

Study Guide

By Abbie Chronister

Blessed Minds Study Guide

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A Resource for Exploring  
Blessed Minds: Breaking the Silence about Neurodiversity

By Sarah Griffith Lund

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# Introduction to the Study Guide

Welcome! This study guide is designed to help structure and inspire discussion as you read through Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund’s ***Blessed Minds***. In this book, stories and ideas are bridged to inspiration and calls to action that celebrate the sacred nature of neurodiversity. Lund repeatedly and eloquently names the vital importance of diversity in all things, how it is intentionally and reverently woven into all of Creation, and how it remains essential to our approach to community and belonging, particularly in spiritual spaces.

The ten chapters of ***Blessed Minds*** are addressed in this study guide. Each chapter is accompanied by (1) an opening or centering reflection, (2) general discussion questions, (3) activities and accompanying debrief questions designed to be adaptable for all ages and stages, and finally, (4) a closing prayer. My intention is that you think of this study guide not as a strict list of questions and activities that must all be attended to in a certain order, but as a menu you can draw from. And please adapt the questions and activities as needed! Every context is different.

As your group forms and gathers, I encourage you to approach with accessibility in mind. Here are some suggestions:

* Create and establish a group covenant about participation expectations (such as the one shared on page 101 of ***Blessed Minds***).
* Share discussion prompts with the group ahead of time, and also present them both visually (via handouts, a projected slide deck, written on a whiteboard, in the chat of a virtual meeting, etc.) and verbally as you discuss.
* If meeting in person, provide a selection of fidget objects that are readily available for anyone to use at any time without having to ask (and make it known that they’re there!).
* Also, if meeting in person, provide flexible seating options. Aside from the standard folding chair, you might include a mix of floor cushions, rockers/gliders, bean bags, etc.

May your journey be rich with dialogue, shaped by curiosity, rooted in compassion, and made whole by the Spirit of the Neurodiverse Divine!

With joy,

**Abbie Chronister, MDiv**

# Chapter One: What Is Neurodiversity?

## Opening/Centering

**In “The Neurodiversity Parable of the Courageous Young Woman,” we witness Jesus on a walk in which he comes upon a crying young woman, whom he chooses to engage (9). Jesus heard what sounded to be someone in need of help. He didn’t pretend to not hear. He didn’t ignore the signs of distress. He instead approached with gentleness and compassion, heart and mind both open. He sat. He waited. He made space for the sacredness of the woman’s tears. Emotions cannot be rushed, and so he was patient. On her own terms, the woman confided in Jesus, the stranger, who just happened to walk past, and who just happened to be equipped to listen without judgement nor need to “fix.”**

***A***

**Has there been an instance when you had heard, seen, or otherwise witnessed someone in distress, but ignored them?**

**What do you remember feeling at the time?**

**What are you feeling reflecting upon it now?**

***B***

**What if the young woman had chosen *not* to confide in Jesus?**

**How might he have responded?**

**CALL TO ACTION:** [**Mental Health First Aid**](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/)**,** [**QPR**](https://qprinstitute.com/)**, and similar trainings help to teach ordinary people to recognize, respond to, and support others who show signs and symptoms of mental health experiences that may be adversely affecting them. They are great ways to fill up your toolbox when it comes to equipping yourself if the need arises, just like any medical first aid training would. Locate and sign up for a training near you. Many are offered at low-to-no cost, and some are hybrid or fully online. You can even get a group from your faith community to attend a training together!**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**Have you heard of the terms “neurodivergent,” “neurodiversity,” or even “neurospicy,” before reading this book?**

**In what context?**

***B***

**On pages 12-14, Lund describes her experience with how the language she uses to discuss her mental health have evolved over the years as she has shared her narrative: “I can’t give others courage, but I can give them a vocabulary for stories they might want to share one day.”**

**In what ways in our society have we seen shifts and evolutions to the language we use, particularly when it comes to talking about the spectrum of mental health experiences?**

***C***

**“The practice of breaking the silence and sharing our personal experiences with others in an important commitment” (13).**

**How does this act of “breaking” and “sharing” relate to the Christian practice of communion: breaking of the bread and sharing of the Lord’s Supper as an act of oneness in community and hospitality (Acts 2:46-47)?**

**What would it look like to break mental health, disability, and neurodivergent stigmas and share our experiences and realities with one another?**

**Why—or why not—would it be a testament to God’s glory and grace?**

***D***

**Churches are *not* legally required to follow the policies and procedures set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (14). Yet, churches often preach a doctrine that calls us to go above and beyond: don’t stop at just loving “the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,” but go beyond that and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes is a biblical illustration as well of Jesus not settling for the bare minimum of what was expected of him—“two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little,” as pointed out by one disciple—but instead fed the thousands of people before him with ample portions, leaving leftovers to spare (John 6:1-15). Even though not legally required, churches still have the *opportunity* and *call* to widen the welcome.**

**What might it look like for your faith community to not just welcome those with various mental health experiences, visible and invisible disabilities, and neurodiversity, but to include them, support them, and engage all types of bodyminds?**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**In a group, do the activity described on page 25, where you paint cauliflower sections and florets with non-toxic paint in order to illustrate how you “feel your brain is wired.” *Tip: It might be beneficial to read aloud the Story Illustration section to the group as a primer to the activity.***

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**What colors did you choose, and why? What do they represent?**

***B***

**What is an adjective that you would use to describe the collective “Brain Forest”?**

***C***

**Biodiversity is the key to a healthy and thriving ecosystem. Lund connects this to the importance of neurodiversity within our communities: “How might the church be blessed by considering the brain as an ecosystem, a brainforest, where diversity is the thing that makes it good, beautiful, and flourishing?... Christian teaching based on Genesis focuses on the goodness of God’s creation… including the various ways we think and learn” (20).**

**What does this exercise teach us about how our own minds work, and what can it teach us about working alongside others in the context of a group project/shared endeavor? *Tip: If it helps, make up a scenario, or even think about the questions in the context of an upcoming collaboration!***

## Closing

**Read as a group the prayer at the end of the chapter: “Neurodivergent Spirit of the Living God Prayer” by Amanda Diekman (26-28).**

# Chapter Two: Ten Commandments of Neurodiversity

## Opening/Centering

**How do you define “commandments”?**

**What authority do they hold?**

**Would you say that “commandments” are a part of being in covenant with one another? Why or why not?**

## Discussion Questions

**Read each Commandment, and then ask its corresponding question:**

**1. You shall honor diversity.**

* **“What are some ways you can begin to honor neurodiversity within yourself or someone you know?” (32).**

**2. You shall rest as a form of resistance.**

* **“What’s the most exhausting part of living in a world that glorifies and worships being ‘typical’?” (32).**

**3. You shall not hide your light or cover up what makes you shine.**

* **“What causes the shadows of discrimination leading to the stigma and shame of having a brain that is different?” (33).**

**4. You shall have accommodations to support your flourishing.**

* **“What particular accommodation for spiritual spaces and faith communities would most benefit you or someone you love?” (34).**

**5. You shall be respected as a whole person and not be defined by labels, diagnosis, or disease.**

* **“Recall a time when someone incorrectly labeled you. How did this make you feel?” (35).**

**6. You shall be included in all aspects of society and given equal opportunities for happiness and success.**

* **“Universal design is the idea that when we make the world accessible for people with disabilities, we make the world more accessible for everyone because we all benefit. Recall an instance in which you benefited from inclusion. What are some barriers to making faith communities more accessible and inclusive?” (36).**

**7. You shall be honored as created in the image of the divine.**

* **“What does it mean to you that God is neurodivergent?” (37).**

**8. You shall be celebrated for the different gifts you bring to the world.**

* **“What do you celebrate about neurodiversity?” (38).**

**9. You shall be valued as an asset and not a burden to society.**

* **“What aspects of brain differences can be experienced as a burden? Why?” (38).**

**10. You shall be free to be you: to explore, grow, create, and change.**

* **“What questions do you have as you learn more about neurodiversity?” (39).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**Lead a Lectio Divina-style exercise using “The Ten Commandments of Neurodiversity” as the reading of focus.**

***Materials:***

* **An assortment of fidget objects**
* **Print-outs of traceable labyrinths (also known as “finger labyrinths”)**
* **Colored pencils/pens/crayons/markers/chalk and scratch paper**
* **“The Ten Commandments of Neurodiversity” (listed in the Appendix on page 137)**
* **A timer**

[**The United Church of Christ has a detailed resource on Lectio Divina as a spiritual practice**](https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/feed-your-spirit_practices_lectio-divina/)**, but here are the basics principles adapted to fit this context:**

1. **Take two or three collective deep breaths as a group.**
2. **Read the Commandments once. The focus here is reading the words, listening to them and soaking them in. *You can have someone read the Commandments out loud to the group, have everyone read them on their own, or have everyone read them in pairs or smaller groups. Whatever works best for your context and with your people!* Participants are of course encouraged to hold a fidget, or even move through a traceable labyrinth as they absorb the words.**
3. **Pause for about 20-30 seconds. *You can either use your judgement in the moment, or you can set a timer to provide more predictability for your group.***
4. **Read the Commandments a second time. The focus here is reflecting on the words. What words or phrases in particular stick out to you? Notice them, then let them fly away.**
5. **Pause again for about 20-30 seconds.**
6. **Read the Commandments a third time. The focus here is responding to the words. Did the same words or phrases still stick out to you? Were there new discoveries? What colors, shapes, sights, sounds, smells, and/or tastes appear to you? Participants are encouraged to hold their particular words/phrases in their minds, write them down, draw them, mold them with Play-Doh, move their bodies in a way that brings those words/phrases to life, or otherwise respond to their embodiment of the Commandments.**
7. **Pause for a minute or two. Prompt the group and say that now, everyone will in unison read the Commandments (out loud, silently, in small groups, again: whatever works best in your context), except this time, you’ll replace the instances of the words “you”/”your” with “I”/”me”/”my.” The focus here is resting into the words, embracing them, claiming them, embodying them. Here is how the Commandments will now read:**
8. **I shall honor diversity.**
9. **I shall rest as a form of resistance.**
10. **I shall not hide my light or cover up what makes me shine.**
11. **I shall have accommodations to support my flourishing.**
12. **I shall be respected as a whole person and not be defined by labels, diagnosis, or disease.**
13. **I shall be included in all aspects of society and given equal opportunities for happiness and success.**
14. **I shall be honored as created in the image of the divine.**
15. **I shall be celebrated for the different gifts I bring to the world.**
16. **I shall be valued as an asset and not a burden to society.**
17. **I shall be free to be me: to explore, grow, create, and change.**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**Encourage participants to share what emerged for them during the exercise.**

***B***

**Is there a Commandment that you want to hold on to and bring with you when it is time to leave this space?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the following prayer, which is compiled and adapted from the prayers presented by Rev. Dr. Lund throughout this chapter:**

**Still-Stimming God. God of Rest and of Light. Fidget-Spinning God of Infinite Being. Disabled, Neuroqueer, and Autistic God. God of Rainbow Sparkles. God of Liberation. You come to us with many names, many faces, and many embodiments of divine being. Give us hearts of love so that we may honor neurodiversity as a gift from you. Bless our movement, creativity, and play as we sabbath and rest. Help us shine in even the darkest margins. Accommodate us so that we may have the energy and power to express ourselves fully. Help us honor the wholeness and holiness of ourselves and one another as we make church more accessible for everyone. We thank you for creating all of us in your image, and for the blessed joy of neurodiversity. And when it is hard to find that blessed joy, may you open our hearts to honor and embrace the divine worth of each blessed mind. May we as a beloved community be free to unmask and to flourish in all our neurodiversity. Amen.**

# Chapter Three: Neurodiversity at the Bible’s Beginning

## Opening/Centering

**Lund says: “In the beginning, God didn’t make a mistake” (40).**

**Does this statement ring true for you, or is it harder for you to accept? Why?**

## Discussion Questions

**“Differences and divergence are everywhere in the Bible, starting at the very beginning of the book of Genesis” (41).**

***A***

**Where do you see representation of neurodiversity in various media sources (books, graphic novels, TV series, movies, plays, musicals, etc.)?**

***B***

**Would you agree that “neurodiversity is part of creation’s DNA,” as Lund described (43)? Why or why not?**

***C***

**“As you think about the stories in the Bible with which you are most familiar, where do you see sparks of neurodiversity? Which biblical characters express some neurodivergent characteristics, how, and why?” (44).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**“There is a full spectrum of diversity within the created order” (41).**

**The story of Noah’s Ark is memorable. Not only because of the appearance of the rainbow as a sign of God’s covenant with the Earth that God will never again send a life-destroying flood (Genesis 9:11-17), but because God called Noah to bring two of every living thing into safety in the ship that Noah would build (Genesis 6:14-22). Lund says:**

**“It is not enough to have one of every kind, but the genius of neurodiversity is the ability to recreate ourselves over and over again. We are not one and done. We exist in multitudes. …The Bible tells the story of an atypical God who is not interested in keeping to the standards of what is considered normal or typical. God is expansive, creative, larger than life, and often too much. In the Bible, God breaks the rules of polite society, colors outside of the lines—and invites us to do the same” (43).**

**Take the coloring sheet and *purposely* color outside of the lines. Use the “wrong” colors. Etc.**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**How did that make you feel? Was it natural? Irksome? Freeing?**

***B***

**What does this activity teach you about the beautiful spectrum of diversity?**

**What about neurodiversity?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the prayer at the end of the chapter: “Neurodivergent Creation Prayer” (44).**

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# Chapter Four: A Theology of Neurodiversity

## Opening/Centering

**Lund defines theology as:**

**“How we think, talk, dream, write, draw, sing, stim, flap, ruminate, fixate, fidget, create, dance, and imagine about God. Anybody can do this… Theology serves society by giving us tools for serving the highest good. As humans, we aren’t God; but as part of God’s interconnected creation, we can do God’s work. If God is love, then good theology comes from love and leads to love. … It is worth our time to spread love when hate is on the loose. Theology is one way to harness this energy of the universe” (46).**

**Odds are high that at some point in your life, you have spent time dabbling in theology! Can you name a time when you were thinking about God or The Divine in a new way?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**Lund reasons that if we consider the natural diversity built into the DNA of God’s creation, then it is rational also to believe then that neurodiversity in humans was a part of God’s plan for creation from the start (46). Does this approach help us to understand the neurodiversity to be sacred and holy? Why or why not?**

***B***

**“A disability theology of neurodiversity proudly names our right to exist equitably with all others. We are not less than. We are not broken. We are not cursed. We are not to be pitied. We are not waiting to be saved” (47).**

**In the Gospels, there are many instances of Jesus healing people, and specific mentions of “ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people” who are portrayed as waiting to be healed (John 5:3-9; 9:1-12; Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 12:14; etc.). The purpose of including these sorts of healings in the texts have been misconstrued over the centuries and have often been interpreted in ways that make it seem as if physical or neurological divergences are *needing* to be cured or “saved.”**

**Why do you think there has historically been so much emphasis on highlighting Jesus’ ministry of healing?**

**How does this focus affect how we discuss disability and neurodiversity theology?**

***C***

**“As you consider the many ways in which we can think theologically about neurodiversity, which theological concept is the most challenging to you? Why? How might God be calling you to make theology more accessible?” (49).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**“This is my fidget, given for you” (49).**

**In the “Neurodiversity Parable of Jesus’ Fidget Coin,” we witness Jesus fidgeting with a coin he found in the road. It is then described how having the fidget “helped Jesus focus his thoughts and relax… Jesus liked the way the pressure felt on his skin” (45). This is an example of using a physical object to center yourself and practice mindfulness.**

**Everyone should find a small object from nearby (like a coin, pen, bookmark, etc.) and hold it. Take a collective breath in, and then out, and and reflect on the following questions to yourself:**

* **How much do you think the object weighs?**
* **What colors does it contain?**
* **What textures can you feel?**
* **Rotate the object. Is it able to spin in circles? Does it make any sounds?**
* **Does it have a smell?**
* **Is there more than one use for this item?**

**While you might not consider your object to be labeled or marketed as a “fidget,” this exercise helps to demonstrate how useful fidgets can be as a tool for self-regulation. While particularly helpful in neurodivergent communities, anyone can benefit from using fidget objects!**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**Can you name what you are now feeling in your body?**

***B***

**Lund describes how fidgets “are how God calms me down enough, stills my mind enough so that I can hear the still speaking voice of God” (48):**

**“I believe fidgets are holy and can be considered spiritual tools for prayer and communion with God. Not only traditional spiritual tools, such as prayer beads and rosaries, but ordinary fidgets can become holy instruments helping us focus on God’s love for us” (49).**

**Do you think utilizing a fidget object while praying, meditating, or otherwise centering could be of benefit to you, if you do not already do so? Why or why not?**

***C***

**Imagine that you’re attending or leading a worship service or other form of sacred gathering and you see a kid using a fidget object. Do any judgments or biases pop-up in your mind?**

**What about if it was a teenager using a fidget object?**

**An adult?**

**An elderly person?**

**If so, I want to affirm that it is okay if you do find yourself with judgemental thoughts or biases; being aware of our presuppositions is the biggest leap when it comes to confronting them! What might you train yourself to think instead if you were actually in this situation?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the prayer towards the end of the chapter: “The Neurodiversity Prayer” (48).**

# Chapter Five: Confronting Ableism and Stopping Stigma

## Opening/Centering

**Lund describes the relationship between stigma and ableism as a “two-headed dragon” (52):**

**“Stigma is a result of ableism. Because of discrimination toward disabled people, there is stigma: the shame of being categorized as less valuable, less worthy, and less than equal. Stigma is harmful because it excludes and punishes disabled people socially. The stigma related to mental health symptoms creates barriers to accessing support” (51).**

## Discussion Questions

**How familiar are you with the terms “ableism” and “stigma”?**

**Have you ever been the subject of ableism or stigma?**

**If so, how did it make you feel?**

**Did it stop you from seeking an accommodation or a service that could have been a helpful support?**

***A***

**Lund says:**

**“Ableism and stigma use these labels to limit people and create barriers to flourishing, whereas the named condition is only one part of who a person is. The brain is not only depressed: it is also many other things. Suicide happens when hope is limited by the shadows of despair. Labels limit us and can lead to despair” (53).**

**In what ways have labels been harmful to you (or a loved one)?**

**In what ways have labels been useful to you?**

***B***

**“What do you do when someone says something hurtful, stigmatizing, or shameful to you or to someone else in your presence?” (55).**

**“How have you responded if/when you inadvertently said hurtful things to others?” (55).**

**In both instances, how do you *want* to respond in the future?**

***C***

**Lund asserts that a theology that supports the inherent neurodiversity of God and God’s creation also supports the notion that when people are free of ableism and stigma, they can fully “express who God created them to be” and we can glimpse “the full potential of the human body and mind” (52). Further, Lund quotes *Christianity Today* author Sunita Theiss, who boldly proclaims to faith communities that they have the responsibility to be a space of radical welcome, hospitality, affirmation, and inclusion for all (54-55).**

**At present, what ways does your faith community answer this call?**

**Where are your faith community’s growing edges when it comes to being radically inclusive?**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

***For this activity, everyone will need access to an electronic device that can search the internet. Participants can have individual devices, or can be put into pairs or small groups.***

**One of the ways to confront ableism and stop stigma is to share and promote available resources. Lund says the following:**

**“The neurodiversity movement can provide support, resources, friendship, and encouragement to people at risk of suicide because of mental health symptoms. Within the neurodiversity movement, there is hope through connection for people who feel ashamed, isolated, and alone. One thing we can all do to increase hope is to share resources that support people who are facing mental health crises” (53).**

**Not only does every geographic place have different resources, links, hotlines, etc., but these resources can change from year to year for any number of reasons. There are also different resources available for different population groups, such as by age, gender, race, and more.**

**Take 5-10 minutes to search for resources specifically available to your community and/or specific people groups/populations. Use the table below to help you mix-and-match keywords to search. The table is not exhaustive, so please feel free to come up with your own search terms! *Tip: Use phrase searching, and boolean operators to get the best results.* Each group should document (write down, type into a notes app, screenshot, etc.) their findings.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topics** | **People Groups** | **Geographic Area** |
| **• Suicide prevention**  **• Lifeline**  **• Crisis line**  **• Hotline**  **• Warmline**  **• Mental health resources** | **• Youth**  **• Young adults**  **• Seniors**  **• LGBTQ+**  **• BIPOC**  **• Indigenous**  **• Neurodivergent** | **Name of your:**  **• Town**  **• City**  **• County**  **• State**  **• Region**  **• Country** |

**Compare findings as a group. Have somebody document these resources for the group (a whiteboard or a projected screen would be great for the visual, but the important part is just collecting the resources!).**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**Were any of the resources you found of particular note?**

**If so, what made the resource unique and/or impactful?**

***B***

**Lund shares the example of her 988 bumper sticker and how that simple act can help “shine a light” on the resource (53).**

**What can you do to promote life-saving resources such as 988?**

**What can your community—in particular, your faith community—do?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the following prayer adapted from Lund’s words (55):**

**Radically Inclusive God, may we as a sacred community “answer the call to faith by recognizing [our] role in preventing suicide. [By] embracing neurodiversity in the church[, we] can save lives because it dismantles the sins of ableism and stigma. As [your followers], we have the power to expose the oppressive evils of ableism and stigma and the systemic shadows that perpetuate them. We cast out ableism and stigma by proclaiming the beauty, value, and blessedness of neurodivergent minds. We claim this in the name of the Neurodivergent God.” Amen.**

# Chapter Six: The Neurodivergent Body of Christ

## Opening/Centering

**“The Body of Christ is creative, resourceful, expansive, energetic, imaginative, playful, accommodating, thoughtful, and diverse” (57).**

**What are other words you would use to describe the Body of Christ?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**Lund says that if we believe that neurodiversity is a part of God’s design for creation, it is reasonable to conclude that the Body of Christ is also beautifully neurodiverse: “Honoring the neurodiversity of the Body of Christ means we are united by neurodiversity, not divided by it” (57).**

**How does viewing the Body of Christ as neurodiverse change how we think about the role of mission and justice-seeking in our faith communities?**

***B***

**“There is nobody that does not belong. In Christ there is neither typical nor atypical, neither neurodivergent nor neurotypical. We are all one in Christ Jesus” (58).**

**What makes you feel like you belong?**

**How do you find belonging in spaces where you feel like the odd one out?**

***C***

**“We don’t treat our brains very well. We treat our brains like machines, high-functioning computers or snack vending machines. Even machines need to be rebooted, powered down, and recharged. Our brains are so much more. We demand so much of our brains. What would it look like instead to honor our own minds as the neurodivergent Body of Christ, treating them with care, compassion, and respect?” (61).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**I invite you to take a survey of your physical space. If your group is meeting in a location such as your church or other community area (or is meeting online but has a shared space), try to evaluate it with a fresh perspective. If your group comes from many different physical spaces, ideas and insights can still be shared. Reflect on the following questions:**

* **What could we add to make this space more welcoming?**
* **What could we *remove* to make it more welcoming?**
* **How do we make space for a variety of bodyminds in this place without building walls, barriers, or otherwise excluding them?**
* **How do we honor diversity in this space?**
* **What changes would help us to live out our values?**
* **Who do we need to invite on this journey as we think about ways we can transform our space?**

**Now, commit to make a change in your space (it could be big or small, but I still want to affirm that *any* movement towards progress is still progress!) that makes it accessible to more people in the Body of Christ.**

**Hold yourselves accountable by coming up with a time frame in which you want to accomplish your goal!**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**What did you discover about your space? What surprised you?**

***B***

**What inspires or motivates you to make changes to your space in order to become more neuroinclusive?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the following prayer, inspired by Lund’s text (57-58):**

**Neurodivergent and Still-Speaking God, we are curious witnesses to the diverse expressions of your Spirit. Help us to embrace neurodiversity in the Body of Christ, and inspire us to be venues of open space for and creation of new opportunities for more of your diverse expressions to be experienced. May we recognize and honor the vastness of diversity that you have blessed us with time and time again. Amen.**

# Chapter Seven: Neurodiversity and Intersectionality

## Opening/Centering

**“The power of thinking about intersectionality is the emphasis on how our differences are positives, not deficits” (63).**

**In this chapter, Lund discusses neurodiversity and how it intersects with disability, racial, and LGBTQ+ justices, though she recognizes that many other forms of intersectionality were not named. What other intersections would you add (74)?**

**Do you have personal experience doing ministry at any of these intersections?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**After naming the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 as an example of “Jesus’ ministry to people with multiple intersecting identities” (65), Lund says: “When it comes to blessed intersectionality, we too can be confident that our whole identities matter to the God who formed, who created us in God’s own image, and chose us” (66).**

**What does it mean to believe that Jesus honors our diversity and our intersecting identities?**

**What does it mean for the Church or other faith communities to believe that Jesus honors diversity and intersecting identities?**

***B***

**Lund discusses the importance of talking about neurodiversity, and how these discussions “honor the various ways in which people experience the world, considering how they process, perceive, communicate, and navigate the world differently” (66).**

**Through what other diverse lenses do we also find new and valuable perspectives?**

**How do these perspectives help us interact with our theologies?**

***C***

**One of the dynamics at play in regard to what language we use when discussing mental health and neurodiversity is medical vs. non-medical models. For example, a medical model approach might focus on naming a disorder, whereas a non-medical model would center on symptoms and/or experiences.**

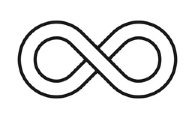
**Lund quotes Dr. Kimberly Douglass, who says: “Just considering the sensory needs within the Neurodiverse community shifts power to community members. It shifts who can get support. It changes the calculus of whose needs are considered legitimate and urgent” (68).**

**Do you find this idea of ‘shifting power’ and adopting practices that are attuned to the needs of neurodivergent people (versus medical and/or other professional interventions) to be a helpful framework when thinking about how a faith community could better support their neurodiverse community? Why or why not?**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**On the use of a rainbow infinity sign as a symbol for neurodiversity, Lund says: “When we think about how neurodiversity intersects with other forms of diversity, this symbol represents limitless possibilities. There are infinite ways in which humans express and experience diversity” (63).**

**Each participant should have a blank piece of paper and access to colored pencils, pens, crayons, and/or markers. Everyone will start off by drawing a hollow infinity symbol like the adjacent example image (alternatively, you could print off full-sheet copies with infinity symbols on them to pass out to participants).**

****

**Inside of the infinity symbol, participants should write about or draw aspects about what sorts of diverse qualities that they bring to the proverbial table. For example, they could include: neurodivergent, hispanic, queer, or even stamp collector or woodwind player.**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**What aspects of yourself that you wrote down intersect with other dimensions of your being?**

***B***

**When certain aspects of yourself cross paths, is this a positive thing? Why or why not?**

***C***

**Does examining the diverse qualities of yourself as within an infinity symbol—capable of intersecting—aid you in understanding the “infinite ways in which humans express and experience diversity” (63)?**

**If not, is there a different shape or form that makes more sense to you?**

***D***

**Lund says: “intersectionality is blessed because when we honor the multiple identities a person experiences, we have an opportunity to work for justice and equality. Intersectionality is blessed when we honestly engage in the work to dismantle individual and communal systems of oppression” (65).**

**In what ways can you imagine your intersections assisting you in justice work?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the prayer in this chapter: “Prayer in Praise of Intersectionality” by Dr. Kimberly Douglass (68-69).**

# Chapter Eight: The Neuroinclusive Church

## Opening/Centering

**In conversation with Lund, Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley of Abiding Presence Lutheran Church said that their neurodiversity ministry was modeled and nurtured after their mental health ministry. This notion reminded me of how the Queer Liberation Movement has its roots in the strategies of the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Can you think of other movements, organizations, or ministries that utilized successful concepts and strategies from another campaign or structure?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**“A neuroinclusive church is a church that honors and celebrates …and blesses neurodivergent minds” (76).**

**Did any of the neuroinclusive church models/examples resonate with you? Which one(s)? And why?” (102).**

**Further, this chapter also highlighted some of the various unforeseen, yet positive, outcomes as a result of making changes to become more neuroinclusive. Was there an outcome in particular that piqued your interest? What made it surprising or noteworthy?**

***B***

**Universal Design is a principle brought to life “when we make improvements for everyone’s benefit, including those who are already there” (97).**

**One example from this chapter of universal design at work came from Rev. Khaleigh Laicher of First Congregational Church of Greenwich in Connecticut, who noted that their Sensory Sanctuary Resource Library in practice was not just of benefit to neurodivergent folks in worship services, but neurotypical people as well (87).**

**What are some other examples or ideas of universal design that are attuned to the needs of a neurodiverse community?**

**What could be implemented in your context?**

***C***

**From the list of categories of accommodations on pages 98-99, how do they “affect the way you think about and design a neuroinclusive ministry? Which area do you perceive to be the easiest and which [is] the most challenging to tackle? How might you adapt an existing ministry or activity, such as worship, so that it better addresses these five areas? Is there anything you would add to the list?” (99).**

***D***

**Examine the “Ten Values for Neuroinclusive Ministry” on pages 99-100 (also listed in the Appendix on pages 137-138). “What is missing from the list of ten values? What would you change, adapt, delete, or add?” (100).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**One of the many ways that your faith community/context can be more neuroinclusive is by “offering multiple ways to pray” (91).**

**When I reflect back on my time working in outdoor ministry, there are a number of profound revelations and spiritual disciplines from Camp that influence and inspire how I do ministry in my present contexts. One such lasting practice was how we prayed: we threw away the “traditional” notion that one must sit still and quiet. Instead, we would do things like shout our prayers to the skies with “repeat after me” prayers, have prayers that involved body movement/actions, and prayers that were prefaced by telling the campers that they should get in their “favorite praying position” (this last one usually resulted in campers and staff alike laying flat-out on the ground, upside-down, twisted into knots, or in ninja-like stances).**

**So, your challenge is this: individually, in pairs, or in small groups, create a prayer that isn’t just sitting still and quiet. The larger group as a whole should come up with a topic that everyone will create a prayer about. Take about 5 or 10 minutes before bringing everyone back together and take turns teaching/leading the prayers.**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**Despite everyone being given the same topic of what to pray about, how did the various prayers differ from each other?**

***B***

**What was your experience being taught the different prayers? What parts of your bodymind were engaged?**

***C***

**What did this exercise teach you about prayer?**

## Closing

**Read as a group the following prayer, inspired by Lund’s text:**

**Neurodivergent and Ever-Evolving God, thank you for creating us in your Divine Image, and for encouraging us to be relational and connected with others. As we search for our own identity and belonging in community, may we journey with others as they, too, seek to find places of safe harbor. Remind us to never think that just inclusion alone is enough, but that we are called to strive for deeper belonging with one another. May we always be on the lookout for opportunities to be neuroinclusive in this place, and in all places. In your Humble and Divine Spirit we pray, Amen.**

# Chapter Nine: The Neurodivergent Minister

## Opening/Centering

**As of mid-2025, there is still limited research that can point to a specific percentage of ministers who identify as neurodivergent. In order to formulate an educated guess though, Lund compiled tangential statistics to estimate that about 20% of ministers identify as neurodivergent (104).**

**Do you find this to be a fair assumption? Why or why not? What other surveys or statistics might you suggest be considered when attempting to make an educated guess as to how many ministers identify as neurodivergent?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**“If neurodiversity among ministers is more common than we realize, then how might the church respond better to accommodate the needs of neurodivergent ministers? What are the lived experiences of neurodivergent ministers, and what can we learn from their stories?” (104).**

***B***

**“The power of breaking the silence is the opportunity to address these realities and work together to put in place accommodations. But there needs to be safety in doing so, and not fear of being fired or punished for advocating for support” (112).**

**In conversation with a group of neurodivergent people called to work in the church or other specialized faith settings, one individual asked the group if anyone was “out” at their settings, and how that conversation played out. I was struck by the question, as it is one that I’ve witnessed many times in circles with queer leaders in faith settings. What walls might we inadvertently be holding up that might serve as a barrier for a leader to “come out” as neurodivergent? How might we go about deconstructing those walls?**

***C***

**Lund addresses—through citing Rev. Lamar Hardwick’s work—that neurofamilies are less likely to get to church. “Why would neurodivergent people have a lower chance of attending church? What barriers to accessibility [are we] not addressing as a church?” (106).**

***D***

**“What would it look like to “NeuroWild” the church, celebrating the beauty in diversity and honoring the presence of the divine in all brains, all bodies, and all humans?” (113).**

***E***

**“Not only can ministry be a good vocational fit for neurodivergent folks, but folks who are neurodivergent also bring important skills, insights, and gifts to the context of ministry” (109).**

**Lund highlights the story of Rev. Kay Rohloff, who is quoted listing some of the “unique gifts” that neurodivergent ministers bring to their calls/contexts. In light of this strengths-based approach, in general, what do you believe to be the joys and/or strengths of having a neurodivergent leader? A neurodivergent *faith* leader? What about specific to your own community/context?**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**This activity is inspired by a similar exercise used in Michelle Huneven’s *Search: A Novel*, in which, a committee for a pastoral search and call process did an exercise with their congregation where they compared and discussed a handful of mini fictional pastoral candidate profiles as a way of gauging what sorts of qualities and characteristics the church found were important for their next pastor to have. Below, you will find a few sentences about four fictional candidates that you’ll examine under the pretense that your group is a committee tasked with hiring someone to fill an open pastoral leadership position in your church or organization. For the purposes of this activity, you’ll have already received an application/profile from these candidates, have interviewed each of them, and are deciding who to call back for a second round of interviews.**

**Candidate 1: Alex**

**Alex is a recent seminary graduate who has previously held jobs in a few different fields over the last 10 years (welding, teaching, and non-profit fundraising). This would be their first call as a church pastor, but they have been involved in their home church since they were a youth and have served in a couple different volunteer leadership roles in that same church.**

**Alex disclosed openly about identifying as neurodivergent in their profile, listing that how their brain works differently is a strength that they bring into all of their previous jobs.**

**Candidate 2: Jordan**

**Jordan is a seasoned minister who has previously served at a handful of different churches within your denomination over the last 20 or so years, spending about four to five years at each and with strong references from each of their previous churches.**

**During the interview, Jordan spoke confidently with their language and speech, but didn’t seem to make eye contact with anyone longer than a second or two at a time throughout the entirety of the interview.**

**Candidate 3: Morgan**

**Morgan is a minister new to your denomination, ordained and previously serving as an associate pastor in a church of a full communion partner.**

**Morgan expressed in the interview that one of their growing edges was that it takes them longer than their peers to get back on task when they are interrupted by unscheduled visitors in the office, but have found that designating either a few explicit do-not-disturb or work-from-home hours each week has been a positive way of combating this issue.**

**Candidate 4: Taylor**

**Taylor, a minister with strong denominational and interfaith ties, comes highly recommended after serving for over 10 years in a church as a youth and children’s pastor.**

**Taylor came to the interview with a silent, though loudly-colored and indiscreet fidget object that they alternated between holding in their hand and setting it down on the table in front of them throughout the interview so that they could talk with their hands.**

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**Was there a particular candidate (or two) that stood out to you? If so, why?**

***B***

**Were there any turn-offs that steered you away from moving a particular candidate forward? If so, what were they, and why?**

***C***

**How do your reflections of the strengths and growing edges of the candidates compare to the observations of others in your group?**

***D***

**Were there any biases or presuppositions that you recognized yourself thinking? If so, how might you address them? *Encourage participants to be honest and authentic. Biases and presuppositions are perfectly normal! Though, we must then recognize and address them in order to work towards more holistic and just responses.***

## Closing

**Read as a group the following prayer, inspired by Lund’s text (111-113):**

**Holy and Neurodivergent God—who bestowed upon us the gift of blessed minds—help us to open wide the doors for our neurokin; for they, too, belong in beloved community. May we be a safe and supportive vessel of community for neurodivergent leaders, whether they themselves have discovered the beauty of their neurodiversity in years of the past or in the years to come. May we experience, honor, and celebrate the unique and holy offerings neurodivergent leaders of the past, present, and future share with us. In Your Blessed Name we pray, Amen.**

# Chapter Ten: The Neurospiritual Movement

## Opening/Centering

**Lund says: “In a world overflowing with reasons to curse God and die, it is an act of courageous hope to be open to being blessed” (118).**

**What are your reactions to this quote?**

## Discussion Questions

***A***

**Do you think that “self-identifying as neurodivergent [can] help decrease stigma and shame traditionally associated with mental illness, mental health challenges, brain disorders, and disabilities?” (119). Why or why not?**

***B***

**Throughout the book, Lund has named “play” as being an essential part of God’s spirit (31), of the Body of Christ (57, 128), a holy expression of spirituality (127-128). She also tells faith communities that they can be more neuroinclusive by incorporating “playful fellowship experiences as important parts of the life of the church” (128).**

**If “neurospirituality reclaims play as a sacred act,” then what does it mean to defy the reality that many “Christian cultures in the U.S. glorify productivity and that churches view play as superfluous” (128)?**

**How might we go about dismantling these historical views on play?**

***C***

**“What supports and accommodations can the church provide for seminary students, student ministers, and those in the process of ordination? How can we ensure that candidates for ministry will not be discriminated against for being neurodivergent? What will it take for the church to realize neurodivergent people are some of the most gifted [people] God could call to go into ministry?” (120).**

***D***

**“What does it mean for the church to ‘do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6:8), when we engage in ministry by, with, and for neurodiverse communities?” (119).**

***E***

**“Language matters. Language is personal and political. Language can empower us, and it can diminish us. Language can revive us, and it can extinguish the spark of light within us” (122).**

**“As we continue in conversation, how should our understanding [of the neurodiversity and spirituality movement] and language evolve?” (124).**

## Activity (for all ages and stages)

**“Neurospirituality [is] what happens when a neurodivergent person of faith experiences an encounter with the holy” (117).**

**In the introduction to this book, Lund mentions that painting is one way that she finds she can express her emotions: “The canvas became a mirror for my mind, colors and shapes expressing the feelings I did not have the words to describe.” The creative arts (such as—and certainly not limited to—painting, writing, poetry, dance, and music) “all come through blessed minds: minds blessed with abilities to create beauty, meaning, and human connections with the divine spark” (1).**

**I invite you to make art using your blessed mind (and yes, all minds are blessed)! This can look, sound, feel, etc. in any way you feel like you are called to do. You don’t have to be an expert either: if someone who has never taken a dance class in their life wanted to experiment with movement as their artwork, wonderful! If a self-proclaimed “terrible drawer” (like myself) decides to give illustration a go, fabulous! Do not feel the need to limit yourself based on things that you have historically excelled at, though you are certainly more than welcome to stick with what you know. This is meant to be a judgement-free opportunity to simply—and spiritually—create art. And if you identify as a neurodivergent person, perhaps this will even be a practice for you in neurospirituality; “a way to understand the different ways in which neurodivergent people nurture their relationship to God” (125).**

**If a prompt is helpful as you imagine what your blessed mind might create, consider the following quotation from Lund:**

**“Like the forest, we constantly change, grow, and experience seasons of loss, death, and rebirth. Like the forest, we do not stand alone but are surrounded by kindred spirits. Like the forest, we are connected by a sometimes invisible bond that roots us in the power of God’s love. … Blending together neurodiversity and spirituality honors the Spirit that enlivens our blessed minds. … Like the roots of trees connected in an underground network, as part of the neurodiversity brainforest, we, too, are connected in a neurospiritual movement of the Spirit” (121-122, 124).**

***Note:***

***This activity can be implemented in a number of ways. Here are some suggestions:***

* ***Assign it as “homework” as a part of their preparation for this chapter’s discussion/gathering session, and then utilize the debrief question(s) within your discussion of this chapter.***
* ***Empower them to make art with their blessed minds on their own as a “takeaway” activity or call to further reflection/action at the conclusion of this book study.***
* ***Have an extra discussion/gathering session just for creating art with your blessed minds as a group! Just make sure you allow space for visual arts, music-making, movement, writing, etc.***
* ***Assign it as “homework” leading into an extra discussion/gathering session. At this gathering, invite them to share their work—”finished” or not!—with everyone, and then debrief as a group.***

***Debrief questions:***

***A***

**What did your creative process entail? What inspiration did you pull from?**

***B***

**What made this activity spiritual, and why?**

**Was this activity a practice in neurospirituality for you?**

***C***

**“How is God calling you to join the neurodiversity spiritual movement?” (130).**

**How is God calling your faith community (123)?**

**“How do you see yourself helping to break the silence about neurodiversity and helping to end the stigma and shame?” (123).**

## Closing

**Read as a group the Benediction that follows this chapter (131).**