

Affirm People Who Are Marginalized

GENESIS 1-2

GOAL

Adults identify the diversity of life woven into creation by God's handiwork, and they affirm and honor the variety of persons whom God creates.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

Holy God, open my eyes to the beauty of your creation, from the smallest grain of soil to the distant sun and moon. Help me to appreciate the diversity of this group of learners and show them honor and value. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The first step in honoring God's diversity is recognizing and valuing the diversity of life and persons that surround us. This session invites adults to look beyond the strict binaries of light and dark, evening and morning, land and sky, male and female. There is opportunity to appreciate the fullness of a day that flows from sunset to sunset, to acknowledge the change in light from dusk to dawn to high noon. God's diversity is a wondrous cycle of depth, variety, similarities, and differences. And God called all of it good. As God's created humans, we honor and celebrate creation and God's creatures, including the uniqueness and diversity of persons with whom we share this earth.

THE BIBLE STORY

Genesis 1-2

From the two creation stories found in Genesis 1-2, we see that God created a diversity of elements, plants, animals, and people. The Bible holds these stories together (even side by side) while they each testify to different perspectives on God, creation, and humanity. These stories serve as a model for how we might honor God's diversity by holding space for a variety of persons and voices to be valued, honored, and included.

Genesis 1:26-27

Among the diversity of God's creation, humans receive a unique distinction of being the final created beings. God created a variety of people (of diverse sizes, colors, races, ethnicities, and genders), yet we are each created in the image of God. No one has seen God, nor does any one human being embody the fullness of God. Instead, we each hold the image of God in the totality of our diversity.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Charge and Blessing" (p. 8): Prepare newsprint with the closing charge and blessing. Keep the newsprint to be used with a closing activity in each session.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Recognizing Diversity" (p. 5): Obtain the *Honor God's Diversity* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- "Celebrating Love" (p. 7): Print copies of the *CNN Health* article, "A Group of Christians Attended a Pride Parade to Apologize for How They've Treated the LGBT Community," *CNN Health* (July 2, 2018), bit.ly/FMApologyLGBT.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the Unit Overview on pages 4–5 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay, which begins on page 45 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING RITUAL

Tell participants that you will begin each session in this unit practicing a centering prayer that focuses on breathing. As they pray, they will be still and know they are God’s child as are all others. They will use words from Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God!” Lead the prayer with these instructions:

- As you inhale, pray the words “be still.”
- As you exhale, pray the words “and know.”
- “Be still.” (*pause*) “And know.” (*Repeat three times.*)

In unison, pray the prayer on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

DISCUSSION STARTER VIDEO

As a way to begin the study, show the “*Honor God’s Diversity Practice Overview*” video and the “*Honor God’s Diversity Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the session.

RECOGNIZING DIVERSITY

Read aloud the first two paragraphs in “Introducing the Practice” on page 8 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Gather around the infographic poster and spend a few minutes looking at it. Invite individuals to focus on one ring of the graphic and notice the range and variety of created elements on it. Notice how the poster shows the diversity between the binaries named in the Genesis 1 creation story (day/night, light/dark, oceans/dry land).

Discuss:

- ➔ What is the purpose of the diversity found in nature?
- ➔ In what ways is God reflected in this diversity?
- ➔ How does this visual resource help us to appreciate God’s diversity?
- ➔ What does it mean to honor it?

DEFINING DIVERSITY

Write the words *diversity, inclusion, and equity* on newsprint. Read aloud the first paragraph on page 5 (in the Unit Overview) of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to discuss each of these terms and develop a working definition of each. After the group develops their definition, locate and read aloud definitions from the dictionary. Check and adjust the group’s work if needed. Remind participants that this practice is titled, *Honor God’s Diversity*. Ask:

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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- Internet-connected device

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- Honor God’s Diversity* infographic poster

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- Newsprint and markers
 - Dictionary

- ➔ In what ways *do* we honor diversity?
- ➔ Based on the practice title, what do you expect will be the focus and work of these four sessions?

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

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- Bibles
 - Paper and pens

COMPARING CREATION STORIES


Have a volunteer read aloud the first paragraph in “Diverse Creation Stories” on page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Form two groups. Distribute Bibles, paper, and pens. Assign one group to read and discuss Genesis 1:1–2:4a. The other group reads and discusses Genesis 2:4b–25. They may refer to the summary information about their texts (pp. 10–11) in their *Adult Reflection Guides*.

Have each group list the diverse elements that God creates and how these intersect or influence one another. Ask groups to consider what they learn about God in their particular creation story.

Gather the groups to discuss their diverse lists. Discuss:

- ➔ What similarities and differences do you notice between the two creation stories?
- ➔ What does having these two accounts indicate about diversity in the Bible?

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- Bibles
 - Paper and pens

 Participants may raise the point that Genesis 1:27 says, “male and female he created them.” Explain that this verse is not to suggest God created women and men *only*. Rather, the verse emphasizes that God created a diversity of humans, not just one or two types.

GENESIS 1:26–27


Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:26–27. Consider one or more of these questions for discussion:

- ➔ What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
- ➔ Who is included in God’s image?
- ➔ Is anyone not made in God’s image?

Form two groups. One group is to list words that describe qualities of God while the other group lists words to describe the qualities of human beings. Each group should try to come up with as many character traits as possible. Have the groups share their lists. Discuss:

- ➔ What qualities and traits do God and human beings have in common?
- ➔ If people are created in the image of God, should they have the same qualities and traits? Why or why not?

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- Bibles

 A “merism” is a figure of speech in which a pair of contrasting words or phrases (such as *near and far*, *body and soul*, *life and death*) are used to express totality or completeness. Parts of a subject are used to describe the whole. (bit.ly/FMMerism)

GETTING BEYOND THE BINARY

Invite volunteers to take turns reading “Getting Beyond the Binary” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have participants identify *merisms* in their day-to-day language (*light/dark*, *daytime/nighttime*, *land/sea*, *searching high and low*). Discuss:

- ➔ What enhancements come when we understand a *merism* to represent a spectrum or whole rather than an either/or choice?

Looking at the broad categories of created elements in Genesis 1:1–2:4, what descriptive words might be expanded to describe the whole of “creeping things,” “wild animals,” “plants yielding seed,” and other elements?

- ➔ How do these descriptive words and merisms broaden your understanding of God’s created diversity?

Read Genesis 1:26–27. Discuss:

- ➔ If we see “male and female” as a merism like the other merisms found in Genesis 1–2, how might it help celebrate persons who identify as non-binary (*those who feel their gender cannot be defined as strictly male or female*)?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

USING MANY NAMES FOR GOD

Refer participants to “Using Many Names for God” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the introductory paragraph. Invite participants to talk about the name(s) they prefer to use for God and how this represents their personal image of God.

Call their attention to the word cloud on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have them notice and circle the names for God that stand out for them. Encourage them to add other names or terms for God that have meaning for them. Invite conversation about their chosen names for God.

Pens

AFFIRMING THOSE WHO ARE MARGINALIZED

Refer to “Affirming Those Who are Marginalized” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud the paragraphs in this section. Discuss:

- ➔ In taking a 30,000-foot view of today’s world, what people are marginalized across the globe? In our country? In your community?
- ➔ What words or actions do you know of that speak to or serve people who are on the margins?

Internet-connected device

Have participants locate “Welcoming the Immigrant” on page 14 in their *Adult Reflection Guides*. Read the first paragraph, then show the Twitter video at bit.ly/FMBibleRefugees, 1:07). Discuss:

- ➔ How do these Scripture readings honor God’s diversity and affirm the immigrant?
- ➔ What other marginalized people are honored and affirmed in the Bible but are excluded or oppressed by society?
- ➔ In what ways could you use the Bible to stand up for marginalized people and communities?

CELEBRATING LOVE

Refer to “Celebrating Love” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Use the information in the guide to introduce the *CNN Health* article. Have participants access and read the article on their internet-connected devices (smartphones or tablets). Discuss:

- ➔ How did the Manila church’s actions honor God’s diversity?
- ➔ How is one able to honor God’s diversity even while struggling to understand another’s situation or place in life?
- ➔ What would it look like for your church to honor God’s diversity by affirming the marginalized, as the Manila church did?
- ➔ How might such actions lead toward transformation in your local community?

Internet-connected devices
 Copies of *CNN Health* article

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Paper
 - Colored pens or pencils

AFFIRMING DIVERSITY HERE

Have participants reflect quietly on their strengths, attributes, and things that they are proud of. Then, ask them to think about things about themselves that they feel they can improve. Distribute paper and encourage use of the art supplies to create a word collage or self-portrait to display their strengths and, if they are comfortable doing so, their areas of improvement. As they finish their creations, invite them to hang them in a visible place.

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- Newsprint
 - Sticky notes
 - Pens

WELCOMING ALL

Refer to “See and Celebrate God’s Diversity” on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read the first two paragraphs on page 7. Discuss ways this information reflects or challenges participants’ understanding of a welcoming church.

Distribute sticky notes and pens to each participant. Have individuals identify groups of people in your community who are marginalized, write each group on a separate note, and name a practical way to affirm or welcome these persons into your community. Attach the notes to newsprint. Read aloud the different notes. If time allows, make a group plan to enact one of the practical suggestions for welcoming others.


FOLLOWING JESUS CHARGE AND BLESSING

Invite participants to read the paragraph in “Following Jesus” on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read again the final sentence, also included here in the sidebar. Invite participants to discuss their responses to this statement in light of the study and activities in this session.

Display the prepared newsprint with the closing charge and blessing. You will use this for each closing throughout this practice. For the first session, give the charge and blessing to the group:

Go out into the world in peace;
have courage;
hold on to what is good;
return no one evil for evil;
strengthen the faint-hearted;
support the weak, and help the suffering;
honor all people;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

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- Prepared newsprint

 Honoring diversity—as opposed to just seeing or having diversity—requires the difficult work of striving toward justice and equality.