

Unit 5



boundless*promise*

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Unit overview

05

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



"I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised." ²⁵Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. ²⁶And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"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**
¹⁷When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask." ²³Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" ²⁴Martha answered, "I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised." ²⁵Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. ²⁶And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"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: ⁹I am going to make a solemn promise to you and to everyone who will live after you. ¹⁰This includes the birds and the animals that came out of the boat. ¹¹I promise every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood. ¹²⁻¹³The 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!" ⁴⁰But the other criminal told the first one off, "Don't you fear God? Aren't you getting the same punishment as this man?" ⁴¹We got what was coming to us, but he didn't do anything wrong." ⁴²Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into power!" ⁴³Jesus 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: ⁴You saw what I did in Egypt, and you know how I brought you here to me, just as a mighty eagle carries its young. ⁵Now if you will faithfully obey me, you will be my very own people. The whole world is mine, ⁶but you will be my holy nation and serve me as priests. Moses, that is what you must tell the Israelites. ⁷After Moses went back, he reported to the leaders what the Lord had said, ⁸and 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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