will to respond to your boundless love and invitation. Amen.***

## word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives

*“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”*



***In today’s session, we’re going to focus on two passages from Scripture that show us how others have responded to God’s boundless invitation.***

## Our head:



***The first story we’re going to talk about is the same one from last session: the story of Mary in the Gospel of Luke. Does anyone remember anything from the story?*** If youth don’t remember much from the story, offer this brief recap: In the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Mary receives an invitation from the angel Gabriel to bring God’s child into the world. Although Mary was initially confused and questioned Gabriel, she placed her trust in God to watch over her as she responded to God’s boundless invitation.

- To recap Mary’s response, view the attached video recording of the Magnificat from Holden Evening Prayer,



[https://youtu.be/nABzv\\_Tlnal](https://youtu.be/nABzv_Tlnal)

### Questions for discussion:

- ***Can anyone remind us about how this story reflects God’s boundless invitation?***
- ***Does Mary respond to God’s invitation alone? (No. In verses 39-45, Mary goes to her cousin, Elizabeth, after hearing the news of God’s boundless invitation from Gabriel.)***
- ***How does Elizabeth help Mary respond to her invitation?***

After youth have responded to the questions, close with the following:

***In the story of Mary’s response to God’s boundless invitation, Elizabeth plays a key role. Elizabeth accompanies Mary during her pregnancy and offers her comfort and support as she processes God’s invitation and prepares to bring God’s child into the world. This story reveals to us that our response to God’s boundless invitation involves not just us and God. It also involves our neighbors and the communities in which we are a part of a whole.***

## Our heart:

## Mary's response:

***We are now going to think about people in our own lives who have been like Elizabeth to us. These people include those who have accompanied us in our journeys of responding to God's boundless invitation – maybe a pastor or deacon at their church, a faith mentor or a parent/guardian.***

- For this section, youth will need a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Youth are invited to begin writing a brief letter to their “Elizabeth,” in which they share what they notice as God’s boundless invitation in their lives and thank their “Elizabeth” for traveling alongside them as they responded to that invitation.
- Following the session, youth are invited to finish their letters and give them to their “Elizabeth.”



## Our body:

***There are many other stories in the Bible in where we notice how people responded to God's invitation through action in their communities. We're now going to act out one of these stories, which comes to us from Luke 10:1-11:***

***Later the Lord chose seventy-two other followers and sent them out two by two to every town and village where he was about to go. <sup>2</sup>He said to them:***

***A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in.***

***<sup>3</sup>Now go, but remember, I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Don't take along a moneybag or a traveling bag or sandals. And don't waste time greeting people on the road.***

***<sup>5</sup>As soon as you enter a home, say, "God bless this home with peace." <sup>6</sup>If the people living there are peace-loving, your prayer for peace will bless them. But if they are not peace-loving, your prayer will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Stay with the same family, eating and drinking whatever they give***



***you, because workers are worth what they earn. Don't move around from house to house.***

***<sup>8</sup>If the people of a town welcome you, eat whatever they offer. <sup>9</sup>Heal their sick and say, "God's kingdom will soon be here!"***

***<sup>10</sup>But if the people of a town refuse to welcome you, go out into the street and say, <sup>11</sup>"We are shaking the dust from our feet as a warning to you. And you can be sure that God's kingdom will soon be here!"***

- Invite your youth group to read the story together. After having read the story, youth are invited to creatively act it out. One possibility is for a youth to read the story out loud while other youth act as disciples encountering receptive towns and hostile towns and returning to Jesus.
- Once youth have put together their skit, invite them to present it.
- After youth act out the story, continue with the following question prompts:
  - ***Where do you notice God's boundless invitation in this story?***
  - ***Who was invited? What were these people invited to do?***
  - ***What happened as a result of living into this invitation?***
- When Jesus sent out the 72, he knew that they could best respond to his invitation in community with their peers. Even if this “community” was just one other person, Jesus ensured that he would be with them as they traveled and spread the good news of Jesus’ ministry.

## Our community:

**We notice God's boundless invitation not just in stories from the Bible but also in our daily lives. In our next activity, we're going to explore the relationship between God's invitation and our communities. I wonder where you notice God's boundless invitation in your lives, and I also wonder what role the communities we wrote down on Post-It notes at the beginning of the session might play in how we respond to this invitation. Does everyone still have their Post-It note?** Confirm that they do.



- **We're now going to reflect on where we notice God's boundless invitation in our lives and how our communities can help us in our response to that invitation. Thinking about what God might be calling you to do isn't an easy task, and our following activity will help you begin to reflect on this.**
- For this activity, everyone needs a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Pass out paper and pens or pencils to each youth. **On your paper, I invite you to draw or write about two things: 1) one of your communities, and 2) something that excites you or that you are passionate about.**
- After one minute, gather your group back together and invite them to share with one of their peers what they drew and/or wrote about. Youth have only two minutes to share their drawings/writings with their peers, so make sure they do.

- After two minutes of conversation, gather the pairs back together.
  - **Would anyone be willing to share what they talked about with their partner?**
  - **I wonder if our passions and our communities connect in any way. Can anyone notice a connection between their passions and one of their communities?**
  - **Does anyone notice a connection between their passions and communities and what we've learned about God's boundless invitation? How are our passions and our communities important in our response to God's invitation?**
  - **I wonder how others might help us respond to God's boundless invitation. After reflecting on your passions and your communities, how could you regard others as you begin to respond to God's invitation?**

**Often, we notice God's boundless invitation in our lives at the intersections of our passions, skills and communities. God knows each and every one of us and invites us to follow God in how we connect our passions with the needs of our communities. In how we follow God and live out our faith with our peers, we respond to God's boundless invitation.**

## sending | reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

### **Closing prayer (youth led/read):**

***God of invitation, we give you thanks for the time we have spent here together today. We're grateful for your presence in our lives and for how your Spirit moves us and our communities to follow you. As we leave this session, we ask that you continue to inspire us, invite us and accompany us as we hear and respond to your calling. Empower us with the courage of Mary and the love of the disciples to respond to what you invite us into now. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.***

### **Dismissal/blessing — call and response:**

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the take-home sheet!***

## Take-home sheet for Unit 4 – Session two:

# God's boundless invitation

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

We talked about God's boundless invitation through the story of Mary in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The story of Mary is a particularly good example of how God's invitation is truly boundless, as Mary was a poor, unwed teenager when she first heard God's invitation. Instead of seeking out the high and mighty, God chose to appear among the least of all people, which shows us that God invites everyone to be a part of God's story.



Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Luke 10:1-11, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).

### **Different lens:**

Another lens to understand the role of community in responding to God's boundless invitation is the South African philosophy of ubuntu. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines ubuntu as "... the very essence of being human. ... it is not, 'I think, therefore I am.' It says rather, 'I am because I belong, I participate, I share'" (No Future Without Forgiveness, New York: Doubleday, 1999). In the theology of ubuntu, God boundlessly invites us to see God at work in our neighbors. Hear Archbishop Desmond Tutu explain the concept himself in the following YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/GaiKX5VdfVE>

### **Wondering questions**

#### **(discuss these questions with someone at home):**

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless invitation?
- How would a theology of ubuntu differ from the way we might otherwise respond to God's boundless invitation?
- How might we embody a theology of ubuntu in our responses to God's boundless invitation?



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**Think about how your congregation reflects God’s boundless invitation.** There are many ways your congregation could respond to God’s boundless invitation, which include using its facilities to the benefit of neighbors or supporting different ministries. You might also notice a reflection of God’s boundless invitation in your congregation’s mission statement.

Take a few minutes to think about this, and try to identify a few ways in which your congregation lives out God’s boundless invitation. You are also invited to think about additional ways in which your congregation could live out God’s boundless invitation.

After reflecting on this, share with a leader of your congregation (such as a pastor, deacon or personal faith mentor) your thoughts about how your congregation responds to God’s boundless invitation.

**Prayer:**

God of invitation, we are grateful for your presence in our lives and for how your Spirit moves us and our communities to follow you. We ask that you continue to inspire us, invite us and accompany us as we hear and respond to your call. Empower us with the courage of Mary and the love of the disciples to respond to what you invite us into now. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. God’s power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

**Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:**

- God’s love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God’s creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God’s forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God’s invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God’s promise is (make the sign of the cross on another’s forehead or hand) boundless.

How does your congregation reflect God’s boundless invitation? How are you responding to God’s boundless invitation? Post an image with your answers to either of these questions on social media, using the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessinvitation**.



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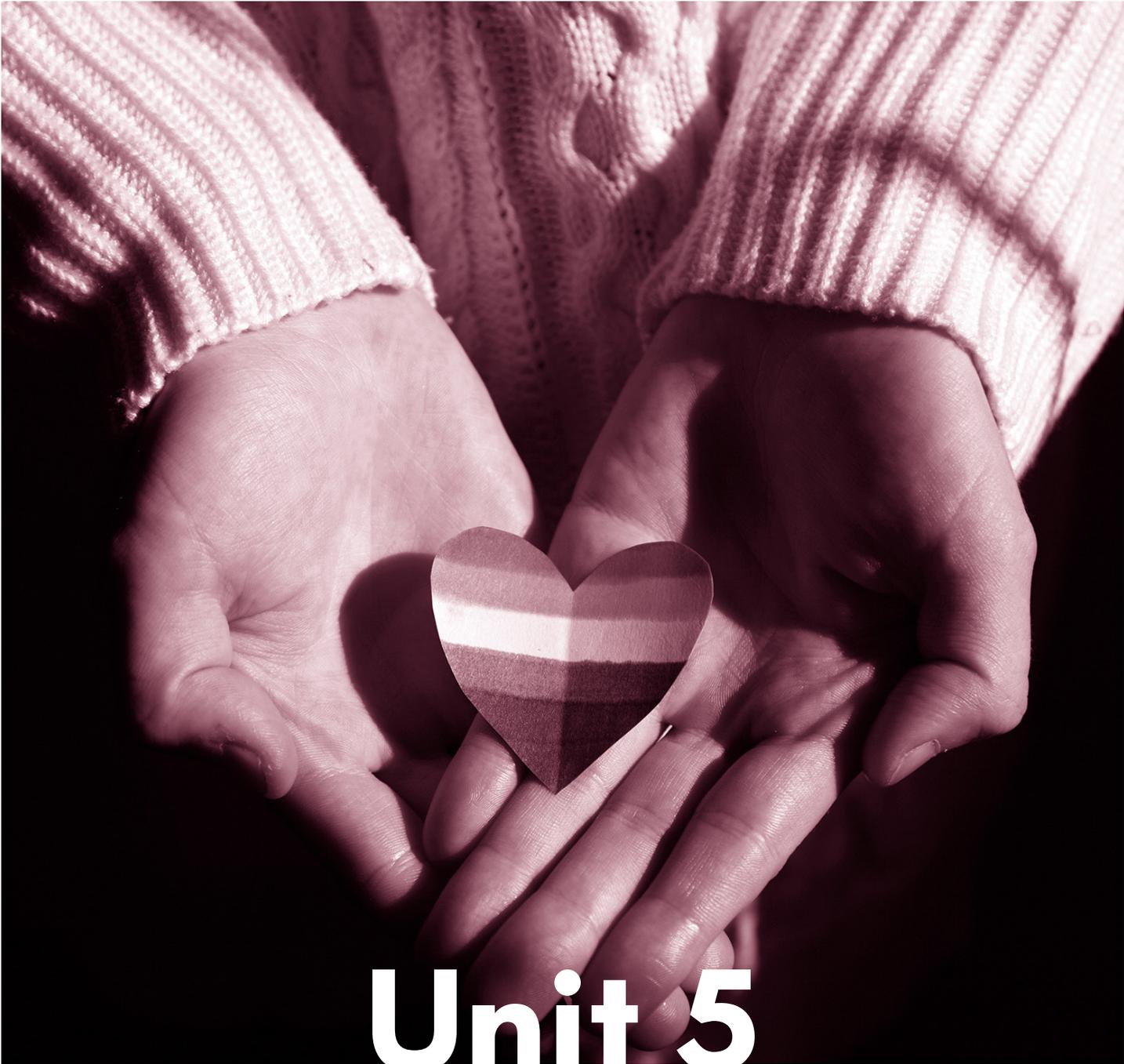


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# Unit 5



**boundless***promise*

Authors: Sarah Mayer-Flatt and Nicole McCarthy

# Unit 05 overview

**The design and intention of this unit is to dive into God’s boundless promise. As humans we make promises both big and small most days, so we may think that promises as a function of life. We also have a habit of making promises we don’t intend to keep. But God’s promises are boundless, extending over an immeasurable amount of time and carrying a weight we cannot begin to measure. We will wonder about the weight of God’s promise in comparison to our own promises.**

The two sessions will begin to differentiate between promises we make to one another and the promises God has made to us as the people of God. Some of the participants may have experienced an abundance of broken promises, but we hope all of them have experienced the boundless promises of God.

**Session one:** In this session, we will focus on the promises we make to others. After Lazarus has died, and before he is raised from the dead, Martha and Jesus talk about promises. Martha’s promise to believe in the resurrection of the dead is one based on her trust in who God is and what God will do for God’s people in the future. Jesus promises that her brother will be raised to new life more immediately than Martha expected. God keeps promises and makes them new all at the same time.

**Session two:** This session dives deeper into God’s promises to us. Our boundless God has been making promises to God’s people since the beginning, promising life, descendants, identity, forgiveness and more. These promises are often referred to as covenants. Some of these promises will mean different things to different participants depending on their life experiences. In our baptisms, we become receivers of all God’s promises. Since this unit is focused on promise, we will spend some time creating or updating your group’s covenant for the Gathering. It is important that the group create these promises to one another together, to create a common understanding of their expectations for one another.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- **Bold italics** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



**Clock** to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



**Bible** to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



**Video** to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



**Music** to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



**Computer** to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



**Social media** for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles below.



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## UNIT 5 – SESSION ONE:

# our promises

### Overview for adult leaders:

In this lesson we will focus on the promises we make to other people. In the Bible story we notice that Martha makes a promise to Jesus to believe in the resurrection of the dead. That may seem like a hard promise to make, yet God promises to raise Lazarus — and us — from the dead. Different levels of promises hold different expectations.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Chart paper or poster board (multiple, depending on your group size)
- Tape (if the chart paper/poster board doesn't include a Post-It part)
- Markers
- Scraps of paper or small pieces of paper
- Pencils or pens
- Hymnals or whatever materials your church uses for baptisms
- Water to pour into the baptismal font (if it's not always filled)
- Enough copies of the take-home sheet for everyone to have one

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



- As participants come into the space have some music playing (check out the Gathering's Spotify playlist, [@elcagathering](#)) and have a large sheet of paper or poster board up (or multiple if you have a larger group) with "Promises ..." written at the top. Have participants complete the phrase by writing their ideas on the paper(s). Remind them that this is a brave space, and all answers are appropriate.



### Invitation:

***You are invited into this space and this time with a daring vision to see God's boundless promise, which is so much wider, deeper, stronger and more powerful than you could ever possibly imagine.***

### Team building/ice-breaker: "Whose truth is it?"



At this point the group members should somewhat know each. If this is one of your first meetings, please use a previous lesson ice-breaker or name game that is more fitting for your group.

Have the group sit in a circle. If your group is big, break into groups of at least six. Give each participant a small piece of paper/Post-It note/etc. and a writing utensil. Have each person write a truth about themselves that other people in the group likely do not know. Designate one person who will be the reader.



***For online meetings, have participants private message the designated reader.***

Have them hand their truth to the reader (the reader also writes a truth but does not participate in the guessing). Once the reader has everyone's truth they will mix up the sheets and read them all out loud. Starting with the person to the left of the reader, have the players guess which truth belongs to which person in the group. If they guess correctly, they get to keep guessing; if they guess wrong, the next person gets to start guessing.

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***The promises we make to each other express our love and respect. Keeping promises means we consider others by making good choices and acting in kindness.***

It is important that we make a commitment to one another so that everyone can have a safe and wonderful time at the Gathering. Your group will represent an intentional Christian community sent on a pilgrimage to discover the boundless love, creation, forgiveness, invitation and promise of God. In the second session of this unit, your youth will make a group covenant for their time together at the Gathering. For some helpful examples of what a group covenant can look like, check out pages 82-87 of the Official Gathering Handbook.

**Opening prayer:**

Use the leftover scraps of paper and writing utensils for this prayer activity. Ask the participants if they will make one promise to everyone in the group. Then, have the participants write their name on the piece of paper as well as one thing they would like someone to pray for. Place all of the pieces of paper in a bowl, have the participants draw out a name and prayer request, and ask them to promise to pray for that person once a day until the next time everyone gathers. Then, pray together, having the group repeat after you:

**God of boundless promises,  
you never abandon us.  
Because your Spirit is always with us,  
you are hearing our prayers  
and praying for us constantly.  
Give us the courage to keep our promises,  
because we are your children.  
In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.**

## word | learn about God's word and connection to our lives

*"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."*



 Have a participant slowly read aloud the following:

**John 11:17-27 CEV:** <sup>17</sup>When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask." <sup>23</sup>Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" <sup>24</sup>Martha answered,



**"I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised." <sup>25</sup>Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord!" she replied. "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world."**

- Have another participant slowly read it aloud again.

**Our head:**

**To give a perspective to this story, it's helpful to know that Lazarus was one of Jesus' closest friends. Knowing how close they were, it makes sense that Mary and Martha were so upset that Jesus wasn't there when Lazarus was dying and that they had expectations of Jesus.**

- **What promises were made in this story? Who made the promises?**

**Our heart:**

- **If one of your very close friends needed you in a serious way, what would you do? What kind of thing would you consider doing for them?**
- **Why do you think people break promises?**
- **What types of promises matter most to you?**
- **What does it feel like when someone breaks a low-level promise (like showing up 10 minutes later than they said they would)? How about a higher-level promise (saying they will help you with an important decision, then not showing up)?**

## Our body:

Gather around the baptismal font at your church and have the hymnal or materials that your congregation uses for baptism available for everyone to see. Have someone pour the water into the font (unless your font always has water in it).

- **As you look through the service for baptism, what promises do you notice being made? Who is making the promises? Who are the promises made to?**
- End this time by having everyone partner up, dip their thumb or finger into the water, make the sign of the cross on their partner's forehead and say, "remember the baptismal promises." (Per local guidelines for communal contact with water.)



## Our community:

Plan a remembrance of baptism for your congregation to participate in during an upcoming worship service. Use the "Thanksgiving for Baptism" found in your hymnal (ELW, p. 97; TFF, p. 104; LBW, p. 198; LLC, p. 113) as a guide. Make sure to include your pastor, deacon and/or worship leader in this conversation. Have the participants think of all the ways they can help lead this part of worship. Assign a team of youth to follow through on the plan (with your support as the adult leader).



## sending

reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.



### Closing prayer (youth led/read):

**God of boundless promise, thank you for keeping every promise you make. May we remember that the promises we make to others are holy and important. And now, I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. May we trust in the promise that God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.**

### Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

Leader: **God's love is ...**

Participants (place hand over heart): **boundless**

Leader: **God's creation is ...**

Participants (open arms wide): **boundless**

Leader: **God's forgiveness is...**

Participants (cross wrists): **boundless**

Leader: **God's invitation is...**

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): **boundless**

Leader: **God's promise is...**

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): **boundless**

**Pass out the take-home sheet!**

## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

*Give your group an opportunity to be inspired by the faith of their congregation.*

Let your church know that your group is learning about God's boundless promise. Reach out to members of your congregation and invite them to share a personal story of God's promise. Find a few willing people and ask them to attend your next youth meeting. Allow the members to share from the heart their personal story. You may also ask questions to assist them in their testimony. For example: What does God's promise mean to you? When have you trusted in God's promise the most? How have you been able to trust God when it was particularly difficult to do so? Allow the youth to ask any follow-up questions they may have. Afterward, thank the members for sharing their story with your group. Finally, ask the youth to share their thoughts on the stories that were told. The insights your youth gain on promise and trust can be life-changing.



## Take-home sheet for Unit 5 – Session one:

# our promises

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

Today, we focused on the promises we make to others. After Lazarus has died but before he is raised from the dead, Martha and Jesus talk about promises. Martha's promise to believe in the resurrection of the dead is one based on her trust in who God is and what God will do for God's people in the future. Jesus promises that her brother will be raised to new life immediately than Martha expected. God keeps promises and makes them new all at the same time.



Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, John 11:17-27, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).

Lazarus, Mary, Martha and Jesus were best friends — they would definitely have been his top three best friends on Snapchat (Jesus would find a way to have more than eight). Who are your Lazarus, Mary and Martha? Do you keep your promises to them more often than your promises to other people?

### **Wondering questions (discuss these questions with someone at home):**

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless promise?
- Are you, or is someone you know, baptized? Do you remember your baptism? Who were your sponsors/godparents?
- What might your baptism be like if you were to plan it now?
- Is your community holding up its end of the promises made to you at your baptism?
- Why are the promises made at baptisms so important?



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**Figure out what part of the “Remembrance of Baptism” you would like to participate in.** Would you like to speak the promises? Pour the water? Sprinkle the congregation with water? Write a brief prayer? Maybe you can help teach the congregation the sending blessing from the “Getting Ready” lessons. This is living into your baptismal promise, “to live among God’s faithful people.”

**Prayer:**

God of promise, thank you for keeping every promise you make. May we remember that the promises we make to others are holy and important. And now, I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. May we trust in the promise that God’s power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

**Dismissal/blessing – Call and response:**

- God’s love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God’s creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God’s forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God’s invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God’s promise is (make the sign of the cross on another’s forehead or hand) boundless.

Share a picture of yourself with your best friends (bonus points if you’re holding some Gathering gear or something with the boundless logo.) Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlesspromise**.



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## UNIT 5 – SESSION TWO:

# God's promises to us

### Overview for adult leaders:

In this session we will be reflecting on the promises God made to us as the people of God. We will also reflect on promises made to us by our community of faith.



**If you are doing this session online** see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share in a digital meeting.

## *suggested supply list*

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Large chart paper or poster board (multiple, depending on group size)
- Tape to stick the paper to the wall
- Markers
- Post-It notes
- Paper for writing the group covenant
- Pens
- Enough take-home sheets for each person (write a prayer partner's name on each take-home sheet and pass these out to the respective participant)

## gather | building of your group

### Warm-up:



- Have some **music playing** to create a welcoming environment as participants arrive. Use a large piece of paper (or multiple pieces if you have a large group) and write across the top, “Add your ELCA Youth Gathering covenant ideas here.” Provide Post-It notes and writing utensils. Encourage participants to add as many ideas as they wish and stick them to the paper.

### Invitation:

(to be read aloud), from John Green’s book *The Fault in Our Stars*:

**“Some people don’t understand the promises they’re making when they make them,” I said.**

**“Right, of course. But you keep the promise anyway. That’s what love is. Love is keeping the promise anyway.”**

- Ask the group for definitions of promises they may remember from the previous lesson.

### Team building/ice-breaker: “Whose truths it?”



If the exercise takes longer, that’s OK; just know you can cut something later. It’s important to make sure the covenant is not rushed.):

- Make a covenant:  
Use the ideas from the warm-up activity to create your covenant. Not all might be included. Facilitate the creation of the covenant through discussion. Feel free to use one of the templates in the Official Gathering Handbook (pp. 82-87). After you have created the covenant, have all the participants sign it. If everyone who plans to attend the Gathering is not present, be sure to have the missing people review the covenant with someone who was present so that everyone understands the context of the items in the covenant.

### Opening prayer:

***God of promise, be with us today as we explore and experience the many promises you make to us. Help us to hear these promises as good news, and to trust that you are a God who keeps promises. In the name of Jesus Christ, who promises forgiveness to all of us, we pray. Amen.***

## GATHERING CONNECTION

***Spend an afternoon at the Minnesota Children’s Museum and you will see God’s promise before your very eyes. The museum is alive with the sights and sounds of children delighted by fun and learning. Interactive exhibits provide them with the opportunity for creative expression. These exhibits also give them challenges to overcome and problems to resolve.***

Through the eyes of faith, the children shine as an example of God’s boundless promise. First they represent God’s promise of new life, a promise that extends all the way back to Abraham and Sarah. They also remind us how God creates and that God continues to make all things new. Most of all, the children at the museum reveal God’s ability to overcome the world and all its challenges, even resolving the problem of death. As amazing as that is, there are still other examples to find. The boundless promises of God are not limited to the confines of a museum. God’s children of all ages will be present in Minneapolis this summer. How will you witness God’s promise at the Gathering? Keep looking through the eyes of faith and you will see promises all around.

## word | learn about God's word and connection to our lives

*"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."*



Have a participant slowly read aloud the following:

**+** **John 11:17-27 CEV**  
***<sup>17</sup>When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask." <sup>23</sup>Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" <sup>24</sup>Martha answered, "I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised." <sup>25</sup>Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord!" she replied. "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world."***



## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

***Find a congregation member to serve as a prayer partner for each participant.***

You will need as many people from the congregation as you have participants (adult leaders included). Being a prayer partner can include as much or as little as makes sense for your setting. Our suggestion would be have them write a note for each day that the group will be at the ELCA Youth Gathering and turn these in to the group leader. Have the prayer partner write on the envelope the participants name and the day to give them the letter. At the end of each day, give everyone their note. If this is too much, have the prayer partner write one note or have them pray daily for their prayer partner.

## Our head:

- **Martha believes that her brother Lazarus will be raised from the dead because she believes in God keeping promises. This is a pretty high-level promise — resurrection.**
- **God makes promises that are sometimes called “covenants.” A covenant is a promise that also includes a sign, symbol or action on one or both individuals’ parts. Do you remember making “pinky promises,” when you and someone else would hook your smallest fingers together as a sign of the promise you made to one another?**
- **Covenants, or promises, are “sealed” between God and people. In Hebrew, the word for “to seal” also means “to cut.” In sealing a covenant, God is promising not to break that covenant or to cut out from the promise. Every promise from God is a high-level promise.**
- Have a different individual look up each of the following Bible verses and read them out loud.
  - Genesis 9:8-13
  - Luke 23:39-43
  - Genesis 17:1-13
  - Exodus 19:3-8
  - Matthew 28:18-20
  - Matthew 26:26-28
- **What promises has God made to us?**



## Our heart:

- **Which of the promises or covenants God has made to each of us surprises you? Which matters the most?**
- **Which of these covenants or promises have you broken?**
- **Do you wonder how God can keep covenants when we break them so often?**



## Our body:



Play the song “One” by Carole King. She sings about facing injustices as not just one person but billions of them.

<https://youtu.be/gc93thQVIV8>

- **How does this song motivate you to keep the promises made in your baptism, specifically:**
  - **proclaiming Christ through word and deed,**
  - **caring for others and the world God made and**
  - **working for justice and peace?**



## Our community:

## Prayer partners:

- Reveal to the group that they will have prayer partners from the congregation who will be praying for them while they are at the ELCA Youth Gathering. Let them know who their prayer partners are.
- Encourage participants to pray for their prayer partners. Remember to include in your prayers a moment for participants to name their prayer partner; if you have a large group you can have them all share the name at once (God’s ability to hear many prayers at once is boundless too) or take the time to name them all individually.



## sending

reflect on what we  
have learned and  
ask questions

- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 75-85 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

### Closing prayer (youth led/read):

***God of boundless promise, thank you for all your promises. We also give thanks for our siblings in Christ who will serve as our prayer partners as we journey together this summer – whom we now name aloud together (pause for prayer partners' names to be spoken). As we continue to uphold our promises to one another, help us to remember your promises to love, claim, forgive and keep us. We pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. May we trust in the promise that God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.***

### Dismissal/blessing – Call and response:

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the  
take-home sheet!***

## CONGREGATION CONNECTION

***Find a way to connect with your congregational prayer partner.***

Send them a message or write them a note. Share with them some of the things you are most excited by, most concerned about and most intrigued about experiencing. Pray for them while you prepare and attend the Gathering. With their consent, take a picture with your prayer partner (bonus points if you're holding the boundless logo) and post it to social media.



Make sure to use the hashtags #ELCAYG2022 and #boundlesspromise.



## Take-home sheet for Unit 5 – Session two: **God's promises to us**

*We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!*

Our boundless God has been making promises to God's people since the beginning in promising life, descendants, identity, forgiveness and more. These promises are often referred to as covenants. Some of these promises will mean different things to participants depending on their life experiences. In our baptisms, we become receivers of all of God's promises.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, John 11:17-27, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version). Here is some additional Scripture to support these themes:



- **Genesis 9:8-13:**

Again, God said to Noah and his sons: <sup>9</sup>I am going to make a solemn promise to you and to everyone who will live after you. <sup>10</sup>This includes the birds and the animals that came out of the boat. <sup>11</sup>I promise every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood. <sup>12-13</sup>The rainbow that I have put in the sky will be my sign to you and to every living creature on earth. It will remind you that I will keep this promise forever.

- **Luke 23:39-43:**

One of the criminals hanging there also insulted Jesus by saying, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and save us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other criminal told the first one off, "Don't you fear God? Aren't you getting the same punishment as this man?" <sup>41</sup>We got what was coming to us, but he didn't do anything wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into power!" <sup>43</sup>Jesus replied, "I promise that today you will be with me in paradise."

- **Exodus 19:3-8:**

Moses went up the mountain to meet with the Lord God, who told him to say to the people: <sup>4</sup>You saw what I did in Egypt, and you know how I brought you here to me, just as a mighty eagle carries its young. <sup>5</sup>Now if you will faithfully obey me, you will be my very own people. The whole world is mine, <sup>6</sup>but you will be my holy nation and serve me as priests. Moses, that is what you must tell the Israelites. <sup>7</sup>After Moses went back, he reported to the leaders what the Lord had said, <sup>8</sup>and they promised, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded." So Moses told the Lord about this.



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## Wondering questions

### (discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless forgiveness?
- What does it mean that God's promises have no limits or boundaries?
- Are all of God's promises high-level promises, or are some more simple?
- Imagine being on the receiving end of one of God's promises (think about Moses receiving the 10 commandments).
- Wonder about what promises God has made ...

## congregation connection

### Congregation connection

Find a way to connect with your congregational prayer partner. Send them a message or write them a note. Share with them some of the things you are most excited by, most concerned about and most intrigued about experiencing. Pray for them while you prepare and attend the Gathering.

With their consent, take a picture with your prayer partner (bonus points if you're holding the boundless logo) and post it to social media. Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlesspromise**.



### Prayer (from session):

God of boundless promise, thank you for all of your promises. As we continue to uphold our promises to one another, help us to remember your promises to love, claim, forgive and keep us. I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. May we trust in the promise that God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

### Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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# Appendix

## Bible citations (Contemporary English Version):

### Unit 1 — Session one

- Ephesians 3:14-21: All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from [God]. <sup>16</sup>God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that [God's] Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup>and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God's] love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you and all of God's people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. <sup>19</sup>I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. <sup>20-21</sup>I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. [God's] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.
- Galatians 3:28: Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman.

### Unit 1 — Session two

- Ephesians 3:14-21: All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from [God]. <sup>16</sup>God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that [God's] Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup>and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God's] love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you and all of God's people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. <sup>19</sup>I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. <sup>20-21</sup>I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. [God's] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.
- Romans 8:38-39: I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love — not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, <sup>39</sup>and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

### Unit 2 — Session one

- Psalm 104:1-34: I praise you, Lord God, with all my heart. You are glorious and majestic, dressed in royal robes <sup>2</sup>and surrounded by light. You spread out the sky like a tent, <sup>3</sup>and you built your home over the mighty ocean.

The clouds are your chariot  
with the wind as its wings.

<sup>4</sup>The winds are your messengers,  
and flames of fire are your servants.

<sup>5</sup>You built foundations for the earth,  
and it will never be shaken.

<sup>6</sup>You covered the earth with the ocean  
that rose above the mountains.

<sup>7</sup>Then your voice thundered!

And the water flowed

<sup>8</sup>down the mountains and through the valleys  
to the place you prepared.

<sup>9</sup>Now you have set boundaries,  
so that the water will never flood the earth again.

<sup>10</sup>You provide streams of water in the hills and valleys,

<sup>11</sup>so that the donkeys and other wild animals can  
satisfy their thirst.

<sup>12</sup>Birds build their nests nearby and sing in the trees.

<sup>13</sup>From your home above you send rain on the hills and  
water the earth.

<sup>14</sup>You let the earth produce grass for cattle, plants for  
our food,

<sup>15</sup>wine to cheer us up, olive oil for our skin,  
and grain for our health.

<sup>16</sup>Our Lord, your trees always have water,  
and so do the cedars you planted in Lebanon.

<sup>17</sup>Birds nest in those trees,  
and storks make their home in the fir trees.

<sup>18</sup>Wild goats find a home in the tall mountains,  
and small animals can hide between the rocks.

<sup>19</sup>You created the moon to tell us the seasons.

The sun knows when to set,

<sup>20</sup>and you made the darkness,

so the animals in the forest could come out at night.

<sup>21</sup>Lions roar as they hunt for the food you provide.

<sup>22</sup>But when morning comes, they return to their dens,

<sup>23</sup>then we go out to work until the end of day.

<sup>24</sup>Our Lord, by your wisdom you made so many things;  
the whole earth is covered with your living creatures.

<sup>25</sup>But what about the ocean so big and wide?

It is alive with creatures, large and small.

<sup>26</sup>And there are the ships, as well as Leviathan,  
the monster you created to splash in the sea.

<sup>27</sup>All of these depend on you to provide them with  
food,

<sup>28</sup>and you feed each one with your own hand, until  
they are full.

<sup>29</sup>But when you turn away, they are terrified;  
when you end their life, they die and rot.

<sup>30</sup>You created all of them by your Spirit,  
and you give new life to the earth.

<sup>31</sup>Our Lord, we pray that your glory will last forever  
and that you will be pleased with what you have done.

<sup>32</sup>You look at the earth, and it trembles.

You touch the mountains, and smoke goes up.

<sup>33</sup>As long as I live, I will sing and praise you, the Lord God.

<sup>34</sup>I hope my thoughts will please you, because you are the one who makes me glad.

## Unit 2 — Session two

- Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV): “For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
- Genesis 1:27-28: “So God created humans to be like [Godself; God] made men and women. God gave them a blessing and said: Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth.”

## Unit 3 — Session one

- Luke 15:12-32: <sup>12</sup>The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons. <sup>13</sup>Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. <sup>14</sup>He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat. <sup>15</sup>He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing. <sup>17</sup>Finally, he came to his senses and said, “My father’s workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.’” <sup>20</sup>The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>The son said, “Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son.” <sup>22</sup>But his father said to the servants, “Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals[d] for his feet. <sup>23</sup>Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found.” And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup>The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants over and asked, “What’s going on here?” <sup>27</sup>The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the

best calf.” <sup>28</sup>The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. <sup>29</sup>But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. <sup>30</sup>This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”

<sup>31</sup>His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”

- Matthew 6:14-15: If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.
- Ephesians 4:31-32: Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don’t yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. <sup>32</sup>Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.
- Acts 3:19: So turn to God! Give up your sins, and you will be forgiven.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.

## Unit 3 — Session two

- Genesis 50:15-21: <sup>15</sup>After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers said to each other, “What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?” <sup>16</sup>So they sent this message to Joseph: Before our father died, <sup>17</sup>he told us, “You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you.” Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped. When Joseph heard this, he started crying. <sup>18</sup>Right then, Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said, “We are your slaves.” <sup>19</sup>But Joseph told them, “Don’t be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided. <sup>20</sup>You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that he could save all these people, as he is now doing. <sup>21</sup>Don’t be afraid! I will take care of you and your children.” After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.

#### Unit 4 — Session one

- Luke 1:26-38: <sup>26</sup>One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee <sup>27</sup>with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. <sup>28</sup>The angel greeted Mary and said, “You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup>Mary was confused by the angel’s words and wondered what they meant. <sup>30</sup>Then the angel told Mary, “Don’t be afraid! God is pleased with you, <sup>31</sup>and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. <sup>33</sup>He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end.” <sup>34</sup>Mary asked the angel, “How can this happen? I am not married!” <sup>35</sup>The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God’s power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. <sup>36</sup>Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but in three months she will have a son. <sup>37</sup>Nothing is impossible for God!” <sup>38</sup>Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant! Let it happen as you have said.” And the angel left her.
- Luke 1:39-55: A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. <sup>40</sup>She went into Zechariah’s home, where she greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, her baby moved within her. The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. <sup>42</sup>Then in a loud voice she said to Mary: God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have. <sup>43</sup>Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? <sup>44</sup>As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. <sup>45</sup>The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep his promise. <sup>46</sup>Mary said: With all my heart I praise the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and I am glad because of God my Savior. <sup>48</sup>He cares for me, his humble servant. From now on, all people will say God has blessed me. <sup>49</sup>God All-Powerful has done great things for me, and his name is holy. <sup>50</sup>He always shows mercy to everyone who worships him. <sup>51</sup>The Lord has used his powerful arm to scatter those who are proud. <sup>52</sup>He drags strong rulers from their thrones and puts humble people in places of power. <sup>53</sup>God gives the hungry good things to eat, and sends the rich away with nothing. <sup>54</sup>He helps his servant Israel and is always merciful to his people. <sup>55</sup>The Lord made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his family forever!

#### Unit 4 — Session two

- Luke 10:1-11: Later the Lord chose seventy-two other followers and sent them out two by two to every town and village where he was about to go. <sup>2</sup>He said to them: A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in. <sup>3</sup>Now go, but remember, I

am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Don’t take along a moneybag or a traveling bag or sandals. And don’t waste time greeting people on the road. <sup>5</sup>As soon as you enter a home, say, “God bless this home with peace.” <sup>6</sup>If the people living there are peace-loving, your prayer for peace will bless them. But if they are not peace-loving, your prayer will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Stay with the same family, eating and drinking whatever they give you, because workers are worth what they earn. Don’t move around from house to house. <sup>8</sup>If the people of a town welcome you, eat whatever they offer. <sup>9</sup>Heal their sick and say, “God’s kingdom will soon be here!” <sup>10</sup>But if the people of a town refuse to welcome you, go out into the street and say, <sup>11</sup>“We are shaking the dust from our feet as a warning to you. And you can be sure that God’s kingdom will soon be here!”

#### Unit 5 — Session one

- John 11:17-27: <sup>17</sup>When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus told her, “Your brother will live again!” <sup>24</sup>Martha answered, “I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus then said, “I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>“Yes, Lord!” she replied. “I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world.”

#### Unit 5 — Session two

- John 11:17-27: <sup>17</sup>When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus told her, “Your brother will live again!” <sup>24</sup>Martha answered, “I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus then said, “I am the one who raises the

dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>“Yes, Lord!” she replied. “I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world.”

- Genesis 9:8-13: Again, God said to Noah and his sons: <sup>9</sup>I am going to make a solemn promise to you and to everyone who will live after you. <sup>10</sup>This includes the birds and the animals that came out of the boat. <sup>11</sup>I promise every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood. <sup>12-13</sup>The rainbow that I have put in the sky will be my sign to you and to every living creature on earth. It will remind you that I will keep this promise forever.
- Luke 23:39-43: <sup>39</sup>One of the criminals hanging there also insulted Jesus by saying, “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and save us!” <sup>40</sup>But the other criminal told the first one off, “Don’t you fear God? Aren’t you getting the same punishment as this man? <sup>41</sup>We got what was coming to us, but he didn’t do anything wrong.” <sup>42</sup>Then he said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into power!” <sup>43</sup>Jesus replied, “I promise that today you will be with me in paradise.”
- Genesis 17:1-13: Abram was ninety-nine years old when the Lord appeared to him again and said, “I am God All-Powerful. If you obey me and always do right, <sup>21</sup>I will keep my solemn promise to you and give you more descendants than can be counted.” <sup>3</sup>Abram bowed with his face to the ground, and God said: <sup>4-5</sup>I promise that you will be the father of many nations. That’s why I now change your name from Abram to Abraham. <sup>6</sup>I will give you a lot of descendants, and in the future they will become great nations. Some of them will even be kings. <sup>7</sup>I will always keep the promise I have made to you and your descendants, because I am your God and their God. <sup>8</sup>I will give you and them the land in which you are now a foreigner. I will give the whole land of Canaan to your family forever, and I will be their God. <sup>9</sup>Abraham, you and all future members of your family must promise to obey me. <sup>10-11</sup>As the sign that you are keeping this promise, you must circumcise every man and boy in your family. <sup>12-13</sup>From now on, your family must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old. You must even circumcise any man or boy you have as a slave, both those born in your homes and those you buy from foreigners. This will be a sign that my promise to you will last forever.
- Exodus 19:3-8: <sup>3</sup>Moses went up the mountain to meet with the Lord God, who told him to say to the people: <sup>4</sup>You saw what I did in Egypt, and you know how I brought you here to me, just as a mighty eagle carries its young. <sup>5</sup>Now if you will faithfully obey me, you will be my very own people. The whole world is mine, <sup>6</sup>but you will be my holy nation and serve me as priests.

Moses, that is what you must tell the Israelites. <sup>7</sup>After Moses went back, he reported to the leaders what the Lord had said, <sup>8</sup>and they promised, “We will do everything the Lord has commanded.” So Moses told the Lord about this.

- Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus came to them and said: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! <sup>19</sup>Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.
- Matthew 26:26-28: <sup>26</sup>During the meal Jesus took some bread in his hands. He blessed the bread and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this and eat it. This is my body.” <sup>27</sup>Jesus picked up a cup of wine and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, “Take this and drink it. <sup>28</sup>This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you. It will be poured out, so that many people will have their sins forgiven.

## Other resources:



### Unit 1 Spotify Playlist #boundlesslove

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/711fk9mNI4YStLv-fYzbfD9?si=150617fe45d041d0>

### Unit 1 — Session one



“Love Has No Labels,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuGlhHs>



Joe Davis Poetry, “Who Is Your Everyone?,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLSbVaN4QdQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0-AZPY5yvl\\_5tNHK\\_DJKuv\\_9spWFLvMTDPdzvxN1NteSXYWi7jzakJ74M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLSbVaN4QdQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0-AZPY5yvl_5tNHK_DJKuv_9spWFLvMTDPdzvxN1NteSXYWi7jzakJ74M)



William Matthews, Lisa Gungor, “We’ll All Be Free,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgG0jltdeek>

### Unit 1 — Session two



“Write a Love Letter to Yourself,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojUrs28LeGM>



(Spotify playlist or YouTube; no visuals needed, just the songs)

- Lauren Daigle, “You Say”
- Tauren Wells, “Known”



### Unit 2 Spotify Playlist #boundlesscreation

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7n8iu6sazn-NUh9TlZmpSd9?si=fee66e0971f04815>

## Unit 2 – Session one

Here is a short but good article on the Leviathan, referenced in verse 26. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Leviathan-Middle-Eastern-mythology>

 Read the book Old Turtle by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee to the group or show this YouTube video of a reading of it: <https://youtu.be/0itq-Uk43mE>

Creation Liturgy, from the full liturgy  
“Celebrating Creation” by Kelly Sherman-Conroy,  
Native Theologian (Ogala Sioux)

What is the Leviathan?  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Leviathan-Middle-Eastern-mythology>

 Songs about creation “God of All Creation,”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RgM3SA1xgE>

 “God of Wonders,”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CBNE25rtnE>

 “All Creatures of Our God and King,” David Crowder Band  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSFK7UiH5Us>

“Earth and All Stars” (ELW, p. 731)

 “Joyful, Joyful” (Sister Act 2)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfBGQpIyT8>

### **Other worship resources on creation**

<http://www.creationjustice.org/indigenous.html>

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/resources-for-creation-care>

The Green Bible (New York: HarperOne, 2008)

## Unit 2 – Session two

 “Canvas and Clay,” song by Pat Barrett.  
<https://youtu.be/OcDRp0zWGIw>

Venice Williams, urban farmer. “Alice’s Garden: Solutions for Clean Water in Milwaukee,” AmericanRivers.org,  
<https://www.americanrivers.org/rivers/films/alices-garden/>

 Sean Sherman, Chef. “The Sioux Chef’s Indigenous Menu,” CBS Sunday Morning,  
<https://youtu.be/w-V0uZfzfx4>

Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment by Mitch Hescox and Paul Douglas (reprinted by permission)

### **ELCA Resources**

Creation care liturgical resources - [Webofcreation.org](http://Webofcreation.org)

Grassroots creation care organization  
<https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>

ELCA social statement  
<https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

ELCA Environmental Advocacy staff- Ruth Ivory Moore  
<https://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy#Issues>

Kids who make a difference for the earth: “Greta Thunberg Isn’t Alone. Meet Some Other Young Activists Who Are Leading the Environmentalist Fight,” CNN.com, September 28, 2019

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/28/world/youth-environment-activists-greta-thunberg-trnd/index.html>



### **Unit 3 Spotify Playlist #boundlessforgiveness**

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/44xHG3R1SR7xK-PyPp71PUZ?si=012c0cc2ab63421b>

## Unit 3 – Session one

Rembrandt’s The Prodigal Son,  
[http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/prodigal\\_son\\_large.html](http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/prodigal_son_large.html)

## Unit 3 – Session two

 Why forgiveness is worth it – TED Talk  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_montana\\_the\\_real\\_risk\\_of\\_forgiveness\\_and\\_why\\_it\\_s\\_worth\\_it/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_montana_the_real_risk_of_forgiveness_and_why_it_s_worth_it/transcript?language=en)



### **Unit 4 Spotify Playlist #boundlessinvitation**

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6jj7WlamcJG-sukqWKxDYe1?si=fe6cb70672874641>

## Unit 4 – Session one

 “We Say Yes,” by Housefires. Pay attention to the lyrics of the song, as they demonstrate how we respond to God’s boundless invitation.

<https://youtu.be/DFNgftfGXJw>

It’s a long song, so only play (00.00-02:58).

## Unit 4 – Session two

 To recap Mary’s response, view the attached video recording of the Magnificat from Holden Evening Prayer.

[https://youtu.be/nABzv\\_TInal](https://youtu.be/nABzv_TInal)

 Information about Ubuntu, hear Archbishop Desmond Tutu explain the concept himself at the following YouTube link:

<https://youtu.be/GaiKX5VdfVE>



### **Unit 5 Spotify Playlist #boundlesspromise**

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2UAEdE9RZra-oD0DRwd5FDe?si=fa51890f688e4e21>

## Unit 5 – Session two

The Fault in Our Stars, novel by John Green



“One,” song by Carole King.

<https://youtu.be/gc93thQVIV8>







**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.