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Unit 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. 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.

¹For 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://jbqnew.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 litary

- 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.



inute

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.

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 litany³

- 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 <u>waters</u> and the <u>land</u>, with the trees and grasses, with fish, birds and <u>animals</u>, with minerals and creatures of every form, and with all <u>people</u>. 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 litary that honors God's creation in your area.

³From 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=mfBGQplsvT8



- Old Turtle by Douglas Wood and Cheng-Khee Chee https://youtu.be/0itg-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**.

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
- 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:

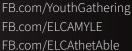
congregation connection

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
- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 41)
- Post-It notes

- Pens or markers
- Newsprint/poster paper
- Tape
- Easel with a backboard of some sort (optional)
- Markers or paint

GATHERING CONNECTION

gather building of your group

Warm-up:



• As participants arrive, play the song "Canvas and Clay" by Pat Barrett. https://youtu.be/OcDRp0zWGIw

minute

• 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.

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 whimsey. 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:

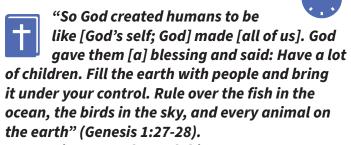


Read this verse: "For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10 NJKV).

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:



 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-V0uZfzfX4
- 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.









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.

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- 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
 - 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-V0uZfzfX4
 - 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, <u>https://youtu.be/OcDRp0zWGlw.</u>

