



EVERLASTING

JOHN 3:16

Everlasting: Loved

Large Group Talk 1

*Don't forget to start with the intro found in the speaker outlines.

Objective: What do your students envision when they think about God? Do they picture an old man with a white beard, uninterested in their problems and far away from their day-to-day lives? Do they imagine a vengeful God, hypercritical and waiting for any opportunity to strike them with a lightning bolt? Or do they imagine a God that's so in love with them, he would sacrifice his own Son on their behalf. In this lesson, students will be introduced to the loving God who created them. They'll discover that they were made in his image to do important things. And they'll see that he's to one who fulfills their physical and relational needs.

Transition to *Everlasting* Large Group Talk

Ask: What's the first word that comes to mind when you're asked to describe God?

Say Something Like:

There are a lot of words we can use to describe who God is. The Bible is full of descriptions like: Holy, Wise, Just, Awesome. But one of the first things we know about God in the Bible is that He's the Creator - the very first words of Genesis tell us about him as the creator of the world and us.

Illustration: "What Did I Invent" Quiz. Take the "What Did I Invent" Quiz as a group or as a competition: (www.leadertreks.org/what-did-i-invent-quiz/). Read through the 7 questions, and have students choose which innovations they think each inventor made. Pick answers as a group and/or have students write down their answers on the *notes* page in their Student Book. (You can even have students take the quiz on their phones.) The correct answers are shown at the end of the quiz. Have students tally how many they got right to see who in your group knows the most about where these inventions came from.

Ask: *What have you made (a work of art, craft, science fair project, etc.) that you are most proud of?* Have a few students share. Encourage them to tell the story

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behind their creation. Why did they make it? Where is it now? What does it do? If students are reluctant to respond, you might share a story like this one:

When I was a kid, in art my fellow students and I made things out of clay. We pounded, wet, shaped, and molded our sculptures before putting them into a kiln. After the kiln hardened our creations, we painted glaze on them. It was a pretty cool process, but most of us made the same things: lopsided bowls or pencil holders. These pieces of art weren't anything special, but our parents displayed them proudly even if they couldn't actually hold anything.

Say Something Like: *Did you know we get our creativity from God? Any desire you have to build a website, make something worth posting on Pinterest, or take the perfect photograph for Instagram comes from your Creator. And of all the things he's created—octopus, galaxies, bacteria, rivers, planets, and porcupines—you are his most valued creation.*

Illustration: In this clip from *Iron Man 2*, Tony Stark watches a film his estranged father made for him. His father tells him, "My greatest creation is you": www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-zx-e2gwiw. One of the best ways we can start to describe God's love for every person in the world is by thinking about the way a loving father feels about his child.

Read Genesis 1:26–31.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Say Something Like: *Several of the inventors you may have learned about in the “What Did I Invent” Quiz created more than one innovation. But of those inventions (the failures and the successes), one was more important than the rest to each inventor. Similarly, God created a lot of things—just read Genesis 1:1–25 to discover the rest of his creation process—but humanity is (you are) his prized creation, the pinnacle of his creative work. Why does God think differently about people than he does about the rest of his creation? You’re about to find out.*

Teaching: Loved

1. Created in God’s Image

Say Something Like: *When God created everything in the universe, he proclaimed that each new element of creation—light, land, water, plants, and animals of all kinds—was good. He didn’t just toss aside his creations after he made them. He took joy in them. He called them “good.” But when he created human beings, he said something different. He didn’t just call people “good”; he said they were “very good.” We were the last things he created, and we were the things he took most joy in making.*

Everything else God spoke into being. He spoke words, and where there was once nothing, there was now something. But when God created Adam, the first human being, he got his hands dirty—literally. The Bible says God formed Adam from the dust, like a potter making a vase out of clay. Then, in a precursor to CPR, he breathed life into Adam. God formed Adam, and then gave him life. Both acts of creation were incredibly hands-on.

If that’s not cool enough, check this out: you were created as an overflow of love. When the Bible says, “Let us make man in our image,” the members of the Trinity are having a conversation. The perfect community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit overflowed with so much love for each other that they created an expression of that love: humanity. Imagine a chocolate fountain. It isn’t just a bowl full of chocolate, sitting there and slowly hardening. A chocolate fountain overflows with layers of tasty wonder. You could just dip a strawberry into a bowl of chocolate, but something about letting the chocolate cascade down on the berry makes it that much better.

God didn’t create you because he needed to. Quite the opposite—he created you because he wanted to. The fact that you bear God’s image means that something woven into your very being reflects God, like an artist’s signature incorporated into a painting. You show the world a picture of God’s love that you couldn’t erase, even if you wanted to.

Illustration: Cabbage Patch. In 1983 the best selling Christmas gift for kids was a Cabbage Patch doll. Each doll came with a birth certificate and

a name. The creator of Cabbage Patch dolls was an artist and toy maker named Xavier Roberts. To verify that they were authentic and not knockoffs, each of these dolls was marked with his signature. Every doll had the creator's signature to confirm its origins. You can see images of the dolls, Xavier Roberts, and the signature on the Wikia page here: cabbagepatchkids.wikia.com/wiki/Xavier_Roberts.

2. Created for a Purpose

Say Something Like: *God didn't create you as an overflow of love and then set you on a shelf to look good and collect dust. You're not just a knick-knack. God created you for a reason.*

Object Lesson: A Tool for a Job. Bring a toolbox up in front of the students. Open it and remove a hammer, a wrench, and a saw. Tell students to imagine walking in the woods and stumbling upon one of those tools half-covered in the dirt. What would students think about that tool? Would they assume it randomly appeared there for no reason and with no purpose? Or would they imagine it was dropped there by someone who was using it for a specific job? Obviously, the second choice is most likely. We might even guess a few things about the job this tool was used for based on its shape—whether it was meant to pound nails into wood, tighten nuts and screws, or cut something in two. We are far more complicated than these simple tools with unique and amazing abilities. Yet many people think their lives are purposeless. That makes less sense than thinking one of these tools spontaneously generated from nowhere for no reason.

Say Something Like: *You have a purpose. In the passage we read from Genesis, we saw that God created men and women to rule over the fish and birds and livestock. In other words, they were meant to take care of the rest of creation. They were also meant to participate in God's creation by making things of their own. Theologians call this "secondary creation." Unlike God, we can't make something out of nothing. So we have to use things he's already created to craft something new. For example, to build a house, you need wood from trees God created. But it goes beyond raw materials; our creative ideas are also inspired by God's creativity. You might think that something as complicated as a helicopter is unique—something humans thought up without any help. But many leaves, flowers, and seeds twirl down to the ground like the blades of a helicopter for a softer landing. Engineers used these natural helicopters as inspiration to create their own.*

You don't live in the Garden of Eden like Adam and Eve, but God still created you for a purpose. He still tells you to care for his creation, to bring order from chaos, light to darkness, and hope to those in despair, just like God did for you. Any time you fix something that was broken or bring order to something that was

a mess (even a messed-up relationship), as long as you do it to God's glory, you are doing something holy. For you it might look like babysitting a neighbor's kid, playing an instrument for others, researching a cure for cancer, or loving kids with special needs in your community.

3. Provided for by God

Say Something Like: *God created you out of love and gave you a purpose, but he wouldn't do those things without providing the tools you need to accomplish that purpose. He provides for all of your needs. Look back at Genesis 1. He provided food for Adam and Eve (verse 29). Not only that, but he also provided food for the animals they were taking care of (verse 30). Like a good father, God provides for our physical needs.*

He also provides for our relational needs. After God made Adam, he saw that Adam was lonely. So he created Eve to enjoy the garden with Adam, to rule with him over the birds and fish and animals, and to build a family together. Have you ever thought about the fact that God put specific people in your life? Your best friend is a gift from God. Your family was God's idea. Your teammates, cousins, neighbors, and co-workers are God's provision for your life.

Think back to a really tough time. Who helped you through it? What if God hadn't provided those people? What if you had to be completely alone?

Illustration: Solitary Confinement. One of the most extreme forms of punishment in the United States criminal justice system is solitary confinement. It's reserved for those inmates so violent that they are considered a danger to other inmates. Many states are debating the merits of solitary confinement. Why? Because losing contact with other human beings is so psychologically devastating that it may actually make those in solitary more likely to act out, instead of less. It says a lot about our need for relationships when being alone is one of the worst forms of punishment.

Say Something Like: *We're not meant to live life alone. God knew that and provided us with companionship. We need food, water, shelter, and human relationships—all things God provides—but there's one thing God wants us to have that's more important than anything else: a relationship with him. In fact, this is the most important reason God created us in the first place. Yes, he wants us to care for the rest of his creation. Yes, he wants us to create new and wonderful things to help other people. But more than anything, he wants us to glorify and live in loving relationship with him. In Romans 8:37–39, Paul tells us that nothing will separate us from the love of God. Your friends might move away or betray you. Your family may not be ideal. Your boyfriend or girlfriend may break your heart. But God will never leave you. Before Jesus ascended back to*

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heaven, he told his disciples he would be with them “until the end of the age”—in other words, forever.

Putting It All Together:

Say Something Like: *So what does all of this mean for you right now? Well, for starters, it means you’re not an accident. God lovingly created you for a purpose, and he didn’t leave you alone. You were God’s idea. Your life is part of his plan. He’s not going to bail on you. When you believe that in the depths of your heart and live like the loved person you are, some important things change:*

- *Your insecurities matter less. God loves you, and his opinion matters more than anyone’s.*
- *Your life is meaningful, but it’s not all about you. When you live your life with God’s purposes in mind, you know you aren’t meant to be a greedy, self-absorbed person, just living for the moment. Your life matters more than that.*
- *Even in your loneliest moments, when you feel like everyone has abandoned you, betrayed you, or let you down, God is with you.*

[Speaker Note: The following questions will be discussed in the following Small Group Lesson.]

Question 1: How did God create you uniquely? In other words, what makes you special?

Question 2: What do you think God created you to do?

Looking Forward: Let the students know that the next lesson will look at the ways sin influences our relationships with God and others. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.

LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.

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