

## **Connected: Created to Belong**

### **Module 4: To What Do We Belong?**

God is BIG! So is the body of his church, his kingdom and the world he created. We belong to all of this. Even in God's bigness, we see that he loves us deeply and cares for our smallest worries. He desires to have a relationship with us.

In lesson 1, students will unpack what it means to actively belong to **A Living God**. We have a choice in this relationship with God — he is open and always there, but we've also got to show up. Looking at the story of the Samaritan woman, we see that God offers us something new: living water. He loves beyond cultural boundaries and sees who we really are. Students will have an opportunity to open up to God by writing him a letter.

In lesson 2, we see that our relationships with God mean we belong to a **Living Body** —the church. We each have a purpose in this larger body. Students will learn that whatever they have to offer needs to be laced with love and the right attitude and heart. Our offerings are nothing without love at the forefront. In this lesson, students learn to encourage one another in love and make note of one another's gifts.

Lesson 3 opens our eyes to the larger, global context of our belonging. We belong to the **Living Kingdom of God**, which includes all expressions of Christianity. As we find ourselves in a Baptist tradition, focus is placed on asking questions about the various Baptist Distinctives. In this lesson, it is recommended that you invite an expert (your pastor or others as suggested in the lesson plan) to facilitate this part of your group time. Towards the end, you make a choice with the youth to visit a church from a different denomination to experience worship with our global brothers and sisters.

In lesson 4, we observe **God's Creativity** and his vast creation in nature. We belong, also, to this world he created and we can draw parallels about our belonging to him and his creativity in our lives by seeing nature. Go on a nature walk and wrap up with scripture that highlights his strength and provision in our lives. We can safely and fully abide in his love and in his plan.

**Leader's note:** Please read ahead and check your church's child protection policy to determine the steps needed to go on a small nature excursion. Permission forms may be needed to leave the church premises.

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### **Module 4: To What Do We Belong?**

#### **Lesson 1: A Living God**

#### **Spiritual Aims**

Students will hopefully:

- realize that nothing can separate us from God's love — no emotion, action or fear
- actively engage with the living God

#### **Lesson Objectives**

Students will:

- recognize that they have a choice in belonging — they can choose to belong and take ownership of that reality in an active relationship with the living God
- use a story to connect to other stories in their own lives
- write their questions to God

#### **Materials Needed**

- 1 Scrabble game per 4 students, with all the letter tiles available to them for that specific board (if you cannot get enough games, allow as many as 8 students per game)
- Camera or cell phone with camera
- Optional: 1 laptop computer or iPad (to make camera images bigger)
- Optional: 1 LCD projector to show images
- 1 large sheet of chart paper per 4 students
- Optional: Tape
- 1 pen per student
- 1 Bible per student [teaching tip 7]
- 1 sign that reads "Fully Agree"
- 1 sign that reads "Fully Disagree"
- 2 buckets or offering plates (1 labelled "World" and 1 labelled "Jesus")
- 1 copy of Appendix A per 22 students (cut words into separate pieces below the headings)
- 1 sheet of paper per student

1 envelope per student

#### **Pre-Lesson Preparation**

- Set up Scrabble boards on a central table and have all the letter tiles for each game to the side or in baskets, ready to be made into words.
- Have a camera ready to use.
- Have chart paper (1 large sheet per 4 students) ready to be placed in the centre of the space during Action activities.

- Make labels titled “World” and “Jesus” and attach separately to the 2 buckets or offering plates.

## Minds On

**Prompt:** On the table in front of us are some Scrabble boards. I figured we’d play Scrabble the whole time... Kidding! We are going to use the Scrabble letter tiles as a way to check-in with how we’re all doing.

### What Word...?:

1. Have 4 students at each board.
2. After you ask 1 of the following questions, students can use the letters to spell out 1-word answers and place them on the board.
  - a. What word describes how you felt during the last period at school today?
  - b. What word describes how you are feeling in this moment?
  - c. What word describes you when you are feeling down?
  - d. What word describes you when you are feeling happy or excited?
  - e. What word describes how you react when you are under pressure?
  - f. What word describes you when you are unsure about something?
  - g. What word describes you when you are the most relaxed?
3. The words can connect to other words on the board. Once their words have been placed on the board, have students raise their hands to indicate they are done.
4. After each question, have leaders take a photo of each board.
5. Remove the pieces for the next question.
6. Repeat steps 2 to 4 until all the questions have been asked or 10 minutes have elapsed.

**Leader’s note:** Ensure there are no offensive, suggestive or curse words used in this activity.

**Prompt:** It’s interesting to note how we feel in different situations. I bet a lot of our feelings are similar — or at least we can all relate to them. We’ll pass the camera around (or show the photos on a larger screen), and I’ll read the corresponding question. If you have the camera, please read the words aloud from each picture that corresponds with that question. We’ll note the similarities and differences.

**Leader’s note:** The goal of this activity is to get youth thinking about their various emotions and contexts. We’ll move on to learn that nothing is too big for God to handle.

## Action

**Prompt:** As we saw during our Scrabble activity, we have a variety of feelings and reactions to different scenarios in our lives. Often, we might feel like no one gets us. But we also saw some similarities in our human feelings. Sometimes it’s hard to believe that God understands us, and even wants us when we’re feeling at our worst. But the Bible tells us that nothing can separate us from God’s love — that we belong to him. The Bible is also full of regular people who feel many things, get themselves into all kinds of situations and don’t feel worthy of God’s fullness and abundance. But God doesn’t hold that against them or us, and he demonstrates his commitment to us in many ways.

**Think/Pair/Share:** [teaching tip 2] What are some things that you think separate people from experiencing God? Be specific.

**Leader's note:** While students are sharing with their peers, place chart paper in the centre of your space and provide pens for writing. For the following activity, you can choose to have 4 students per chart paper, or tape 2 to 3 sheets together and have up to 8 students around them.

**Idea Connections:**

1. After Think/Pair/Share, have students choose a sheet of chart paper. Ensure they are at a different paper than their partners from the earlier activity and that there are 4 students per sheet.
2. Students will write some of the ideas that came from their Think/Pair/Share onto the chart paper.
3. After they have written their ideas, have them read other ideas on the paper. If there are any similar ideas, they can draw a link between the m.

**Prompt:** We can see on our papers here that a lot can come in between us and our understanding that God wants us to experience his living spirit and work in our lives. We're going to read a short story about a woman who was a Samaritan. She was different than Jesus, who was a Jew. Usually, these people did not associate with one another. She had a lot of pain in her past and didn't believe that Jesus would talk to her — or that he knew her so well and still chose to speak with her. Let's look at Jesus' response to this woman when they met at a well.

**Voting with Your Feet:**

1. Have a student hand out Bibles to each student.
2. Ask everyone to look up John 4:1–26.
3. Read through the scripture by having each student read 1 verse [teaching tip 6].
4. Once you have read the entire passage, ask the students to stand up and move to the centre of the room.
5. Read each of the following statements individually:
  - a. Speaking with a Samaritan woman was an appropriate thing for Jesus to do.
  - b. Jesus crossed a line when he revealed that he knew about her past and her various husbands.
  - c. Without having met someone before, it would be alarming if they knew everything about you.
  - d. If you didn't feel judged, you would be comfortable with the person knowing things about you.
  - e. It would be easy to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah.
  - f. The "living water" Jesus talks about sounds inviting.
  - g. Jesus is kind and understanding with the Samaritan woman.
  - h. Jesus represents a living and working God — not a passive one.
6. After each statement, ask students to move along a "spectrum of responses". At 1 end of the room place a sign that says "Fully Agree". At the other end of the room, place a sign that reads "Fully Disagree". The centre will be neutral. Students should be prepared to offer a reason for their vote.
7. After each vote, ask 1 to 2 students to share their reasons.

**Prompt:** Thanks for participating in that activity. Let's find our seats again. In this story it seems that Jesus is offering a different way to live and be nourished. There's the world's way and Christ's way. Let's talk about that for a bit.

### **Deciding Between 2 Buckets:**

1. Place 2 buckets (or offering plates) labelled “World” and “Jesus” at the front of the room.
2. Hand out 1 cut-out from Appendix A per student. (If you have more than 22 students, there will be some duplicate cut-outs.)
3. Students will have a minute to decide which bucket they think it should be placed in and be ready to offer a reason why. If they’re not able to decide, let them know it’s okay.
4. Each student will take a turn to read their word (if someone else has the same word, have them pair up). They will drop it into the appropriate bucket and offer their reasons. If they’re not sure, the group can offer suggestions for which bucket to drop it into.
5. Before you begin, ask students if they have any questions.

**Prompt:** In this exercise, we’re trying to identify what the world offers and what Jesus offers. It can be tricky sometimes, but these are decisions we actually make every day, whether we realize it or not.

### **Consolidate/Debrief**

**Prompt:** Sometimes it might seem hard to experience this living God. It may actually feel invasive — knowing that he knows, sees and loves even our deepest, most secret selves. But Jesus has all of those incredible things to offer us. God doesn’t force his way into our lives, but he is constantly there and nothing separates us from his love and movement in our life. We’re going to take time as we close to write God a letter.

### **Letters to God:**

1. Give each student an envelope, a sheet of paper and a pen.
2. Have them address the envelope to themselves (e.g., write their name, address, postal code).
3. At the top of their letters, they should start with “Living God:”.
4. For the rest of the letter, they can ask God whatever question they want, including those about moments or emotions that feel even too big to handle.
  - **Optional prompt:** We have a choice in engaging with our living God. You belong to him. He shows us this with his love and patience and by letting us make a choice to move towards him. He doesn’t force us — and he welcomes our concerns, questions and doubts. So tell him about them!
5. Give students 5 to 7 minutes to write their letters. Once they are done, have them place their letters in their envelopes, seal them and give them to you.

**Prompt:** I’ll collect your letters in sealed envelopes and send them to you in a month. It’ll be cool to see what God has done in 1 month of your life and in response to your words.

**Leader’s note:** Remember to mail all the letters in 1 month!

Read 2 Corinthians 6:16b and Romans 8:38–39 aloud to the students.

2 Corinthians 6:16b (NIV): “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

Romans 8:38–39 (NIV): “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Conclude in prayer, with something like, “God, we thank you for walking among us and giving us access to you. We thank you that we belong to you, a God who knows us and cares for us...”

## Appendix A: Deciding Between 2 Buckets

**Leader's note:** Feel free to add your own words

### Jesus Offers:

Living Water

Unconditional Love

Understanding

Patience

Sees Us

Truth

Selflessness

Trust

Joy

Rest

Strength

### World Offers:

Religion

Conditional Love

Rules

Baggage

Lies

Our Past

Selfishness

Temptation

Arrogance

Anger

Apathy

## Connected: Created to Belong

### Module 4: To What Do We Belong?

#### Lesson 2: A Living Body

#### Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- love, be patient, persevere and encourage all “body parts”
- to see that all “body parts” are vital in their contributions

#### Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- identify what it looks like to support the living body of God (i.e., the church)
- be able to list what forms of love they desire to practise in the church body and encourage one another based on their discoveries
- grasp that God calls them to a deeper reality — “the most excellent way” of love — and that without love, the body is nothing

#### Materials Needed

- 2 blindfolds
- 2 tennis balls (each a different colour if possible)
- Timer (e.g. iPhone, stopwatch, etc.)
- 4 small prizes (e.g., Smarties, gum, Tic Tacs, stickers, etc.) [teaching tip 5]
- 1 copy of Appendix B per 2 students
- 1 copy of Appendix C per 2 students
- 2 sheets of chart paper
- 2 markers
- Tape
- 1 sheet of paper per student
- 1 pen per student

#### Minds On

**Yes/No Game:** This game will get students thinking about their approaches in relating and loving others in their church body and communities. They will notice that the way they interact makes a huge difference in the growth or stagnation of the broader community.

#### Round 1:

1. Gather with your students in a fairly open space (e.g., gym, recreation room, hallway).
2. Divide your students into 2 groups by directing half of the students to move to your right and the other half to move to your left.
3. Instruct each group to choose 1 person to blindfold.

4. Have the chosen 2 people leave the space with a volunteer leader to help get them blindfolded.
6. While they are gone, give each group a tennis ball. Explain that it needs to be hidden somewhere in the space — not too hidden, but also not too obvious.
7. Have the 2 blindfolded students come back into the space.
8. Explain that each group can only use the word “no” to help their teammate find the hidden tennis ball. They cannot say anything else, including “hot”, “cold”, “yes”, “keep going”, “so close”, etc. They may only use the word “no”.
9. They also have to speak louder than the other group so that each blindfolded student knows which voices to follow to find the appropriate ball.
10. Set a timer and note how long Round 1 takes. Record each group’s time when they find the tennis ball.

### **Round 2:**

1. Choose new students to leave the space with the volunteer leader to become blindfolded.
2. Have each team hide their tennis ball in a new place.
3. Have the new blindfolded students come back into the space.
4. Explain that for this round, they can only use the word “yes” to help direct their teammate to find the tennis ball.
5. Again, record how long it takes each team to find the tennis ball.
6. Provide each person who was blindfolded with a small prize for a job well done!

**Leader’s note:** The task may not have been accomplished faster in Round 2; however, the main point is determining how encouraged (or not encouraged) the volunteers felt in their experiences.

### **Ask:**

1. Was it hard to just say the word “no” in the first round?
2. Did it take longer in Round 1 for your teammate to find the tennis ball?
3. What happened in Round 2 when you could use the word “yes”? Did your teammate feel more encouraged because of it? Did they complete the task quicker?

**Prompt:** It matters how we talk to and how we help one another. We can’t do everything alone — and when we belong to a larger group than ourselves, so we’ve got to learn how to work together. The church is like this.

**Leader’s note:** When we have a “no” attitude, people become discouraged and frustrated and the work takes (or at least feel as if it takes) much longer. When we switch our perspectives and speak with love and encouragement (“yes!”), the task speeds up and everybody senses the positivity.

### **Action**

**Prompt:** Scripture talks about the church being like a body — we need all parts to function. This is what creates community. We belong to our church and to our youth group families. Each of us has something unique to offer, but beyond this, God is calling us to something bigger: love! He says through Paul, “I will show you the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31b, NIV) to do community — to be the body of me, Christ. And that way is to love.

**Leader's note:** If it makes sense, invite each group to go find a new spot to work that is theirs. While groups are working, rotate between them to hear their thoughts and engage in discussion. The scripture sets are long, but worth diving into, so if you have more time, allow them to go a little bit longer. A spokesperson will share their group's answers.

1. Invite students to form 2 groups again by giving them a number (1 or 2).
2. Provide each group with a sheet of chart paper and a marker. Give Appendix B to everyone in Group 1 and Appendix C to Group 2.
3. Each group will have 15 to 20 minutes to read and answer the questions.
4. Have them record their answers on the chart paper.
5. Invite each group to gather back in the main space.
6. Have each spokesperson place his or her chart paper on the wall beside each other.
7. Ask Group 1 to share their summary first. Then ask Group 2 to follow. (If you have more than 1 group looking at the same passage, have them all give their summaries first before moving to the second passage.)
8. Ask students if they can explain the connection between the 2 passages.

### **Voting with Your Feet:**

1. Move everyone into a large circle. Instruct them to listen to each question that you will ask and then put a foot into the centre of the circle if they agree.
2. Ask the following questions:
  - a. Is the "far better way" or "most excellent way" to belong and function to a church body through love?
  - b. If we behaved as if that was the truth, do you think that more people would feel and know that they belong to a living body (i.e., the living church)?
  - c. In our game earlier, were we more productive and encouraged because people spoke and interacted with us in positivity and love?

**Prompt:** God cares about how you use your gifts, but if you forget to love in the midst of utilizing what you're good at, he says it's less functional and no good. In the early formation of the church, the body of Christ was small and they called themselves a fellowship (a group of believers living and trusting in Christ). They formed this fellowship through the practice of loving one another with their actions and words. We have an opportunity in our own church and in our own youth group to belong and partake in our own version of fellowship. Love is not a new concept, but practicing it can be a challenge. Let's get real and practical about it!

### **Consolidate/Debrief**

**Prompt:** Group 2 made a list of the qualities of love that they gravitated towards in 1 Corinthians 13. To close tonight, we will tell one another what we think our friends are good at and we will identify how they love with actions. We will be writing these observations. For example, "Amanda, you're great at helping older people at church — you show your love with patience and kindness — you always put others first".

Invite a student to hand out a paper and pen to each student.

**Prompt:** Write your name at the top of the paper. We will pass our papers around and each time you receive a new paper, you can offer a word of encouragement by noting your friend's gift and how they show love. If you're stuck, take a look at Group 2's chart paper or look up the scripture again (1 Corinthians 13). Let's start by passing our papers to the person on our right.

After about 2 minutes, we'll stop and pass to the next person until our papers make it back to their owners.

**Leader's note:** Depending on the size of your group, you may want to separate students into groups of 8 people or less.

**Prompt:** You now have a paper of encouragement from people in your own present-day fellowship. We not only belong to our living God, but also to a living body! When we speak and act with love, this body is strong and will function well. Let's thank God for the gifts he's given us, and also this community of friends who have encouraged us tonight.

Close in prayer.

## Appendix B: 1 Corinthians 12:4–31 (MSG)

Read the passage below and then answer these questions as a group on the chart paper:

1. Why is the church compared to a physical body?
2. Does this model of the body, or church, represent life? Does it represent a way to grow with community?
3. What gifts have been identified in this scripture?
4. What is the “far better way”? Any guesses?

<sup>4–11</sup> God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

wise counsel  
clear understanding  
simple trust  
healing the sick  
miraculous acts  
proclamation  
distinguishing between spirits  
tongues  
interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

<sup>12–13</sup> You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts — limbs, organs, cells — but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain — his Spirit — where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves — labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free — are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

<sup>14–18</sup> I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body,” would that make it so? If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, limpid

and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

<sup>19-24</sup> But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, **it is only because of what you are a part of**. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way — the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

<sup>25-26</sup> **The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church:** every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

<sup>27-31</sup> You are Christ's body — that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body": Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that **Christ's church is a complete body** and not a gigantic, uni-dimensional part? It's not all apostle, not all prophet, not all miracle worker, not all healer, not all prayer in tongues, not all interpreter of tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts.

**But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.**

## Appendix C: 1 Corinthians 12:31, 13 (MSG)

Read the passage below and then answer these questions as a group on the chart paper:

1. Why are our gifts no good without love?
2. What are the qualities of love that stand out most to your group from this description of love?
3. Do you agree this is a “far better way”? Why or why not?
4. What are 3 things we should focus on in order to grow in the living body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 12: <sup>31</sup> But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

1 Corinthians 13: <sup>1</sup> If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

<sup>2</sup> If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

<sup>3-7</sup> If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always “me first,”  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.

<sup>8-10</sup> Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

<sup>11</sup> When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

<sup>12</sup> We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

<sup>13</sup> But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

## **Connected: Created to Belong**

### **Module 4: To What Do We Belong?**

#### **Lesson 3: Living Kingdom of God**

**Leader's notes:** This lesson has been developed specifically for a Baptist denomination to unpack the various distinctives we believe. If you are using this curriculum and are from another denomination, it is recommended that you replace our distinctives with your own set of distinctives, while encouraging and engaging youth in conversations around various practices in the larger church body.

If you were ever to invite a Baptist expert, your pastor or a guest with more knowledge on Baptist traditions, this would be the lesson to do so. The majority of the work in the Action section unpacks various youth-chosen Baptist Distinctives. If you want a voice with knowledge in that realm, consider inviting a guest for the whole of your time, or that portion of the lesson.

**Expert options:** Michael Knowles or Gord Heath from McMaster Divinity College, your pastor, or elders in the church with knowledge around Baptist tradition. If none of these are options for you, consider having your volunteers research 1 distinctive each, becoming the “expert” on that distinctive for the evening. You can also do some research and be ready to answer questions. It is highly recommended that you plan to involve someone who has a broader understanding of the history and framework, unless you feel very confident on your own.

### **Spiritual Aims**

Students will hopefully:

- recognize their places in the larger kingdom of God
- appreciate their own faith traditions and the others that make up Christianity
- grow in their sense of belonging to something much bigger and diverse than their individual self
- acknowledge the church of Christ as a beautiful mosaic

### **Lesson Objectives**

Students will:

- learn about various Baptist beliefs and ask their questions
- step outside of their own known church world and plan to visit a church of a different denomination

### **Materials Needed**

- 1 large sheet of bristol board
- 1 pair of scissors
- Markers (enough to share amongst the group)
- Crayons (enough to share amongst the group)
- Stickers (enough to share amongst the group)

- 1 roll of masking tape
- 8 sheets of chart paper with the Baptist Distinctives taped at the top (see below)
- 1 copy of Appendix D (enlarge and cut out each distinctive, and then tape it to the top of each chart paper)
- 1 blank sheet of chart paper
- Bible [teaching tip 7]
- Access to the Internet on a laptop or someone's mobile device OR a map of your church neighbourhood

### Pre-Lesson Preparation

- If you wish to invite an expert, do it well in advance so he or she is available to support your discussion (see expert options above).
- Draw puzzle piece shapes on the bristol board. Cut them out and make sure there are enough pieces for the number of students in your group. They should be able to go back to the original size and shape of the Bristol board when put back together.
- Place craft materials, cut-out puzzle pieces and masking tape on a central table in your space — have this ready prior to students coming into the space
- Post large chart papers with the Baptist Distinctives around the room (leaving space for the puzzle installation in Minds On). You may wish to tape the bottom to the top so as to conceal them until you get to the Action section. Once you are there, you can un-tape them and let them lay flat against the wall.
- It may be a good idea to research and/or make contact with the other church once your group decides on a place to visit. Before committing that you will go there, be in touch with their leadership. Also, be in touch with your own leadership to express this idea and have their backing before moving ahead with this plan.

### Minds On

To get students thinking about the entire kingdom of God and each church body coming together under God, we can use the image of a giant puzzle. They will reflect on what represents them, and later this will be linked to our various church body traditions and denominations.

**Prompt:** On the table is a stack of puzzle pieces and supplies to get creative. Take 5 to 7 minutes to make 1 puzzle piece your own. You may choose to represent something personal about yourself, or just draw unique designs and expressions on the piece. Go!

Once everyone has created their puzzle pieces, invite them to:

1. Put masking tape on the back of the piece.
2. Affix all pieces to the wall randomly, and then step back and see the shapes.
3. Next, invite students to figure out how to put the pieces back into the larger whole so that the puzzle is complete.

**Ask:** [teaching tip 4]

1. What stands out for you about the image as a whole?
2. What similarities do you see between the pieces?
3. Are there any that are completely unique?

4. What are some common themes or ideas that you see?

Invite answers and discussion for 5 to 7 minutes.

**Prompt:** This image is a way to understand our belonging in the living kingdom of God as a whole. We know we belong personally to him and to our local church/youth group body. But beyond those ways of belonging, we get to participate in his larger kingdom on earth. There are many types of churches that make up the body of Christ under the umbrella of Christianity. Today, we're going to chat a bit about the denomination we find ourselves in — the Baptist tradition. Others might worship in an Anglican, Catholic or United tradition, for example. The point is that, when put all together, we all serve the same God and belong to him, but can be rooted and find meaning in our various traditions and beliefs.

### **Action**

**Prompt:** Around the room are various beliefs that Baptists hold. I'm going to invite you to walk around and pose questions, make statements, draw a response, write yes or no — respond with whatever your reactions to these beliefs are. Graffiti your thoughts on the papers! We'll be unpacking them a bit later, but for now, I'm only interested in your thoughts about what you read on each chart paper. Let's take 10 to 15 minutes to write our observations. Go!

**Leader's note:** You can join in the action — go and write your own thoughts and questions down. Encourage your volunteer leaders to do the same.

Once everyone has graffitied over the chart paper with thoughts and questions, ask the following:

1. With a show of hands, were any of you familiar with these beliefs in our Baptist traditions? Which ones?
2. Did some beliefs stand out more than others?

### **Choose Which Distinctives to Study:**

1. Every student has 2 votes. They are to vote for the top 2 distinctives that interest them most or have the most questions about.
2. Stand by each distinctive. At each, ask them to vote by raising their hand.
3. Select the 2 distinctives with the most votes. In the event of a tie, ask students to vote again as a tie-breaker.

**Leader's note:** Once you have chosen 2 chart papers to unpack further, you can approach the conversation a few ways:

**Option 1:** Invite your expert to take the lead. Have him or her look at, highlight and circle the “big questions” on the papers you have chosen and lead a discussion based on what is asked on the papers.

**Option 2:** If you have no guest and are leading from your own knowledge, circle and highlight the questions on the chart papers the group has chosen that you feel you can best answer. If you don't know answers, decide how you will research and explain them at a future point.

**Leader's note:** The main goal of this activity is to understand their context further and begin to think about the Baptist tradition. New questions might be formed and some might not be answered in this session. Discussion is key — follow where the students go and help to direct their queries. Make an effort to record new thoughts on the extra chart paper and determine how to find answers for them at a later date if it is something you cannot unpack on the spot (e.g., speak with your pastor, read up on ideas or contact an expert).

Once you have spent time talking, learning and developing a new awareness of these beliefs, invite a youth to read Galatians 3: 23–29.

**Prompt:** While we find ourselves attending a Baptist church, we need to understand that our relationships with God and our belonging is sculpted by our faith in him — in our choice to engage with him as he desires. Being a part of a denomination is not about rules. It can help us to clarify and probe deeper into our faith journeys with Christ. In the scripture, God calls us all his children through faith. This is our promise that we are part of his entire kingdom!

### **Consolidate/Debrief**

**Prompt:** So, what do we make of the other traditions and denominations in our midst? Imagine that each of your puzzle pieces from earlier represented a different denomination. When they come together under the head of the body, Jesus Christ, it paints a beautiful picture of the kingdom.

**Ask:** Has anyone ever attended a church that was a different denomination than Baptist?

**Leader's note:** Allow time for answers. Have a volunteer set up a computer with a map of your neighbourhood pulled up on the Internet. Based on responses, organically move into the next prompt.

**Prompt:** Since we may or may not have attended another type of Christian church, we're going to do some research. I have a map of our neighbourhood pulled up here on the screen. Let's do a search of all the different Christian churches in our surrounding area.

If a student wants to lead this search, or is good with searching the Internet, allow him or her to take the lead. As you discover different churches, have a different youth keep track of their names and denominations.

**Prompt:** Awesome — we've found some different options. I wasn't just curious to see what was in the neighbourhood. We're actually going to plan a trip to visit one of these churches on an upcoming Sunday morning instead of coming to our church. In order to fully open ourselves to the kingdom of Christ, it might be a good idea to come in contact with different traditions than just our own.

Plan with the youth which church you would like to visit and when. Or, simply pray that God would direct you in your time of prayer and that you would all have the same sense as to which church before you depart from your gathering. Trust that God can lead your discussion and that he can also lead your next steps.

Close in prayer, thanking God for his various people and our various expressions of faith in him. Invite him to direct you as you step beyond the walls of your own church into a different setting. Ask God to help you to learn from your other brothers and sisters in the kingdom.

## **Appendix D: Baptist Distinctives**

**Leader's note:** These distinctives vary. CBOQ's version is found at: [baptist.ca/about/what-do-baptists-believe/](http://baptist.ca/about/what-do-baptists-believe/). Enlarge and cut out each distinctive below and attach to its own large chart paper for the Action activity.

### **Jesus is Lord**

Baptists believe that Jesus Christ, being eternally God, only begotten Son, and the visible expression of the invisible God, effectively procured salvation for all creation through his death, burial and resurrection. He is the one assigned by God the Father to rule with authority over all of creation. Every area of the believer's life and the life of the church is to be subject to the Lord.

### **The Word of God is the Authoritative Rule of Faith and Practice**

Baptists believe that God communicates his will through the inspired Word of God. For Baptists, the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

### **The Priesthood of All Believers**

The Bible affirms the value of each person as having been created in the image of God, and also declares each person morally responsible for his/her own nature and behaviour. Baptists believe that inherent in the worth of each person is also the right and competency of each individual personally to deal directly with God through Jesus Christ. In essence, each person, by faith, becomes his/her own priest before God; hence, the cherished term "priesthood of all believers". This implies that all believers share as equals in Christ's body, the church, and in turn, have a priestly role toward each other.

### **A Believers' Church**

Baptists believe that Jesus Christ chooses to form his church by bringing together believers for the purpose of worship, witness, fellowship, and ministry (both spiritual and social). Baptists recognize the church universal as all who truly profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. They also profess their understanding of the church as being visibly expressed in local congregations. Each local church must thus be made up of believers who, upon their profession of faith and their baptism (almost always by immersion), are incorporated into the local church through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

### **Believer's Baptism by Immersion**

Baptists believe that baptism is an ordinance required by the New Testament, and is to be administered by the local church. Baptism is intended to represent Jesus' death, burial and resurrection; baptism by completely immersing the candidate in water is seen as the only adequate outward expression for the spiritual faith-union with Jesus Christ. Baptism should be

administered only to believers. It is one of the first significant acts through which the believer proclaims personal faith in Christ and is initiated into church life and ministry.

### **Congregational Government**

Government in a local church is controlled by the principles of the priesthood of all believers, the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Christ, present in the lives of congregational members, leads them corporately to discover and obey his mind and will. Such “congregational government” calls for and expresses the equality and responsibility of believers under the Lordship of Christ. Baptists also believe that the principle of the Lordship of Jesus Christ gives each individual congregation a certain degree of autonomy and freedom from coercion by other bodies. However, just as a believer must temper his/her doctrinal interpretation and personal behaviour to satisfy the greater needs and unity of the community of believers, **Baptist churches also recognize the need to temper the exercise of their autonomy in order to “associate” with a larger body of churches.**

### **Separation of Church and State**

A further extension of the principle of the Lordship of Christ and the priesthood of believers is to be found in the Baptist conviction that there must exist a separation between the church and civil governments. There is the easy recognition that God has given legitimate roles to both church and state, but also the deep conviction that neither is to encroach upon the rights or obligations of the other. They are, however, under obligation to recognize and reinforce each other as each seeks to fulfill its divine function. The function of individual believers and the church is to become part of the conscience of the community and nation.

## **Connected: Created to Belong**

### **Module 4: To What Do We Belong?**

#### **Lesson 4: God's Creativity**

**Leader's note:** A portion of this lesson will work best if you can be in a beautiful place in nature (in any season)! If there is not a place nearby your church or not within easy walking distance, consider hosting your youth group time in someone else's home that lives near a park, forest, creek, etc.

### **Spiritual Aims**

Students will hopefully:

- be more secure knowing they belong to a creative and loving God
- recognize his creative provisions for his favourite creation — humans
- acknowledge God as the ultimate creative force in their lives
- experience awe and thanksgiving

### **Lesson Objective**

Students will:

- have a chance to experience God in nature and know that they belong to him in this physical world

### **Materials Needed**

- Outdoor gear depending on the weather
- A beautiful outdoor space
- Optional: Video equipment to view nature clip (e.g., [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v2L2UGZJAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v2L2UGZJAM)) [teaching tip 1]
- Basket or container for phones
- 1 copy of Appendix E per student
- 1 or 2 coloured pencil crayons per student
- Optional: Appendix F printed in colour
- Optional: Tape

### **Pre-Lesson Preparation**

- Have a basket ready for phones as students arrive. Consider putting a Post-it Note on it that reads: "Be with the friends who are HERE" — a playful yet real reminder that we don't need to be attached to our devices.
- Optional: Post Appendix F somewhere in the space you use for this lesson.
- Check your church's child protection policy for off-site excursions and collect any waiver forms well in advance if it is necessary.

## **Minds On**

Get ready to be in the outdoors! In rain, sunshine or snow, we can experience and learn about God's creativity through being in his creation — nature! Within reason, plan to spend about 20 to 25 minutes outdoors in a nearby forest, by a creek, in a field, etc. Even if it rains, consider going out with the right gear — unless of course it's a storm!

As your students arrive to youth group, inform them to keep their coats on and to leave their cell phones behind — they will have no need for them during the first part of the lesson.

**Prompt:** We're about to head outdoors and explore a different space. Make sure you will be warm enough and make sure that you leave your cell phone in the container provided — you will not need it!

Take students on a nature walk. Let conversations happen naturally. Encourage them to note the gifts of creation all around them and to see God's creativity in the natural world. Invite them to take a piece of nature back with them before you leave the space (e.g., rock, stick, feather, leaf, etc.). Make sure it is something small that can be easily removed — and is not destroying nature!

Once you have spent about 20 minutes in your chosen location, head back to your meeting spot for a time of discussion.

**Leader's note:** If you are really not able to go outside, use the Internet to find "virtual" nature walks or clips from the Planet Earth series, such as the one suggested in Materials Needed.

## **Action**

**Prompt:** It's evident when we are in nature just how complex God is — he's created some beautiful things in this world. He created the world and invites us to belong in his creation. Even amidst the noise of our daily lives, we can find ways to see the ultimate and grand picture of his strength, kingdom, creation and provision in our lives.

### **Scripture Reading:**

1. Hand out Appendix E to each student. Invite them to grab a coloured pencil or 2.
2. Psalm 19 talks about the beauty of the heavens and of earth — the tangible space we inhabit as part of God's kingdom. Through it everyone has access to God's creativity.
3. Give everyone a copy of Appendix E and have them read through the passage together once out loud.
4. Each student will reread the passage by themselves. They will highlight, circle or note the words that stand out to them (e.g., words that describe God's strength, his shelter, his character, etc.).
5. Afterwards, have students turn to the person beside them and compare notes. What similarities and differences do they note?
6. Once students have compared notes, invite them to comment on what they highlighted and to bring forward any questions.

## **Ask:**

1. Have you ever pictured yourself belonging to something much bigger than yourself? What does that feel like?
2. What did you notice in the scripture about nature that provides strong proof of God's strength? Do we feel a sense of safety and belonging in this?

### **Consolidate/Debrief**

**Prompt:** As we finish today, let's acknowledge and thank God for his creativity in our lives. If he can make this entire world, he can surely provide and come through in our lives with all of the things we face. We belong in him and he has given us a place to abide. Scripture talks about God providing for the tiniest of birds — and he wants so much more to provide for us, his best masterpiece, his human creation. Matthew 6:26 (NIV) says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet our heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Have each student pull out their item from the nature walk. One at a time, invite them forward to place their objects on a central table in your space. Perhaps the items will interlock and become a new sculpture. Perhaps they will just be laid out separately as a reminder of God's creation. When they come forward, invite them to say a prayer or word of thanks to God as they place their piece of nature in the centre.

Once the pile/sculpture has been made, end with a full prayer of thanksgiving, starting with the last verse from Psalm 19 (verse 14): "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." See Appendix F for an artistic representation of the verse.

Acknowledge that we are all part of God's creativity and his world, therefore, we belong in him, our Rock!

## Appendix E: Psalm 19 (NIV)

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.  
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.  
It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

The law of the Lord is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.  
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.  
The precepts of the Lord are right,  
giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the Lord are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.  
The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever.  
The decrees of the Lord are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.  
By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
But who can discern their own errors?  
Forgive my hidden faults.  
Keep your servant also from willful sins;  
may they not rule over me.  
Then I will be blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight,  
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Appendix F

