BOUNDLESS

God Beyond Measure

"I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is."

EPHESIANS 3:14-21









2022 BIBLE STUDY

Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp

BOUNDLESS: GOD BEYOND MEASURE

We are very grateful to the following individuals for their work in writing the 2022 Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp Bible study.

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2022 BOUNDLESS: GOD BEYOND MEASURE

There is no way to measure the depth and breadth of God. But one sure way we can begin to understand how immense God is, is through exploring God's tremendous and immense love for us. If we can even begin to grasp all that God can do in this world, we can then become instruments to share God's boundless love and BE God's love in the world. And then the possibilities are boundless!

This study focuses on the breadth, length, depth, and height of God's boundless love. We get to experience how far God will actually go for us as his precious children. We hope this study will give us courage to really live out our faith in every aspect of our lives. Challenging, yes… but this is our calling!

1. **BREADTH OF GOD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE: CREATION:** The breadth of God's love is manifested in the incredible creation that surrounds us. The immensity of the night skies to the smallest creature all reflect God's love for the world. But even more so, we, as humans, are God's crowning glory of creation.
2. **LENGTH OF GOD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE - JESUS:** We gain a whole new understanding of God's boundless love for us through the gift of Jesus. God sent to Jesus to be one of us, to experience life like us, and to be a model for us**.**
3. **DEPTH OF GOD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE - HURT**: Life is not perfect. Life includes times of pain and hurt. But God promises to be with us every step of every day. And we can be God presence in the lives of those hurting around us.
4. **HEIGHT OF GOD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE - JOY:** We all love to be happy. But happiness depends on the circumstances of our lives. Joy, on the other hand, comes from God. Jesus came to earth, died, and was resurrected for us. Jesus, who is God's love incarnate, allows us to now experience true joy in all circumstances. God is the source our joy!
5. **THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE - ME:** God love for us is immense and boundless. The problem is we don't believe it. God claims that we are the crowning glory of God's creation. We truly matter deeply to God. Our life, then, becomes a response to give away God's overwhelming, boundless love to others!

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a welcome, some scriptural reading, a current song, and then move to about a half hour of God Time and reflection. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about this study. This is going to be a challenging study in a new way. I hope this study can move campers, staff, and adult leaders to wake each morning, to think about their day ahead, and fully experience the boundless love of God while living a life that impacts others in the name of Christ throughout their day. If this happens, they will transform the lives of others, and in doing so, they will be transformed as well. I also hope this study will help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the people of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.

Dave Jarvis,
Executive Director

2022 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
BOUNDLESS: GOD BEYOND MEASURE
DAY 1: The Breadth of God's Boundless Love: Creation

INTRODUCTION TO THE OVERALL THEME

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father,
the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.
I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources
he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.
Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.
Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.
And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should,
how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.
May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.
Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.
Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us,
to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.
Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.
Ephesians 3:14-21 NLT

Perhaps one of the greatest prayers in all scripture penned by the Apostle Paul to the believers in Ephesus. A prayer of love, but also a prayer of vision, insight and great power. Paul's wish for his friends in that day is still God's wish for us today. Paul understood how vast, how immense God is, AND how great God's love is for each individual person. And while God's love is truly boundless, it also is personal for each of us. We can tap into the boundless love, power, and grace, and in doing so, we begin to grasp all that God can do in this world – in us and through us.

Take a moment and read through this prayer at least a couple of times…read slowly. Read to absorb not just to read words. Let this prayer be God's prayer for you today.

How amazing and beautiful is the boundless love of God for you! Pray this prayer each morning or night all summer long – see how it's very presence in your waking and sleeping can help you experience the boundless love of God for you!

NOW…let's step into this year's Bible study experiencing the love of Christ, and the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love really is…SO THAT we can be cups filled to overflowing with God's grace and love to campers this summer. SO THAT we can be "overflowers" of the vision of what God's boundless love looks like for us, for our campers, for the world around us.

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

"Just ask the animals, and they will teach you.
Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.
8 Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.
Let the fish in the sea speak to you.
10 For the life of every living thing is in his hand,
and the breath of every human being.
Job 15:7-8,10

Last fall, I had the privilege of being on sabbatical. Fall is my favorite time of year – to watch the greens of summer turn into yellows, oranges, and reds…to hear the rustle of leaves as I walk through them. To smell fall – which, contrary to what some think, is so much more than just pumpkin spice! While on sabbatical, I traveled to places familiar – Chicago, Oklahoma City, my family's homes, my friends' backyard and places I had never been – the San Juan Islands of northern Washington state to see Orca whales and Tucson, Arizona, to see the beauty of the Sonoran Desert.

Using photography as spiritual practice, I heeded instruction in that it's not about "taking pictures" it's about capturing the pictures given. So, I looked through the lens to see what I was given. And I can tell you this: God's amazing creation is well…amazing! If you want to begin to grasp the immenseness of God's boundless love for us – take a look around you. I did. One day my lens was filled with Orca whales breaching in the waters of the Salish Sea, hunting seals, swimming within feet of me (yes feet! And I can tell you this – they are HUGE and graceful and beautiful). Another day, my lens was filled with mountains covered in snow; a sunset too stunning to put into words. Yet another day, my lens saw the beloved face of my great nephew turning one, my mom and dad hugging and my best friends playing games with me. The lens helped me see the stunning beauty all around me.

A snowflake – none other like it. A sunrise – never to be repeated just exactly the same. A mountain top that's stood for millennium. The crest of the waves, the force of the wind, the power of a good thunderstorm. The beauty in faces – no two exactly alike – skin color of all dimensions – no two bodies exactly alike. Even identical twins have some differences! From the depths of the seas to the immensity of space – creation is truly something to behold.

Intertwined in this immense, beautiful creation – is God's boundless love for us. This creation – created out of nothing and given to us to enjoy, to be used as resource, to challenge us and inspire us. But it doesn't stop there for we are part of this amazing creation as well. We don't exist outside of God's creation – we ARE God's creation – just as much as the tiniest flower petal or the loftiest universe light years away. How amazing is God and how vast is God's love to create something so beautiful, so vast, so amazing that includes us?!

Today, we are going to pay attention to God's boundless love for us through the beauty of creation. As we enter into our first full day at camp it makes sense to take time to recognize the beauty all around us. To really see the trees, the blue sky, the mountains, to breathe the fresh air, to feel the warmth of the sun. To notice the smallest leaf, the flowers, the pine tree needles, the cool refreshing waters of the creek. And we will also recognize God's beautiful creation that

is each of us. To name the beauty around us and within us. We will look to the mighty creation and see what it can teach us – what we can teach each other. The invitation today is to immerse ourselves in creation and listen, learn, experience God's boundless love for us found here!

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Today you will help your campers immerse themselves in the beauty of God's glorious creation by noticing the world around them
- Campers will discover the truth that they are part of God's creation
- Campers will have the chance to comprehend the immenseness of God's love for them

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome

You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and bumps into you, shaking your arm, making you spill your coffee everywhere. Why did you spill the coffee?

"Well because someone bumped into me, of course!" Wrong answer. You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup. Had there been tea in the cup, you would've spilled tea. Whatever is inside the cup, will spill out.*

Therefore, when life comes along and shakes you (which WILL happen), whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it, until you get rattled.

So we have to ask ourselves... "What's in my cup?" When life gets tough, what spills over?

Joy, gratefulness, peace, and humility?
Or anger, bitterness, harsh words, and reactions?

Today let's work towards filling our cups with gratitude, forgiveness, joy, words of affirmation; and kindness, gentleness, and love for others.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Introduction to the Day

Good morning! Welcome to camp! Do you spend much time outdoors away from camp? Where have you traveled? What amazing things have you seen in this world? Today we are going to take time to look at God's amazing creation all around us – to really see it, discover it, and let it teach us about God's boundless love for us.

Why we Chose the Passage and Scripture

Today's scripture verses are going to help us celebrate all of God's amazing creation –

including ourselves! We're going to let some of the songs of the Bible help us with this praise, and help guide us to remember all the great things God has created for us!

- Psalm 104 – talks about a lot of the great and mighty things God created
- Psalm 8 - talks about how great is God's creation of people!

Let all that I am praise the Lord.
O Lord, what a variety of things you have made!
In wisdom you have made them all.
The earth is full of your creatures. *(Psalm 104)*
O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.
2 You have taught children and infants
to tell of your strength,
silencing your enemies
and all who oppose you.
3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—
4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?[c]
5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God[d]
and crowned them[e] with glory and honor.
6 You gave them charge of everything you made,
putting all things under their authority—
7 the flocks and the herds
and all the wild animals,
8 the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,
and everything that swims the ocean currents.
9 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! *(Psalm 8)*

Song: "Indescribable" by Chris Tomlin

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creations revealing Your majesty
From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring
Every creature unique in the song that it sings
All exclaiming

Indescribable, uncontainable
You placed the stars in the sky
And You know them by name
You are amazing, God
All powerful, untameable
Awestruck, we fall to our knees
As we humbly proclaim
You are amazing, God

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go?
Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light?
Yet, conceals it to bring us the coolness of night
None can fathom

Indescribable, uncontainable
You placed the stars in the sky
And You know them by name
You are amazing, God
All powerful, untameable
Awestruck, we fall to our knees
As we humbly proclaim
You are amazing, God
You are amazing, God

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You placed the stars in the sky
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You are amazing, God
All powerful, untameable
Awestruck, we fall to our knees
As we humbly proclaim
You are amazing, God

Questions for Consideration:

- Wherever you find yourself sitting this morning, look around you. What do you see in God's creation? What is beautiful? What is strange? Look closer – what do you see now that you maybe missed before? What do you wonder about?
- What are your favorite things outside? Least favorite?
- Look at the people around you – they and you – are part of God's creation. When you think about people – what are some of the great things God created people to do? (example: love each other, sing, pet dogs, laugh)
- Take a minute to think about the fact that God created the world for us. How does that make you feel? Why?

Closing Prayer

O God, your creation is amazing! Thank you for loving me so much to create such a beautiful world for me to live in. Help me see myself as part of your beautiful creation and every person and creature as well. Open my eyes today to see the wonderful world around me here at camp and help my heart praise you! In your power I pray, Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Creation is often something we take for granted – unless we are talking about the negative impacts our ways of life are having on it. We hear lots about the deforestation of the Amazon, how climate change is leading to more severe storms and droughts and rising water levels in our oceans. We see the damage done by plastics being thrown into our oceans. And yes, we must learn to care better for the wondrous planet we live on. Today's study – while recognizing our need to preserve and care for this gift of creation – is really focused on us seeing God's creation. Appreciating God's creation. Finding joy in God's creation.

Since a lot of our campers come from urban or town areas, the change to the great outdoors of camp is often a stark change. Kids used to going outside only to get in a car or play in the fenced in back yard often don't see the amazing creation around them. Part of what we want to help them do today is recognize the beauty God has created – not just in plants and trees and the vast mountains, but also to recognize the beauty in themselves, the people around them – all of us – who are also a part of God's creation and beloved as part of God's creation.

Think for yourself – think about where you've spent the last year. What part of God's creation have you been in? Have you noticed it? Appreciated it? Thought about the fact that the world you found yourself in was created – for you to enjoy? Not only do our campers miss the beauty around them – we all do. We take for granted the ways things happen – we assume the sun will rise and set tomorrow. We assume there will be air to breathe all night when we lay down to sleep. We assume the mountains will always be here and that the rhythms of summer, fall, winter, spring will continue as always. We all take for granted what we have been given.

Herein lies the beauty of using my camera lens as a spiritual practice. It is making me slow down and pay attention to the smallest of details. One day, I got so wrapped up in watching bees on flowers and I admit, trying to get just the right shot, I spent about 20 minutes watching bees on flowers. Going from flower to flower, knowing they were doing exactly what God created them to do…it was mesmerizing and amazing! Have you ever stopped to smell the bark of a tree? To pay attention to the way flower petals lay against or next to each other? Have you even just watched a bird soar in the air?

And then…have you ever just stood still and given thanks to God for all that you are seeing? All that you are experiencing? See, a part of understanding God's boundless love comes when we acknowledge the One who created it all for us. Otherwise, we end of worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. So, how often do you thank God for the care God took in creating our world? Have you ever thanked God for allowing you see the beauty, for being able to experience the breathlessness of a mountaintop? How often do you stop and marvel at the truth that there are things in the oceans and out there is space that will never be discovered while you are alive?

This is the immenseness of God's creation and the immenseness of God's love for each one of us. When we recognize the vastness and intricacies of creation, we can begin to glimpse the vastness, the boundlessness of God's love. Today, we will use some of the Psalms to help us recognize, see and celebrate the boundless love of God through creation.

Intro to the Psalms
The Psalms began as people's words to God and have become God's word to people. They were written out of Israel's history and given to generation after generation to use as hymns and songs in worship together and individually. They are part of what we call the "canon" of the Bible – meaning the writings the church uses to hear God's voice even today.

Written through the entire period of Old Testament history – from Moses through the exile nearly 1000 years later, the Psalms were gathered together into the collection they are today. The people of God were encouraged to both learn and sing the songs of Psalms. The Psalms fall into the "poetry" section of the Old Testament as they use creative language which invites us into meditation as well as reflection and study. The psalms also make use of a technique called parallelism – sometimes called "thought rhyme." Key ideas are repeated often but in various ways. The repetition helps clarify and intensify the ideas. They help us slow down and consider the connections being made.

Like most poetry, the psalms use lots of imagery to form word pictures. Images might not be literal language, but their use attracts our attention by their vivid expressions helping us imagine and stirring our emotions. Because the imagery is from an ancient non-Western agricultural lifestyle context, we need to pay heed to the cultural context and discover what the imagery would have meant to the ancients who heard them first. Any imagery depicting God's character for example, then must be consistent with God's character as revealed throughout scripture – and not taken from just one text. This is true in Psalms, but also in all of scripture.

Psalm 104:24-34 *New Living Translation*

O Lord, what a variety of things you have made!
In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.
[25] Here is the ocean, vast and wide, teeming with life of every kind, both large and small.
[26] See the ships sailing along, and Leviathan, which you made to play in the sea.
[27] They all depend on you to give them food as they need it.
[28] When you supply it, they gather it. You open your hand to feed them, and they are richly satisfied.
[29] But if you turn away from them, they panic.
When you take away their breath, they die and turn again to dust.
[30] When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth.
[31] May the glory of the Lord continue forever!
The Lord takes pleasure in all he has made!
[32] The earth trembles at his glance; the mountains smoke at his touch.
[33] I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will praise my God to my last breath!
[34] May all my thoughts be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Psalm 104 draws pictures similar to those in the Genesis creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:4a). In the earlier part of the of the psalm God creates the world by pushing back waters and raising up mountains so plants can grow and creatures, including humans can flourish. God also promises to never flood the earth again, recognizing no matter what, humans are inclined towards evil. This is perhaps one of the most basic signs of God's grace.

In **verses 24-30** the psalmist recounts many of the worders God has created. You can almost picture the creatures, the oceans, and everything in it through the words on the page. There are two very important claims made here. In verses 27-28, God gives all creatures their food and in verses 29-30 points out that God is the one who gives the creatures (including humans) the very breath of life and without we die. One of my favorite verses reminds me of this daily (it's my background screen!):

The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
Job 33:4

How amazing is that?!? The God who creates vast universes also breathes life in to you! If we stop long enough to think about it, it's also a great reason to see ourselves as God sees us – as beloved, glorious creations, fashioned in God's image. No matter what the world says – God has created you and breathed life into you! And God sees all creation and in Genesis says, "It (You) are very good." Believe that! Hear the voice of God, feel the breath of life from God, and choose to believe <u>that</u> more than you believe the messages of the world.

In **verse 24 –** the words "in wisdom you have made them" – this is a great reminder that God created and still creates, I believe, with great skill and insight. We aren't just a model God tried and said well… OK… let's let her/him/them live. God took care, time, applied God's skill to creating every aspect of creation –including you! (Though I will admit – I have some questions about the validity of some of creation – mosquitoes for one, mushrooms for another…just my own personal questions! 😊) And in each piece of creation – God designed a way to praise him. In Psalm 19:1-4 (NLT) we see this proclaimed:

The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
2 Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
3 They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard
4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God's creation doesn't have to even say anything – by simply being who/what God created creation speaks of God and God's craftsmanship. And there are no mistakes…*you are not a mistake*. **Stop**. Let that sink in. You are not a mistake. You have been created in wisdom – with great skill and insight. If we don't/can't see ourselves as beloved ones created in God's image with skill and insight – it is hard to believe God is out there for us and even harder to love the rest of God's creation.

A quick note about Leviathan.
Leviathan is often seen in the Old Testament as a fearsome creature of the sea, that is untamable. Thus the statement about God making Leviathan play in the sea is an important claim that no creature, nothing is beyond God's control. While your world might seem chaotic

and a mess, this can assure us that God is ultimately in control even when our worlds feels out of control.

The end of the verses here are a shout out for God to be praised and worshipped. Recognizing the power of God – (the earth trembles at his glance, the mountains smoke at his touch) gives us reason to sing praises to God for as long as we live. The gift of creation is not one to take for granted, but rather, one to rejoice in!! For God's boundless love has created a world of beauty, of power, of mystery, of wonder – including us!

Psalm 8 *New Living Translation*

O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.
2 You have taught children and infants
to tell of your strength,
silencing your enemies
and all who oppose you.
3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—
4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?
5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 You gave them charge of everything you made,
putting all things under their authority—
7 the flocks and the herds
and all the wild animals,
8 the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,
and everything that swims the ocean currents.
9 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise (in case you didn't get that gist yet!) While there are many psalms of praise (Psalms 93, 136, 150 are just a few examples) Psalm 8 is unique in two different ways.

First, it is the first hymn you encounter when reading the Psalms straight through. The psalms most immediately before it as prayers spoken by people who are suffering or persecuted. Psalm 8 reveals/reminds that the people who are suffering are made in God's image and highly valued by their Creator. In fact, the psalm declares humans are God's agents on earth.

Secondly, this psalm is the only hymn in Psalms that is spoken entirely to God. It reminds us of God's ultimate power over creation and calls humans to do what God has called them to do. You'll notice the first half of verses 1 and 9 (beginning and end) are identical. They bookend the hymn and draw our attention to the majesty and might of God. The psalmist proclaims more of God's power and acts in verse 2 and then the reminder that the night sky, the stars and implying all of creation is the work of God's hands. When the psalmist recognizes this – the natural progression is to ask – who are humans that God should think of us? When considering

the grand and mighty things God has created the depths of the oceans, the vastness of galaxies – humans aren't exactly that mighty.

Yet…God takes note of us. And not only takes note but declares us the grandest design – for humans are the only part of creation said to be created in God's image. Alongside this, David (psalm writer) touches on a familiar theme in all of scripture: this idea that God often uses what is deemed on earth as weak to display his glory. **Verse 2:** *You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength…*this is a good reminder to us all – the campers we interact with – the greatest and best and the ones who challenge us, God can and does use to display his glory, his strength, his character. It is not up to us to decide that campers cannot be old enough to proclaim God. For as God has shown – even babies and children can shout out God's goodness and amazing creation!

I can tell you from personal experience – some of the most profound wisdom has been spoken from some of the youngest hearts I know!! Never underestimate the ability of campers to not only understand, but be proclaimers of God's amazing, boundless love and creativity!

Verse 3 is another reminder of the boundlessness of God's creation:

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—

Did you know:

* With the naked eye you can see about 5000 stars. With a 4-inch telescope you can see about 2 million stars. With a 200-inch mirror of a great observatory you can see more than a billion stars.

* The universe – just our universe – is so big that if you traveled across it at the speed of light it would take 40 billion years to reach the edge.

These great heavens along with the moon and sun, scripture tells us, are the work of God's fingers! A universe that would take us 40 billion years at the speed of light to get to the edge of, is the work of God's fingers. How boundless is our God?!? Pretty boundless if you ask me!

In **verses 5-6** we are reminded of our true status with God:

Yet you made them only a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 *You gave them charge of everything you made,*
putting all things under their authority…

Try this…read the text this way and see if it doesn't change the way you feel about these words:

Yet you made ME only a little lower than God
and crowned ME with glory and honor.
6 *You gave US charge of everything you made,*
putting all things under OUR authority…

How does that make you feel? YOU were made just a little lower than God…YOU!!! Not just some random person somewhere – but YOU! We are part of God's amazing creation and not just part, but the crowning glory. That line in verse 5 is a foreshadowing of what your campers will experience on Friday – how they are God's crowning glory! And so are you! Don't skip over this fact too quickly – realizing, embracing our crowning glory-ness is part of being able to see ALL of God's amazing creation!

Verse 6 is where our responsible as part of God's creation comes in. While I don't want the whole focus of this day to be here – it is helpful to touch on it, as being given "charge" over creation doesn't mean we can use God's creation – land, animals, resources, people, however we want with no regard to how it impacts (though this is largely what we do too often), rather, God gave us a responsibility to care for creation. To care about creation. And that means caring for the person sitting next to you as much as it means caring for the trees and air. To quote Spiderman's uncle (or in reality, a document from the time of the French revolution)…"With great power come great responsibility." The power we are given in being in "charge of" everything comes with great responsibility to care for it…including people.

Oh Lord our Lord – how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Your boundless love has given us so much
And we would be wise to care deeply for it all.

Things to remember about campers and Bible study:

* Today is your first day of Bible study – your campers are still getting to know each other and still figuring out what and who is "safe." You can **help create a safe space** by setting/creating a group covenant around how your crew will treat one another. Suggestions of good practices are things like:
    - We will listen to each other because each voice is important
    - We will hold each other's stories within our group…meaning we will not share someone else's story outside our cabin/Bible study group.
    - We consider everyone to be equal and so will treat each other as we would like to be treated

With younger groups it can be as easy as:
- we will listen when someone else is talking
- we will treat each other with kindness
- we will not talk negatively about another person in our group or share what they shared with anyone else

* Sometimes campers have a **hard time paying attention.** Here are some ideas that could help campers engage:
    - have a talking stone – when you hold the rock, that's your time to talk
    - have everyone turn to a partner and share their answer with their partner…then have the partner's share each other's answers with the group or simple each person share what they shared with their partner

- have everyone stand up and once they have spoken have them sit down (or vice versa) while you're walking to your Bible study spot, walk for a short way then stop and ask a question. After everyone has answered, walk a short way further, stop ask another question. Keep this going till you get to your Bible study spot.

* A lot of campers won't have much experience with Bible study or the experience they've had has been Sunday School lessons or VBS. WE don't want to teach them that Bible study is boring**. Bible study is so much more than just reading scripture!** If we relegate Bible study to just looking at words on a page – we don't let the text live in our campers' lives. Campers, especially the younger ones like to move and be active. The activities are just as important as the reading of text!

* **The enthusiasm of the group will never rise above the enthusiasm of the leadership.** Which means if you aren't engaged, if you are bored with what you are doing – you can guarantee your campers are the same…or less.

Actual Possible Bible Study

Intro Today's Theme:
Items Needed: Booklet by Sands on some of the cool creation things around camp
How amazing it is to be able to discover and talk about God's creation in the middle of a particularly spectacular part of that creation! To start today, you are going to take time to notice things about the creation around you. If you started this while walking to your Bible study site – that'd be great! The booklet is a resource to get you started – but help your campers be creative – encourage them to find/see things. If they ask what something is and you don't know the answer – I bet Sands does!

Once to your Bible study site say something like:
Isn't it amazing all the details in God's creation? Let's just sit here for a minute and listen and pay attention to what is around us. *(Some younger campers in particular will dig around in the dirt, play with rocks, etc – don't discourage this right now – let them experience nature.)* After no more than a minute – ask::

- What did you notice?
- What did you hear?
- What did you smell?

Did you realize that God's creation was made for us? For us to enjoy and take care of! How cool is God to make a world this amazing for us?

Have any of you seen something in God's creation that was amazing?
(as the leader you start – share an amazing place you've traveled, or a beautiful sunset you've seen, etc. Be sure and describe it in detail – your campers will follow your lead. If you say – I saw a pretty sunset and leave it at that – they'll do the same. Tell them where you were, who you were with, what the colors were, what made you go "wow!", etc)

Creation to Create
Items needed: whatever campers find around them
Tell your campers you are going to give them a chance to be a Creator. They have 5 minutes to create something that has meaning for them…it could be a model of something they like, a word that shows how they feel or a word they love, it could be something creative but has meaning for them…and they have to be able to share what's meaningful about it to them. They can use whatever they can find around them, but they cannot hurt the creation around them (so no cutting down trees or ripping off branches, etc).

Whatever they make is FINE! It's not the quality of the project – it's simply an exercise in helping them see the creation around them and finding meaning in it.

After everyone is done – have each person go around and share what they made. You as the leader go first. Be sure and reaffirm each and every camper – this is not space for criticism! You could even encourage your campers to compliment each other!

Bible: Have everyone turn to Psalm 104:24-34
Items needed: Bibles
A great "trick" to teach them is that Psalms is in the middle of the Bible – so if they close their Bible and open it up in the middle they should be in Psalms!

Help Note: There is always the possibility you will have a camper or campers that have never opened a Bible before. Don't assume kids know their way around a Bible just because they're at camp! You might have to do helping, or if you have a camper who does know their way, allow them to help another camper. Never start reading scripture until everyone is there!!

Help Note: You will most likely end up with different versions of the Bible – help campers understand there are many different versions of the Bible – they all say basically the same thing – but they use different words. That's OK – we can still read together even if the words are exactly the same. Sometimes different words help us understand things better. If you don't address this especially with younger campers – you'll hear a lot of "mine's different"!

Once everyone has found Psalms – introduce the Psalms saying something like:
- Does anyone know anything about the Psalms? *(let answers come, but don't expect them)*
- The Psalms are the songs of worship of the ancient church. Just like we sing songs at camp the people of old sang songs when they worshipped God too. The Psalms are some of the songs that were sung.

Some Psalms are still sung today – here at camp we sing:
- The Rock - Psalm 18
- More Precious Than Silver - Psalm 119:72
- Just Be - Psalm 46:10
- Psalm 121 - I Lift my Eyes

Just to name a few!

Let's look at this Psalm 104 as see what it says!
We're going to read Psalm 104:24-30
Read the Psalm round robin style – meaning each person reads a verse.
(Help Note: Always allow campers to pass if they are uncomfortable reading out loud. Never shame

a camper for not wanting to read!)

Once you have read through the text ask:

- What things in creation do you see in here? *(creatures, ocean, ocean life, Leviathan-be ready to explain what this is!, food, breath)*
- What do you think it means that God created them "in wisdom"? *(possible answers: God knew what God was doing, God put things together in ways to make sure they worked, God knows just how to create things so they were connected to each other, etc)*

(Help Note: There doesn't have to be a "right" answer in a question like this – it's more opening campers up to the idea that you can talk about scripture without there always having to be a "right" answer!)

Movement: On the Spot
Items needed: nothing

Have everyone stand up. Tell them to walk around within view and find something they think is interesting and can describe. It has to be able to be seen from the circle. Don't pick it up. Once they have found their object, tell them to come sit back down in the circle. Ask for a volunteer to be "on the spot." They need to keep their object in mind and answer yes and no questions about it. But they can only answer with yes or no. Tell the group they have up to 15 questions they can ask the person "on the spot." Questions have to be yes or no questions. See if anyone can guess what the "on the spot" object is. If after 15 questions the group has not figured it out have the "on the spot" person get up and show the group what they had picked. Take time to let 1-2 campers be "on the spot."

This is a game you can play anywhere at just about any time – especially if you're waiting somewhere! Remind you campers if they don't get a chance right now – there will probably plenty of time throughout the week to be "on the spot".

Bible: Psalm 104:33-35

Have everyone sit down – re-locate Psalm 104 and start at verse 33. Before you start the reading – tell your campers something like this:
One way God has shown us his love is through all the things God has created for us throughout this world.

Let's take a look at what the psalm writer wants to do! Read verses 33-34 (ask for a 1-2 volunteers)
After the text has been read – ask:

- What does the psalm writer say they will do? *(sing as long as I live, praise God, have pleasing thoughts, rejoice in the Lord)*
- When you see something amazing what do you want to do? *(share with others, say wow!, etc)*
- When you know God has done amazing things like creating all this what would you want to say to God?

Unique Creation

Items needed: ½ sheet white paper, colored pencils or crayons
Tell campers: We're going to take some time now to create with creation. Each of you will get a piece of paper and have access to the crayons/pencils. You can take up to two different colors

at a time. When you're done with a color, please bring it back and trade it out so others can use that color too. I invite you to walk around (stay within view of me) and make etchings of nature.

What is an etching? Find an interesting rough rock or a tree or leaf, etc. Put your paper over the top of the object you have chosen and rub your pencil/crayon over the paper. If you press hard enough and the object has enough ridges/roughness – it should leave an imprint on your paper.

Create a picture that is composed of all these etchings on top of each other. Combine color and texture to create your own masterpiece!

Make sure to give everyone a chance to share their masterpiece! Then encourage them to stick it in their Bible to remind them of the beauty of creation.

Bible: Psalm 8

Have everyone turn to Psalm 8.
Tell them this psalm is about God's greatest creation! Read round robin style again. Once you've read the whole psalm ask:

- What do you think is God's greatest creation? *(humans)*
  Help note: you might get some night sky, stars answers too and you can say those are pretty amazing creations aren't they? There's another – can you find it? This helps honor the answer while also directing to the greatest creation – without telling them they are wrong. You could also honor that answer by saying – hey how would you like to really see the stars? Maybe some night we can go up to the ball field and lay on our backs and look at the stars! That'd be pretty awesome wouldn't it? Note though – if you say they can do this – you have to make sure it happens!

- What does the psalm say about this creation? (*God thinks of them, made them a little lower than the angels, crowned them with glory and honor, put them in charge of everything God made)*
  - *You could do a little talking here about what it means to have been put in charge of God's creation and how we do this well or not so well.*

- How do you feel about being God's greatest creation? Has anyone ever told you that you are God's greatest creation before?

- Do you believe you are? If you struggle to believe that – do you know what gets in the way of your believing?

- Let's think about this for a minute – look at the people around the circle – just like you – each person here is one of God's masterpieces. How amazing is that? This week as we learn about God's boundless love – we want to start off recognizing God's boundless love shows up in who and what God creates. And that means each one of you. Let's look at each other – what is the same/different about all of us? What makes us each unique? Let's see if we can figure it out!

Differences will be easier for campers to identify so help them ask questions of each other to find differences. Questions about what they each like to do, where they've traveled, what their involved in at school or outside of school, how many siblings they have, etc.

Closing Prayer

Let's take a moment and pray for the beauty of God's creation that is us this week. I'll pray today, but I want to encourage you to try praying for us at some point during the week! You can do it! You can pray something like this:

Dear God – we thank you so much for the beauty of your creation. The beauty we find in the trees and grass, in the mountains, sky and sun. Thank you for the beauty found in each one of us. Help us learn to love all that you have created. Help us to open our eyes to the beauty of your creation all week long. Thank you God, for your boundless love which created all this for us! Amen!

Getting to Know God's Creation at RTLC
Share these verses with your campers from Job:

"Just ask the animals, and they will teach you.
Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.
8 Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.
Let the fish in the sea speak to you.
10 For the life of every living thing is in his hand,
and the breath of every human being.
Job 15:7-8,10

Tell your campers – This whole week is about God's boundless love for us and the ways that love shows up for us. If we accept that God's creation includes the animals, birds, earth, fish and every living thing – which includes you, me, and everyone here - what do you think they might be able to teach us this week?

Each day I'm going to ask you where you are seeing the beauty of God's creation. My hope is that you will be paying attention to the dogs and the birds and each other and see what you can learn from all of God's creation! We'll take time somewhere in each day to reflect where we're seeing the beauty!

For starters today – let's take a different route back into camp. Take note and point out things along that way that you think are beautiful or amazing in God's creation*! (Make sure you leave enough time to take a different route back to wherever you need to go next.*

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

- You can make time after campfire some night to sit and look at the stars, or go up to the ball field and watch the night sky.
- You could go on a creek walk and take time to notice creation along the way.
- Take the etching idea further and create larger masterpieces. You could also include each group member's fingerprints using either an ink pad or paint

- Have your campers write their own song/poem/psalm of praise to God for creation. Have them share it with the whole camp!
- Give campers permission to take their phones with them and capture creation around them. Take time to share the pictures taken at night devos or around a meal. Encourage them to look beyond just the surface or "big" things – look closely, deeply.
- Do a "circle hike" with your Bible study group. Grab a Hula Hoop from the office. Lay the hula hoop on the ground. Have your group lay around it, facing in. Spend five to ten minutes seeing what you find inside of the hula hoop.

For a more advanced group

- You could delve into God's creation in people – and talk about how we negate God's beauty in ourselves and others. Then dream up ways to honor the beauty in people this week. Make a plan and actually do some of the things you talk about. If you do this – know you may open baggage campers bring with them. Be ready to affirm their feelings AND help them begin to see the beauty in themselves. They also might not trust the group with themselves – so you could keep the conversation focused on how God's beauty is negated in others.

- Another way to take a group deeper to is keep asking – what do you see beyond that? If they are looking at the creation around them and are just naming things they can see from where they are sitting – have them stand up walk around – look under things or deeper at something – for instance you might see a tree at first, but when looking closer you might find a squirrels nest or fire damage on the trunk. Gently pushing to go beyond the obvious is often fun and amazing!

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

- **Around the World** – celebrate the diversity of God's creation in people/places
- Foods from different lands – Mexican, Italian, Chinese, French, etc
- Worship could incorporate different languages, one worship could focus on the creation of nature and the evening could focus on the beauty found in God's creation of people
- Activities/All Camps
- Nature Treasure Hunt – have to look for different things around the site – certain point values for different things
- World Kids' Games – there are websites like:
  https://www.parents.com/fun/games/educational/games-from-around-the-world/
  https://off.com/en/inspiration/family-fun/5-backyard-games-from-around-the-world
  https://www.inculturepparent.com/five-fun-games-from-around-the-world/
- have whole camp do nature etchings (see study above)

- **All Creatures Great and Small** (or anything to do with animals) – celebrate the
  Foods – no silverware meal, eating/drinking out of bowls
  Worship – from animals point of view – looking at creation as the animals see it, songs with animals in them or creation flavored songs
  Activities/All Camps:
    - Charades based on animal themes

- Animal based games: https://kidactivities.net/animal-theme/

- **I Love to Go A Wandering** – hiking theme all day
  Foods – things that you could take "on the trail" or cook over a campfire
  Worship- could incorporate things Compass Points does on trail, or message about the Wandering we do through life – what we see along the way
  Activities/All Camp – evening hike, star gazing, relays that involved packing and unpacking backpacks, "Wandering" hunt – groups have to wander around and find certain things or People who have each group do a certain task before signing off

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES, THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Camp songs:
The Rock, More Precious than Silver, Psalm 25 (To You Oh Lord I lift UP My Soul), Dance With Me, Hippo Song, Ancient of Days, God of Wonders, Did You Feel The Mountains Tremble, How Great is Our God, Psalm 121 (I Lift My Eyes Up)

Other songs:
Creation Sings – Stuart Townsend:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf8xKiC1dq0&ab_channel=ScottBacher
All Creation Sing – Feast Worship
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kotCEmdrb9o&ab_channel=FeastWorship
Let All Things now Living (it's a hymn but could be done in a fun way – even though none of the videos show this)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL1YF2iS1TY&ab_channel=DanSingsHymns

Additional Scripture:
John 1:1-4 NLT In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He existed in the beginning with God. **3** God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. **4** The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

Ephesians 2:10 NLT
For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Isaiah 55:12-13 NLT
You will live in joy and peace.
The mountains and hills will burst into song,
and the trees of the field will clap their hands!
13 Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow.
Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up.
These events will bring great honor to the Lord's name;
they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love."

Another Story:
From: https://biologos.org/articles/tactile-wonder-tacit-truths-seeing-ourselves-in-adam-and-eve *(you could potentially use this as an activity sometime – using things found around you sticks, stones, etc. or use it as an idea with clay)*

Like most kids, my kids love to play with Legos and Play-Doh. So, one day, I got an idea about how I might communicate the power and wonder of the creation story. I had my kids pull their enormous box of Legos off their toy shelf and construct a "garden." We built trees and alligators and dogs and fish. We put them all together and set the stage for the next part of the project. They would construct little human figures out of Play-Doh. My kids, being sharp, asked if they could use the gingerbread-man cookie cutter to simply stamp out the figures. But I told them these had to be figures that they made and fashioned with their own hands. It took them a while, much longer than using the cookie cutter would have taken. But eventually they had two three-dimensional model humans.

When they were finished, we talked together about how much effort it took to make the figures. We talked about how much thought and work at first went into building the world that they would live in. Then how much thoughtfulness and care it took to create the Play-Doh humans. The impact of such thoughtfulness and care was no more a theoretical idea, but something they had experienced with their own hands. If such thoughtfulness and care was required by them to make a fake world, how much thoughtfulness and care did God give in making this real world?

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

- The activities Juniors can all do – I might suggest you keep the conversation more about the creation around them and leave ample time for discovering the natural world around them.
- Since Juniors are actually really interested in the world around them – taking time with Sands booklet perhaps each day, discovering something new could be a lot of fun, go exploring in different areas of the camp to see what you can find – doesn't have to be a long way, just new each day.
- Since Juniors haven't always done a lot of self-reflection at this point – and they still spend more time in "concrete thinking" rather than "abstract thinking" it might be harder for them to "go deeper" when talking about themselves as God's creation. So you might approach seeing themselves as God's creation something like this: have them make lists/talk about visible things that make them, them (eye color, hair color, athletic/musical abilities, height, etc). Then have them talk about things that make them, them – that aren't visible: likes, dislikes, passions, fears. Remind them – God created them in their uniqueness and God thinks they are good!! God loves the creation that is them!

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

- High Schoolers are notoriously self-centered. It's not a judgement call – just fact at where they are in life. The world revolves around what they want/need. Sometimes it is hard to get them to appreciate what's around them that's not directly related to them. But if you can get them to step out of that self-focus – they are very insightful! Challenge

them to see below the surface – when you say what do you see in creation – a leaf, a tree – are great Junior answers, but high schoolers can look "below the surface" challenge them to do just that. Not just for natural creation but for humans too!

- When working with the things in Sands booklet – give them a brief description or show a picture and then have them find the tree, rock, etc. Don't show it to them – let them discover it for themselves!
- While things like "On the Spot" might not be as attractive to high schoolers, delving into the scriptures and what they say can be. So, while with the younger, setting more movement is always better. Some high school groups would prefer to sit and talk deeply. Let them. Let them ask questions. You don't have to have the "right answers". When they ask a question – ask them what they think.
- Challenge your group early on to see the beauty in each other. So often their inward focus, which hides their fears and scars, keeps them sarcastic, judgy and not so nice to others that they perceive as lesser than themselves. Challenge that right away – and create a group where each person is celebrated for who they are.
- Spend more time on the section where they are naming difference and similarities. It's easy to name the differences but keep digging until they understand they are more alike than different. Some questions to ask to go about this could be:
    - What are some of your fears?
    - What's one thing you wish you could change about yourself?
    - What do you do when you are embarrassed or made to feel small?
    - What do you love about yourself?
    - What would you change about your school if you could?
    - What would you change/keep the same about your family if you could?

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: "O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.**2** You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.**3** When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers -- the moon and the stars you set in place --**4** what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? **5** Yet you made them only a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.**6** You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority --**7** the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals,**8** the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.**9** O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!" Psalm 8

Reflection: Today was all about God's boundless love shown to us through creation. We spent time today investigating and learning more about the beauty of God's creation in the world around us. We even found trees that smell like butterscotch! But we also reminded ourselves that the crowning glory of God's creation is – humans. Us! How amazing is it that the God who created our universe (and more) – a universe it would take us 40 billion years at the speed of light to get to the edge of – is the same God who counts us his crowning glory! Us! In all our messiness and wholeness, our whining and rejoicing, our wandering away and longing to follow

– we're God's masterpieces of creation! Today we celebrated that and looked for the beauty of God's creation – not just in trees, skies, mountains, and sun, but in the faces of those around us.

Activity: Take time this week as a family to immerse yourselves in the beauty of God's creation. Go for a walk, a hike, a run. Jump in the car and drive up a mountain or find a flat place to watch the sunset. Take time to talk about the beauty you see in the world around you. Then take a few moments and let each family member share the beauty of God's creation they see in one or all the members of your family. Use this time to reflect, but also to build up the most beautiful of God's creation – you!

Prayer: Mighty and Amazing God – you spoke and the world we know was created from nothing. You moved your hands and crafted the oceans and stars in the sky. You created vast universes in space so huge we can barely comprehend. And you crafted us – shape and mold us in your image and call us good. Help us live into that identity – beloved creation of God. Help us see ourselves as you truly see us and walk in the power you have given us. Give us hope and courage to treat your creation – all of it – with love and care. In your name and power we pray, Amen.

K. FOR SUMMER STAFF

- Read through the theme verses for this summer…what jumps out at you today?
- What beauty are you seeing in creation this week?
- What beauty are you seeing in humans this week?
- How is God creating/at work in you this week?
- Where are you being God's crowning glory this week? In what ways?