



Beloved Places 4 Week Faith Formation Series

In this podcast based series, your group will listen to many voices sharing about their most beloved places and how God has been with them there.

You can find the All Places Together podcast wherever you get your podcasts and on our website: www.allplacetogether.org/listen

This playlist may be led by one leader or up to four different leaders. The gathering can happen in-person, online, or in a hybrid set-up. The materials are best suited for high school youth and adults of all ages. Each session can be anywhere between 60-90 minutes long, depending on how much the group shares.

For the most engaging discussion, listening to the podcast before the gathering is strongly recommended. Each podcast is about 30 minutes long.

If you take photos of your group, share them with Pastor Colleen via email (allplacetogether@gmail.com) and on social media with the hashtags #aptreadsthebible #aptbelovedplaces. Be sure to follow All Places Together on Facebook and Instagram to join the conversation with others.

Please make a meaningful contribution for your group to All Places Together for using this Bible study. You can donate [here](#).

Leader Preparation Time: 30-45 min

Before Gathering:

1. Listen to the assigned podcast.
2. Review discussion questions.

During Gathering:

1. Welcome the group! Share names if everyone doesn't know each other.
2. Each participant is invited to share a high, low, and God sighting from the previous week.
 - High = the best part of their week!
 - Low = the worst, saddest, or most challenging part of their week.
 - God Sighting = a time or interaction where they saw God in their lives over the past week.
3. Invite the group to share their initial reactions to the podcast.
 - What was most meaningful to you?
 - What questions do you have?
4. Read the bible verses and work through provided discussion questions.
5. Review listening for next time.
6. Close in prayer. (Pray off the cuff, write a prayer ahead of time, ask another person to pray, or say the Lord's Prayer together.)

After Gathering:

1. Send a note to the group with the following parts:
 - a. Thanking them for their participation
 - b. Something that you are still thinking about from the gathering
 - c. The time, place, and podcast episode to listen to for next time.

About All Places Together

All Places Together (APT) is an online faith community based in the State of Virginia in the USA that believes that God loves you wherever, whoever, and however you are. In addition to the weekly podcast, they gather on Instagram and Facebook (@AllPlacesTogether) to explore God's radical love for diverse creation.

All Places Together is a Reconciling in Christ Community that is committed to LGBTQIA+ affirmation and inclusion and to the ongoing work of anti-racism.

APT is led by Pastor Colleen Montgomery and is a new start of the Virginia Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. To make a gift to support the ongoing mission work in digital spaces go to www.allplacetogether.org and scroll to the Give to APT button!

Beloved Places Week 1: Lights of Love

Episode Length: 25 min

Episode Description: Pastor Colleen is in the hot seat today. Special guest Deb Roberts from Camp Lutherlyn joins the conversation to interview Colleen about one of her favorite places: Lutherlyn!

Welcome the group!

Share names if not everyone knows each other. Since this is the first week, you may want to do some extended group building and sharing.

Suggestions:

Two truths and a lie: Traditionally, each person would share two truths and a lie about them in general and the rest of the group has to guess the lie. In this version, have the group focus on places they've been. Example: I've been to Poland, Canada, and California. (I've never been to California!) Encourage folks to share stories about why they traveled to those places.

Journey Together: For US residents, open Google Maps and zoom to the US. Pick two different states (except for Hawaii). Then see if you connect the two states with folks who have traveled to the adjacent states. If you are from a different country, start with your country and then zoom out from there!
Expert level: Zoom out to an entire continent and see how many countries your group has travelled to! Again, encourage conversation about why folks visited those places.

Favorite Trip: Invite folks to share the favorite trip they ever went on.

Share a high, low, and God sighting from the previous week.

High = the best part of their week!

Low = the worst, saddest, or most challenging part of their week. God

Sighting = a time or interaction where they saw God in their lives over the past week.

God Sighting: You may need to do some work on understanding what a God Sighting is. The purpose of sharing them is to help participants tune into God

in their daily lives. Some common examples may include: nature, love shared between family/friends/partners, worship, and overcoming a difficult situation. Especially with youth, affirm all their answers. They may experience God in very different ways than you and that's ok. Always be ready to share your God Sighting.

Tip: If you're working with a quiet youth group (or even quiet adults), you can invite them to simply share two things that happened in the week that they want to share.

Share about All Places Together.

All Places Together (APT) is an online faith community based in the State of Virginia in the USA that believes that God loves you wherever, whoever, and however you are. In addition to the weekly podcast, they gather on Instagram and Facebook (@AllPlacesTogether) to explore God's radical love for diverse creation. You can connect with the community there and join in the conversation!

All Places Together is a Reconciling in Christ Community that is committed to LGBTQIA+ affirmation and inclusion and to the ongoing work of anti-racism. We will hear from people with diverse backgrounds and experiences throughout this study.

APT is led by Pastor Colleen Montgomery and is a new start of the Virginia Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We have made a contribution to APT for the use of this study.

Invite the group to share their initial reactions to the podcast.

Open for general reactions. (What did y'all think? Was this anyone's first podcast?)

If the group is quiet:

- Have you ever been to a camp before? What was that experience like?
- If no one has ever been to camp: What comes to mind when you think about camp? Does it line up with Pastor Colleen's experience or is it different?

- What group of people have helped you grow in your faith? Are they located in a particular place?

Read the Bible verses below and work through provided Discussion Questions.

Set the scene:

- These verses from Matthew are part of a large teaching section called The Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is standing on the side of a hill and teaching a large group of people. This group is very diverse and includes the disciples.

Read [Matthew 5:13-16](#). (If you're gathering online, BibleGateway is an excellent resource to be able to share screen, read together, and explore the text in different translations. Recommend: NRSV - New Revised Standard Version, The Message, CEB - Common English Bible.)

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it means to be salty in this situation? How is Jesus using this word differently than modern-day slang?
- What are the various uses of salt? How can these uses be metaphors for Christian living?
- Jesus says that we are the light of the world right now, not that we will become the light in the future. How are you sharing the love of Jesus in your life already?
- How can this group help each one another to share our lights in our daily lives- school, work, family, hobbies?
- Recount the children's song *This Little Light of Mine*. Do folks have a favorite verse? What are ways that we put our faith "under a bushel" or "blow it out"?

Review listening for next time. Episode 9: Haven of Hospitality. 35 min

Close in prayer.

Pray off the cuff, write a prayer ahead of time, ask another person to pray, say the Lord's Prayer together, or use the APT prayer from that week.

Week 2: Restoration: Haven of Hospitality

Episode Length: 35 min

Cedric Wilson gathers with All Places Together and shares powerful stories about one of his favorite places, his childhood home. His family nurtured a safe space for him and his brother to grow in, especially as they navigated a move from a Black neighborhood to one that was predominantly white. As a father and husband now, he strives to create the same safe space for all who enter his family's home.

Welcome the group!

Review names if needed.

Share a high, low, and God sighting from the previous week.

High = the best part of their week!

Low = the worst, saddest, or most challenging part of their week.

God Sighting = a time or interaction where they saw God in their lives over the past week.

Leaders, be ready to share your God sighting! Challenge yourself to share how you saw God in a different way each week.

Ask if folks had any other thoughts, insights, or questions from last week's session.

Invite the group to share their initial reactions to the podcast.

Open for general reactions.

If the group is quiet:

- Where is a place that you go to when you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or afraid?
- Where is a place that you have experienced hospitality?

Read the Bible verses below and work through provided Discussion Questions.

Set the scene:

- Mary and Martha are two sisters who are disciples of Jesus. Be wary that this text is often used as a way to define women's roles. There is a lot of debate about the original Greek and how it has been translated in the King James Version (KJV) and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Without getting deep into the linguistic debate, it is best to remember that BOTH women are disciples of Jesus and BOTH of their ministries matter.

Read [Luke 10:38-42](#). (If you're gathering online, BibleGateway is an excellent resource to be able to share screen, read together, and explore the text in different translations. Recommend: NRSV, The Message, CEB.)

Discussion Questions:

- Share a story about when you were like Mary, showing love by listening closely and learning from someone else.
- Share a story about when you like Martha, showing love by preparing food, drink, and comfort that a group would enjoy.
- Which is more natural for you? Which is more challenging?
- If you are part of a privileged group (male, white, straight, educated, middle class or higher, neurotypical, etc.), what are ways that you have learned to set yourself aside in order to make a more hospitable and affirming space for folks who do not share those same privileges?

Review listening for next time.

Next week is Listener's Choice! Share the list of possibilities with them. Note that the times vary. Some are longer than 30 min. Encourage folks to take a few notes either during or after so they remember important quotes and the biblical focus.

Close in prayer.

Pray off the cuff, write a prayer ahead of time, ask another person to pray, say the Lord's Prayer together, or use the APT prayer from that week.

Week 3: Listener's Choice

This week, participants can choose an episode that interests them. If you are looking to extend the number of weeks of the study, you can do a week on each of the episodes or request that they pick from 2 options at a time.

- Episode 6: Wrestling & Welcoming. 26 min

This week's interview is with Pastor Dave Delaney, Director for Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Virginia Synod, ELCA. Dave shares stories about where he wrestled with God and how these places showed him how God welcomes all of us.

- Episode 7: Restorations: Dental & Divine. 25 min

There aren't many people who like to sit in the dentist's chair, yet dental care is a powerful metaphor for our relationship with God and for our connection to others as well. There is forgiveness, restoration, and deep relationship. Dr. Kayla Klingensmith shares about this and more on this week's episode.

- Episode 10: Into the Ocean. 31 min

The Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New Jersey is a treasured place for multiple generations of Jessie Edelman-O'Brien's family. In this week's episode, she shares stories from her growing years as well as her hopes about bringing her wife on this year's adventure. Through it all, she trusts that God is there, even when it doesn't quite feel like it.

- Episode 13: Both And. 38 min

Can a place be both a favorite and not favorite? According to Deacon Julie Stecker, yes it can! On this week's episode, Julie shares about how her home is both one of her favorite places and not a favorite either and how God is in the middle of it all.

- Episode 14: They Will Teach You. 36 min

It is often said that the devil is in the details. But in this week's episode, Pastor Ryan Fitch tells stories about how God is in the details, specifically in the details of creation. And as Job says in Job 12:7-8, the details of creation will teach you. This episode was recorded at Camp Lutherlyn.

- Episode 16: Through the Water, Through the Fire. 46 min

Water and fire are opposites and have so much in common: they are essential to our daily lives and also can threaten us as well. Pastor Drew Tucker, University Pastor of Capital University and Trinity Lutheran Seminary, unpacks his spiritual experiences both in, around, and through fire.

- Episode 17: Along the Trails. 38 min

Summers are meant for exploring during the day and conversation on the porch at night. Pastor Sarah Lyon Hess, the Director of Sales, Marketing, and Communication for Caroline Furnace, shares how conversations in these places have shaped her relationship with God. Through it all we are reminded how central relationships are to understanding God's love for us and presence in our lives.

- Episode 18: Interstate Exodus , Mixtape Vol. 1. 30 min

It's time to hit the road with All Places Together. Pastor Colleen mixes together three modern day stories about spiritual encounters on the interstate with one of the first road trips, the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. Grab your favorite road snack and get ready to experience God in the playlists, people, and plateaus along the way.

Welcome the group!

Review names if needed.

Share a high, low, and God sighting from the previous week.

High = the best part of their week!

Low = the worst, saddest, or most challenging part of their week.

God Sighting = a time or interaction where they saw God in their lives over the past week.

Ask if folks had any other thoughts, insights, or questions from last week's session.

Discussion Questions

- Which episode did you pick and why?
- Go through each episode that was selected and have those who listened to it answer the following questions:
 - What was it about?
 - What was meaningful and what surprised you?
 - What was the biblical connection?
 - What's a question that you have for the person who was interviewed?
- Does it sound like there were any similarities between any of the episodes?
- Now that we have heard so many examples, how would you answer the question: what is one of your favorite places and how has God been with you there?
 - Follow-up: Is there a Bible verse, story, or character that comes to mind when you think about this place? If the answer is no, ask the group.

Note: If participants have a hard time coming up with a Bible verse, affirm that it is okay! God was, is, and will be with them regardless of how much of the Bible they have read and can recall. However, encourage them to do

some searching on BibleGateway to see if they can find a story during the coming week.

Review listening for next time.

Episode 11: Just Not My Favorite. 20 min.

Close in prayer.

Pray off the cuff, write a prayer ahead of time, ask another person to pray, say the Lord's Prayer together, or use the APT prayer from that week.

Week 4: Just Not My Favorite

Episode Length: 20 min

This week's episode does a full turn from the series of talking about favorite places. Pastor Colleen shares about one of her least favorite places and how God was with her there. May this be an affirmation that God is truly with us wherever we are, even when it isn't our favorite place.

Welcome the group!

Share a high, low, and God sighting from the previous week.

High = the best part of their week!

Low = the worst, saddest, or most challenging part of their week.

God Sighting = a time or interaction where they saw God in their lives over the past week.

Leaders, be ready to share your God sighting! Challenge yourself to share how you saw God in a different way each week.

Ask if folks had any other thoughts, insights, or questions from last week's session. Did anyone listen to an additional episode? Did anyone think of a Bible verse, story, or character that related to their story from last week?

Invite the group to share their initial reactions to the podcast.

Open for general reactions.

If the group is quiet:

- After hearing about so many beloved places, what was it like to hear about a not-favorite place?

Paired Bible study and Group Discussion.

Divide the group into groups of two or three. Invite them to share one of their least favorite places and how God has been with them in that place. Using their memory or BibleGateway (excellent Bible website), invite them to think about biblical stories that speak to their experience. Give them at least 10-15 minutes to do this. Then come back to the large group and share. If meeting

online, send folks into Zoom breakout rooms or work through each person in a large group.

Note: This may be very difficult for some. Offer lots of encouragement. It doesn't have to be a deeply profound or life-altering biblical insight. It could be as simple as, "I don't like heights. Romans 8:38-39 says that God is with me in high places and low places."

Affirm that it is **completely** okay to use BibleGateway like Google. Encourage them to read new passages of the Bible if they haven't read them before.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Were there similarities between people's least favorite places?
- Were there similarities in how God was with us in them?
- Was it difficult to come up with a Bible story that connects to it?

Wrap-up the series, plan for the future, thank, and affirm!

- What was your favorite part of this series?
- What was your biggest take away?
- The next series is about Creation. Would you like to do it?
- Invite the group to follow All Places Together on Facebook and Instagram and to subscribe to the podcast if they would like to keep up to date. If they have ideas for future podcast content or series, please share it with APT!

Either as the leader or as a group, offer affirmations to each member of the group. You can do this in a note/email/text to them afterwards or through conversation. Tell them one way you saw God at work in them during the study. (Example: their willingness to pray, listened well to others, asked great questions, was always willing to answer questions, shared great insights, etc.)

To do group affirmations in person, get a piece of paper for each person in your group. Have folks write their name on the top and then spread them around the room. Have each person write one way that they saw God at work

in the other members of the group. To do group affirmations online, you could make a Google doc with sections for each person.

Close in prayer.

Pray off the cuff, write a prayer ahead of time, ask another person to pray, say the Lord's Prayer together, or use the APT prayer from that week.

Be sure to include thanksgiving for the group, the way they cared for each other, and learned from each other.

Provide feedback to All Places Together

Leaders, please share with Pastor Colleen about your group's experience with this study. What went well? What was difficult? What moment was powerful for you as a leader? Email your response to allplacetogether@gmail.com.

A note from Pastor Colleen:

Thank you for choosing and using this study with your group. I hope that it was both affirming that God is with us wherever we are and also challenging for folks to see God at work in these places.