

1

Welcome to God's World!

GENESIS 1:1-2:2



GOAL

By hearing about God's care in creating a diverse and beautiful world, children envision ways to embody that welcome in their interactions and participation in the life of the church and community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Creator of all, as I prepare to share your word, create in my heart the space to receive the children's perspectives, so that together we understand this familiar text in ways that inspire us to share your welcome today, this week, and each day. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Although the story of creation may be familiar, with hospitality and welcome as our lens, we will be coming to this story from a different angle. This story affirms the worth and belonging in each part of creation, and that is something to celebrate and lift up for our children.

THE BIBLE STORY

The creation story is actually told two different times in the first two chapters of Genesis. While Genesis 1 focuses on creation over seven days, with God creating every living thing and seeing that each was good, the second account's focus is on the humans that God created, placed in the garden, and entrusted with the care of everything. God's care was evident in the variety and diversity of each creation—most especially in the garden full of everything God's people needed. Is anything more welcoming?

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

God's welcome is as abundant as God's creation is! In the session, the children will notice ways they have experienced welcome, and use those experiences to find ways to practice the same kind of welcome, both in our church and in their own daily lives.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "God Welcomes All" (p. 8): Write the words to the song "God Welcomes All" on a sheet of newsprint. Save newsprint for sessions 2, 3, and 4.
- Depending on the options you choose:
 - "Welcoming People to Our Church" (p. 10): Look at the church website, brochures, or kiosks, and note how these things show welcome. Could children's contributions enhance the spirit of welcome? Based on your choices for this activity, talk with your pastor or your church's evangelism or outreach ministries to see how these craft projects could be used.



GETTING STARTED

- Resource Pages 1 and 2
- Tape

CONNECTING WITH CREATION



Cut apart the pictures on Resource Pages 1 and 2 and tape them at the children's eye level in four corners of the room. Invite everyone, including leaders, to walk around the room and look at each picture, standing by the one that is their favorite.

Ask each person to share what they liked about the picture. (If this is a new group gathered for the first time, also have them share their name and grade.) Once everyone has shared, ask what the pictures might all have in common. Affirm any answers that make sense, but until someone mentions that they are all things that God created, continue to ask, "What else?"

Invite everyone to move to the seating area in a way that is inspired by the picture (*floating, crawling, gliding, and so forth*). Tell the children that our next four sessions will focus on the theme of "Welcome All."

- Prepared newsprint with words to "God Welcomes All"
- Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

GOD WELCOMES ALL



Display the words and introduce the song "God Welcomes All." If singing, use the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or listen to the tune at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll. Sing the song a few times so that the children become comfortable singing together. If you are not singing the song, invite the children to speak the phrases after you.

God welcomes all, /
strangers and friends; /
God's love is strong /
and it never ends.¹ /



Save newsprint for sessions 2, 3, and 4.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Colored construction paper
- Tape

WORDS OF WELCOME



Engage the children in conversation about a time that they felt really welcomed, using the following questions:

- When was a time you felt welcome because of something someone said?
- When was a time you felt welcome because of something someone did?
- When was a time you felt welcome because you were given something?
- When was a time you felt welcome because of your surroundings?

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Use newsprint to collect their ideas. Circle the words or ideas that came up the most. As a group, pick three to five words or phrases that describe *welcome* best. Have volunteers write each word on a sheet of colored construction paper. Display these in a visible area of your meeting space.



You will be building upon and revisiting the words of welcome throughout this unit. Keep them displayed or save them and repost them for each session.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

DEPICTING GOD'S GARDEN

C A

Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Genesis 1:1–2:2 on Resource Page 3 or invite volunteers to read. Wonder together, using the following questions or some of your own:

- How do you think Adam and Eve felt to be asked to take care of God's creation?
- How do you think it would feel to come into this new place as the only people there?
- How do you think God felt about sharing the beautiful garden with Adam and Eve?
- If God is powerful enough to create everything and anything, why might God have needed to rest?

- Resource Page 3
- Newsprint
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Magazines

Provide magazines for the children to cut out pictures of things that might have been found in God's garden. Have the children glue the pictures on the newsprint to make a collage. While they are working, continue to wonder together about the story.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

ROLE-PLAYING WELCOME: GETTING IT RIGHT AND MISSING THE MARK

D

Tell the children that there are many areas of life where we have the opportunity to extend and/or receive welcome. Ask for volunteers to role-play scenes, each of which will be done twice: once to show not being very welcoming and a second time to show welcome. Use the following scenarios, or invite the children to make up their own:

- Going out to eat at a restaurant and being greeted by the hostess
- Getting lost on a hike in a park and asking another hiker for help
- Walking into a new cabin at summer camp where all the kids have been together for many years
- Trying to find a partner for the water balloon toss at a neighborhood party

“I’M GOING TO CHURCH . . .”

G

Play a game based on the I’m Going to Grandmother’s House game where participants have to name something that they are bringing that begins with the same letter as their first name.

In this game, there will be three rounds. Arrange the children in a circle, giving the following instructions before each round:

- Round 1: Name an attitude or quality that you will bring to church to be welcoming that begins with the same letter as your first name (for example, “I’m Lydia, and I am going to bring my best listening skills to church”).
- Round 2: Name an activity that you love to do that you will invite people to participate in (for example, “I am Kamau, and I am going to invite people to go sailing with me”).
- Round 3: Name a treat that you will bring to coffee hour in the same number as your age (for example, “I am Ryan, and I am going to bring nine candy bars to coffee hour”).

As the children share, affirm their answers and look for qualities, activities, and treats that could be brought to the communal life of the church to create an atmosphere of welcome.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Paper lunch bags or plain gift bags
- Crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- Blank notecards with envelopes
- Mural paper or newsprint

WELCOMING PEOPLE TO OUR CHURCH

A

Invite the children to create a craft project that will fit with your church’s evangelism, outreach, or welcoming efforts, or for use in your space.

Choose one or more options:

- Decorate bags: Brainstorm together ideas for welcoming pictures and have the children draw them on paper lunch bags or plain gift bags. Suggest they write the words “Welcome to [*your church’s name*]” and/or your church’s tagline if you have one. Wonder together what could go in the bags that would be helpful to visitors or those new to the congregation. Give the bags and the children’s suggestions to the appropriate leaders.
- Make notecards: Tell the children that pastors and church volunteers send notes of welcome to visitors. Brainstorm together messages that would be welcoming for the cards, such as “We are glad you worshiped with us.” or “Please, come again!”
- Create a welcome sign for your room or Sunday school area on mural paper or newsprint.

HOW I AM WELCOMING



- Three sticky notes for each child
- “Words of Welcome” signs (p. 8)
- Pens, pencils

Give every child three sticky notes and the following instructions:

- On sticky note #1, write or draw one way that you are great at welcoming others (such as I always say hello to my neighbors when we go for walks).
- On sticky note #2, write or draw one way that feels hard to be welcoming to others (such as I don’t like it when people not in my friend group sit at our lunch table).
- On sticky note #3, write or draw one action you can take to be welcoming to others (such as I could make a point to ask the new person in my class to be my partner in gym class).

Have the children:

- Place sticky note #1 on one of the signs they made in “Words of Welcome” displayed around the room.
- Give sticky note #2 to you or another leader.
- Take sticky note #3 home with them as a reminder of a welcoming action to try to take in the coming week.



Encourage children to help those who need assistance with writing to add a description of their picture on the sticky note below the drawing.



FOLLOWING JESUS

Holding the children’s sticky notes #2, encourage them to remember the area where it can feel hard to be welcoming, and keep that situation in their prayers. Comment that, although it may feel scary to think about changing the situation, remember that God made the whole world to welcome us, and we, too, can welcome others.

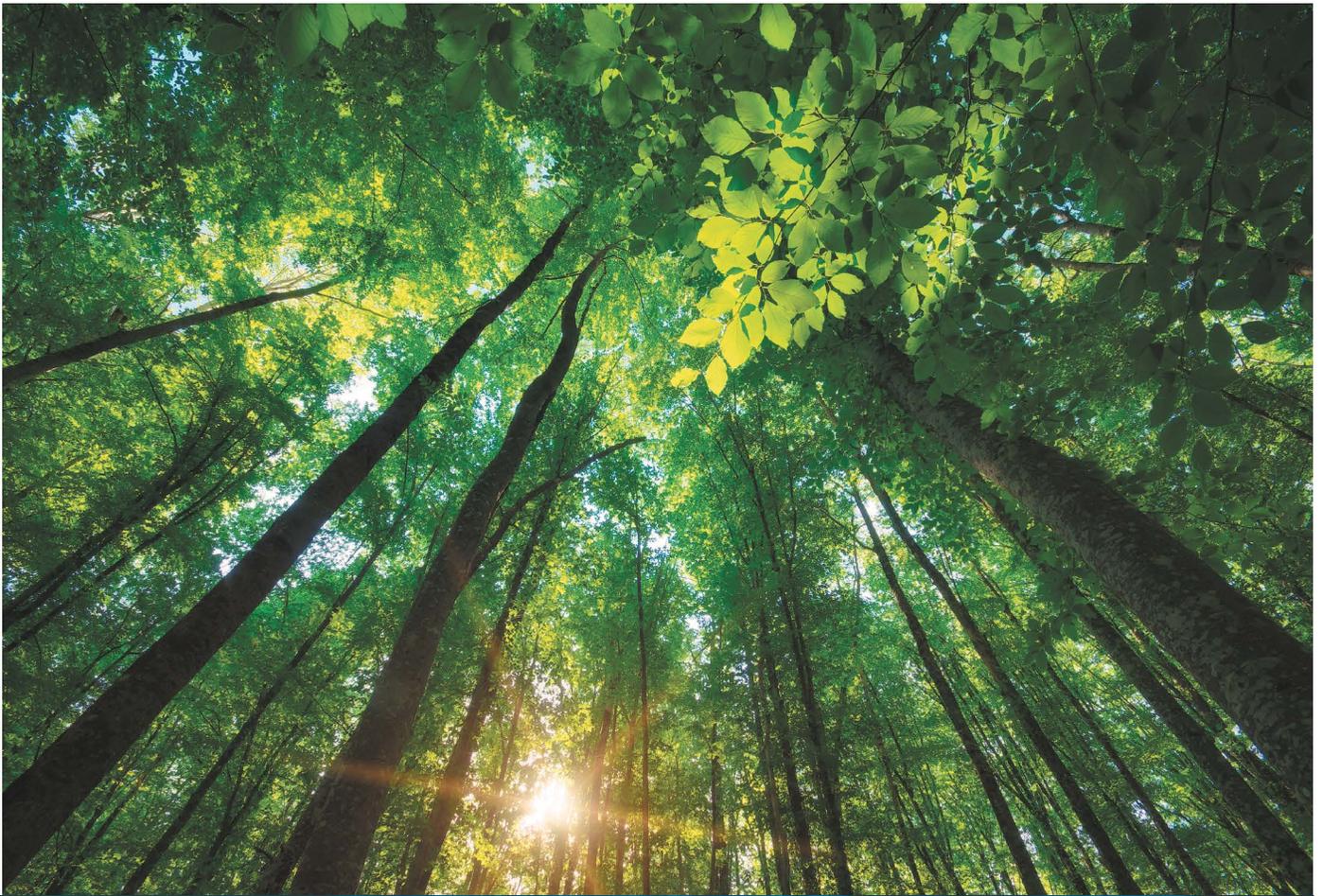
Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

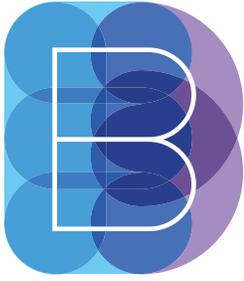
Creator God, we are in awe of all you created, and we are grateful that you created us to live in your world. There are so many ways that we are welcomed, and so many opportunities for us to be welcoming. We know you are with us as we welcome all. May we be challenged this week to go out with your word in our hearts and your love in our words as we welcome others. Amen.



Keep the signs with welcoming words from “Words of Welcome” (p. 8) for sessions 2, 3, and 4.







BIBLE STORY

ADAPTED FROM GENESIS 1:1–2:2

At the beginning of time, God created the world. Before God created the world, there was nothing but darkness, and a wind from God swirled around. In this darkness and wind, God decided that there should be not just darkness but also light. God separated waters and sky and land, and on that land, God created plants and trees. God made days and years and seasons. God made the sun and moon and stars.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world full of so many different things—but God was going to do even more!

God created animals: fish that could swim, birds that could fly. God created every kind of different animal to walk the earth that you could even imagine! God welcomed all of these creatures, born of God's creation, to live in this wonderful world being created.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world of so many different things and creatures—but God was going to do even more!

God created humans in God's own image and gave them names: Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were created by God to be partners and to work together. God told them to create families and care for all of God's creation: the birds and fish and creepy crawlies. God told Adam and Eve to tend the plants, to help them grow. And having worked so hard to create a world full of every kind of different thing God could ever imagine, it was time for God to rest.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world of so many different things and creatures and people—but God was going to do even more!

In creating every thing and being, God created a diverse world, and then God welcomed people to care for this creation. Just as God welcomed people into God's beautiful creation, we, too, can welcome others into our lives, our community, and our church so that they, too, may know of God's love.

