

Welcome Others as God Welcomes You

GENESIS 1:1-2:4A; GENESIS 2:4B-25

GOAL

Adults explore biblical foundations of hospitality and consider how they welcome all.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.

● Visit our YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/c/GrowingFaithResources, for discussion starter videos.

PRAYER

God of abundant grace, prepare my heart to welcome your beloved. Let me welcome ideas, experiences, and perspectives that may differ from my own. Ground me in your wisdom, patience, and grace that I may practice the hospitality that I seek to explore with this group. Amen.

THIS SESSION

To discover the foundational truth about hospitality, we start at the beginning; we welcome others because we have first been welcomed and have a place prepared for us by God. We belong in God's good creation. We all do. From this place of belonging, we show welcome and practice hospitality with both stranger and friend.

In this first aspect of practicing hospitality, we revisit the early stories of creation with an eye toward ways God showed welcome to the first humans. We consider the biblical call to practice hospitality with not only friends but also strangers. We reflect on our comfort levels in offering hospitality in unfamiliar situations and imagine different ways to practice hospitality and offer welcome. This first aspect grounds our understanding in who we are and whose we are. It will stretch us to think about how we welcome God's beloved.

THE BIBLE STORY

Biblical scholars affirm that the purpose of the two creation stories (Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Genesis 2:4b-25) is to teach us about who God is and about God's relationship with humanity and the world. One could argue that creating the world and inviting humans to be part of it was the greatest act of hospitality ever shown. As part of God's good creation, humans are created in the image of God. This generous gift further affirms the abundant welcome God extends to humans as God's beloved.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Expectations of Guests and Hosts" (p. 6): Obtain the *Welcome All* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- "Organizations That Welcome" (p. 7): Prepare at least two volunteers to read about the hospitality offered by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sanctuary movement, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sanctuary movement, and Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden found in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have volunteers prepare to give a summary to the group.

GETTING STARTED

OPENING SONG

In this opening session for the practice of hospitality and welcome, make a special effort to present a space of inclusion and welcome to participants. Invite introductions and have each participant tell what they do to show welcome to others.

Lead or have a volunteer lead the group in singing “God Welcomes All” by John Bell. This song can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399. You can hear the tune at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll or watch the YouTube video “God Welcomes All” (bit.ly/FMWelcomesAllVideo, 1:15). The lyrics are printed below and in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, page 7.

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

- Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)
- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

DEFINING HOSPITALITY

Review the definitions of hospitality found in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, page 7. Have participants discuss the parts of these definitions that stretch their understanding of hospitality. Develop a group definition of hospitality based on your discussion.

PLANNING AN EVENT

Invite the group to imagine they are planning an event for a special occasion. Create a list together of what needs to be considered in making your plans. Discuss the following:

- ➔ Depending on the occasion, what are some preparations that need to happen before the event to make guests feel honored or special (special foods or music, parting gifts, and so forth)?
- ➔ How do you as hosts need to prepare to ensure that guests feel welcome at the event?
- ➔ Why is it important to create a welcoming environment?

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

COMPARING CREATION ACCOUNTS

Have participants take a minute to review and discuss the first two paragraphs on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Ask:

- ➔ How do you understand the fact that there are two accounts of creation in the same Bible?
- ➔ How do you react to the author’s statement that the purpose of creation stories in ancient texts was to explain humanity’s relationship to God and our place in the world rather than to provide a scientific explanation of the world?

Form two groups. Assign one of the creation stories to each group (Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–25). After the text has been read silently or aloud, invite a volunteer from each group to summarize the creation account

 If everyone has a Bible or Bible app, you can form two groups, and everyone can read silently and focus on their text. A group discussion can immediately happen. If not, form two groups and allow time for each group to read aloud the assigned text.

they just read without looking at the text. After they finish, invite one or two others to add anything not mentioned. Discuss the following as a whole group:

- ➔ Can you identify any significant differences in the two texts?
- ➔ How are humans created in both texts?
- ➔ How is God's welcome shown in both texts?

In the first creation account, male and female are created at the same time. While the second account appears to suggest that women are made from men and has been used throughout time to justify patriarchy, a careful word study makes it less clear. In Hebrew, "Adam" is translated "human." The human does not become identified as male until the female is created. How does that influence your understanding of the reading?

Paper, markers and/or colored pencils

ILLUSTRATING HOSPITALITY IN CREATION

Distribute paper and drawing supplies. Invite participants to read one of the two creation accounts and then illustrate their image of God's hospitality shown in creation through words or drawing. Invite volunteers to show their work.

DISCUSSING THE ADULT REFLECTION GUIDE

If participants have already read the two Genesis stories and reflected during the week, spend time discussing how they answered the questions on pages 8 and 9 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

Copy of your worshiping community's welcome statement

CHURCH WELCOME STATEMENTS

Discuss the church's welcome statement found in the *Adult Reflection Guide* on page 10. Show your worshiping community's welcome statement if you have one and compare it with the one in the guide. If participants have already written an idea for a welcome statement in their *Adult Reflection Guide*, invite them to read their ideas. If appropriate, have your group try to come up with a brief welcome statement they would like their worshiping community to have.

Welcome All infographic poster

EXPECTATIONS OF GUESTS AND HOSTS

Work together to create two lists of current expectations: for guests and for hosts.

Review the lists and consider how these expectations are communicated today. What are the rewards or consequences when the expectations are met or not met?

Display the *Welcome All* infographic poster. Invite participants to compare the expectations of hosts and guests in the first century with the two lists they created. Reflect together:

- ➔ What first-century hospitality expectations would you find easiest to fulfill? What would be more difficult?
- ➔ Would you prefer to be a first-century host or guest? Why?
- ➔ What lessons about hospitality can we gain from first-century customs?

ORGANIZATIONS THAT WELCOME

Have the volunteers report on the two groups' efforts to provide hospitality found in the *Adult Reflection Guide* on page 11. Discuss the following:

- ➔ How do these organizations exhibit hospitality?
- ➔ What faith foundations undergird these organizations' hospitality practices?
- ➔ How does the work they do reflect the message of hospitality offered in Genesis 2:4b–25?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

CONSIDERING ACTS OF HOSPITALITY

Encourage participants to engage in self-reflection as they prepare to practice hospitality and welcome. Provide time for individuals to respond to the questions on pages 12–13 in their *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite conversation about insights gained from their responses, being aware that some people may not be comfortable disclosing their personal insights with a group. Ask:

- ➔ How does an awareness of your comfort level affect the way you practice hospitality?
- ➔ What acts of hospitality and welcome are you comfortable offering?
- ➔ How might you make room in your life to welcome others as God welcomes us?

BRAINSTORMING WELCOME

Show the YouTube video “Carrie Newcomer-Room at the Table” (bit.ly/FMNewcomerTable, 3:57). Have participants identify different acts of hospitality portrayed in the video. Brainstorm ways that people with disabilities might have been included in the video. Invite suggestions of concrete acts of hospitality that each person can practice in the coming week.

Internet-connected device

FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING SONG

Have each person name an act of hospitality that they will practice this week. Sing or watch the song, “God Welcomes All,” used at the beginning of this session.

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and it never ends.

Glory to God hymnal or internet-connected device