

Pathways

Session 6
God's special creations



RESOURCES FOR THE PRESENTER

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Purposes of Session 6

For the participants to:

- explore what it means to be a special creation of God
- consider ways of keeping the dimensions of life in balance

Reflection stimulus

Living from Belovedness

When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Matt.3:17). These words revealed the true identity of Jesus as the beloved ... I know now that the words spoken to Jesus when he was baptised are words spoken also to me and to all who are brothers and sisters of Jesus.

My tendencies toward self-rejection and self-depreciation make it hard to hear these words truly and let them descend into the center of my heart. But once I have received these words fully, I am set free from my compulsion to prove myself to the world and can live in it without belonging to it. Once I have accepted the truth that I am God's beloved child, unconditionally loved, I can be sent into the world to speak and to act as Jesus did.

The great spiritual task facing me is to so fully trust that I belong to God that I can be free in the world – free to speak even when my words are not received; free to act even when my actions are criticized, ridiculed, or considered useless; free also to receive love from people and to be grateful for all the signs of God's presence in the world. I am convinced that I will truly be able to love the world when I fully believe that I am loved far beyond its boundaries.

[Henri Nouwen, *Modern Spiritual Masters Series*, p72]

Focus questions

- Who am I?
- What does God think of me?
- What has God created me to do?

Biblical focus

I think about the heavens. I think about what your fingers have created.

I think about the moon and stars that you have set in place. What is a human being that you think about him? What is a son of man that you take care of him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings. You placed on him a crown of glory and honour.

Psalms 8:3-5 (NIRV)

God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully. If you speak, you should do it like one speaking God's very words. If you serve, you should do it with the strength God provides. Then in all things God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Give him the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:10,11 (NIRV)

There are different kinds of gifts. But they are all given by the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve. But they all come from the same Lord. There are different ways to work. But the same God makes it possible for all of us to have all those different things. The Holy Spirit is given to each of us in a special way. That is for the good of all.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NIRV)

Theological focus

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther begins his explanation to the first article of the Creed with the words: 'I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties.' This is part of the theology of 'continuing creation' which sees God as active in the life of each person. It also emphasises that human beings are a special creation of God, the climax and crown of God's creation (Ps 8:4-6).

While the Bible uses the terms 'body', 'soul' and 'spirit' to speak about human beings, it is important not to suggest that a human being is made up of three 'parts' (as for example in Greek philosophy). We do not 'have' a body, a soul and a spirit, but we **are** body, we **are** soul and we **are** spirit (I Thess 5:23). The body needs to be seen as part of God's 'good' creation (Gen 1:31) and should be treated as such also because the body will rise again at the end of time (Phil 3:20-21, 1 Cor 15:35-57). Each person also needs to appreciate the necessity to develop 'holistically' and keep a healthy balance of body, mind and spirit. Time and space needs to be provided also for spiritual development.

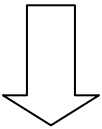
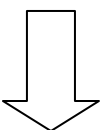
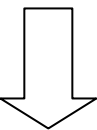
Each individual person is unique. While there may be many similarities with other persons, no two human beings are identical. God has given each person distinctive characteristics and abilities. These gifts do not establish our worth, because human worth does not depend on people's abilities, talents or achievements; nor is it diminished by illness, handicap, age, or failure of any kind. Human worth certainly has nothing to do with race, colour, gender, distinctive characteristics and abilities, or anything else that distinguishes one human being from another.

All human beings, whether or not they realise it, are individual creations of God. This gives every individual worth and value in the eyes of God because they are all creatures of God whom he loves equally (Acts 10:34: 'God does not show favouritism'). This value rests not only on the creative work of God, but also on the fact that Jesus has died for each individual and the Holy Spirit offers faith to each person and lives within each Christian.

Concepts in focus

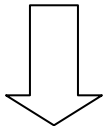
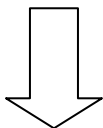
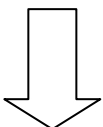
- I can see myself as one of God's good creations – with value and purpose and dignity created in the 'image of God'
- I appreciate that I am a total person – developing holistically in body mind and spirit, needing to keep all of this in balance: recognising that I am uniquely gifted
- I have to care for myself – also take time and space for my spiritual development

**WORKSHOP
Option 1**

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Begin the session by reading a picture book that contains the message of how special each person is, such as Max Lucado's <i>You are Special</i>. Share with participants that this session will focus on each person as a special creation of God and the implications this has for the way we live our lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges do people face in developing self-acceptance and self-awareness? • Do you think the Christian church has been successful in promoting God's great love for all people? • Have you had opportunity to hear about and or grow in your knowledge of God's great love for you as his special creation?
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Participants read Psalm 8 and Psalm 139:13-17</p> <p>Provide participants with clay or a range of art materials for responding to the message of the Psalm and exploring the theme <i>God's special creation</i>.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Study the painting of the creation of Adam by Michelangelo (see Resource Handout) or other religious art of the creation of humans and reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this painting or artwork helpful or unhelpful in exploring this theme?
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to share their artwork or sculpture with others sharing the key ideas that helped shape the artwork.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Participants share their thoughts about the artwork studied.</p> <p>After participants have shared their reflections, ask them to form groups and share their responses to the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a Christian respond to the question: Who am I? • In what ways is this message important in the school context? • Why do you think self-acceptance and self-awareness are important in spiritual growth? • Why is it important to grow holistically in body, mind and spirit?
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Close with a responsive reading of Psalm 139:1-18. Men and women could be asked to read alternate verses or the leader and participants.</p>

[Note: From the two workshop options provided, please choose the option that best suits your staff needs]

**WORKSHOP
Option 2**

<p>Stimulus</p> 	<p>Provide the Resource Handout, <i>Living with Belovedness</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does God say about our value or worth? • How does Nouwen suggest our value impacts on the way we live?
<p>Reflection</p> 	<p>Provide the participants with the Resource Handout, <i>god's special creations</i> that contains the Bible readings related to people's gifts. They reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your gifts? If you find identifying the ways God has gifted you difficult consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do you love to do? ○ How do you like to spend your time? ○ What do other people say you are good at? • What does God intend me to do with these gifts?
<p>Sharing</p> 	<p>Ask the participants to share their reflection with a partner who may also add gifts to their list. Discuss whether it was easier to identify the things that we like about ourselves or the things we dislike</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who influences the way we think about ourselves? • Why do we find it easy to be critical of ourselves? • Why do you think the concept of people as special creations of God can be helpful in the school setting? • How do you think it impacts on a person's spiritual growth?
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Provide time for the participants to make a journal entry or to write a personal prayer in response to the theme of God's special creations.</p>