

CREATED TO BE
Introduction to the Theme
Ann Haywood Leal

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well."

—Psalm 139:14

We are loved and accepted by God even before we enter this world. The fact that God knows our innermost selves is mind-boggling at the very least. Even when we feel alone and unseen, God sees us and knows us, never leaving our side. Maybe even more brain-bending is that we need not do anything or prove one single thing to receive God's free gift of grace.

Each of our five sessions gives us an opportunity to explore more deeply the authentic selves God has created us to be. We will learn what it means to be siblings in Christ—humans who are brave enough to encourage and stand up for each other, sharing burdens as well as joys. We grow and learn more about ourselves while listening to and sharing with each other.

Created to Be Free

We begin by exploring what it actually means to be free. Our freedom is a beautiful gift from God through Jesus. The best thing of all is that everyone receives this gift. We don't have to prove ourselves or rack up points to get it. We all enter and continue to exist in this world equally loved and treasured by God.

Created to Be Authentic

God recognizes and cherishes our true selves. We don't need to change who we are to fit some person's or group's ideal. God created us to be our individual selves. The story of sisters Mary and Martha in chapter 10 of the book of Luke is a vivid illustration of how Jesus sees value and worth in each one of us. God's love isn't reserved for a select few, with stipulations about who we love, how we move, or what language we speak. Our unique talents and gifts join together seamlessly to make up one body of faith.

Created to Be Brave

In a changing world, the Spirit is a constant and encouraging presence. Through the Spirit we are given bravery and courage to navigate our lives, no matter how small we feel or how seemingly insurmountable the circumstances. Young David from the Old Testament

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exhibits true bravery in action as he defeats Goliath, the Philistine, a seasoned, fully equipped warrior more than twice David's size. David uses a weapon much more powerful than Goliath's heavy arsenal; he has the Spirit.

Created to Be Disciples

It can be uplifting and fulfilling to share our joyous moments with each other, but what about those not-so-great times? When we lean on each other and encourage one another, everyone feels lighter. It can be easier to share burdens with people we know well—friends, relatives, people who look like us and share the same spaces and beliefs. But what would discipleship look like if we were to truly share God's love as put forth in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"?

Created to Be Disruptive

Love for our neighbors can be exhibited in myriad ways—some so easy to carry out, we might even do so automatically without giving it much thought. But sometimes showing that love and discipleship can be a bit more challenging. Speaking up in support of another person or group being hurt by unfair rules or situations can be a very powerful way to walk beside our siblings in Christ.

As you begin your week, be encouraged by the words from Galatians 5:22–23: "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."