

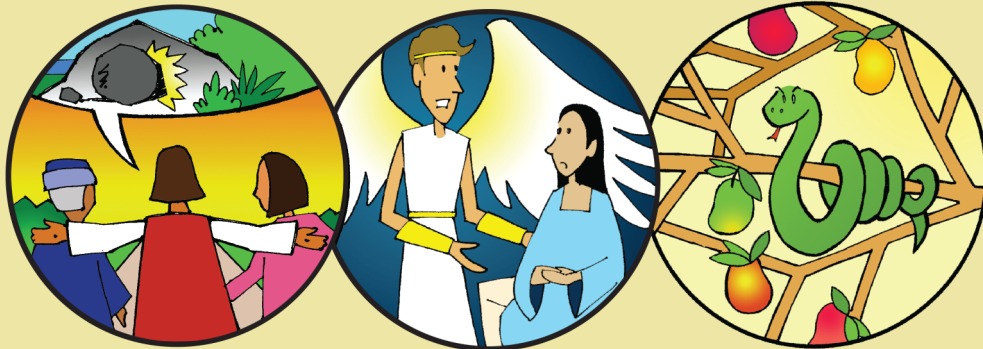
# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

# GUIDE #1-1

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# LIVING THE WORD

## Narrative Lectionary



# Small Group Guides

## Discussion Guide

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Living the Word: Small Group Guides (Narrative Lectionary, Year 1)

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# Noah and the Ark

## *God's Promises Bring Hope*

### About the Story

The Narrative Lectionary, and our study this year, begins in Genesis. Genesis is the first book in the Bible, in fact the name literally means “beginning.” Genesis begins with the creation of the world, which God declares good. But the goodness of the world did not last long. From the beginning, people did not put their trust in God. Sin entered the world. The relationship people were created to have with God and with one another was broken. Violence erupted among humans and wickedness destroyed creation. Sin caused God such grief that God decided to flood the earth.

### The Point:

**We can trust that God cares for creation and will never again destroy the earth.** Humankind, and indeed, the entire creation, was declared “good” by God, but humanity turned toward evil. God decided to start over with Noah, but promised never again to destroy the earth. God created a covenant with a visible sign—the rainbow—to remind us and God that instead of destruction, God will find another way.

God did not destroy everything, though. God provided a way for Noah, his family, and every kind of animal to be saved. Through them, creation began again. This is the first in a series of efforts that God made to restore the world to the relationship that God intended for creation. It did not, however, solve the problem of sin. In spite of Noah’s obedience to God’s command to build the ark, in spite of the cleansing of the flood, sin endured. The inclination of the human heart after the flood was still evil but God promised never again to address that problem through the destruction of the earth by flood.

God made the promise visible in the rainbow hung in the sky. Instead of destruction, God will work in another way. God will work through a particular family and, as that family grows, through the nation they become. The blessing, though, will not stop there. God will become flesh and be born into this family so that all nations and all of creation will be redeemed and restored. This is the grand story that will unfold as we embark on our journey through the Bible this year!

### Opening Prayer

God of redemption, help us to know that where we see destruction, you inspire hope; where we see brokenness, you see promise; where we see rain, you craft beautiful rainbows. Help us to remember your promise and blessing to Noah and his family, and inspire in us the call to follow your call to justice and peace. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Last Week/Next Week

This is our first week, and we begin with the well-known story of Noah and the Ark! Next week, the God makes another promise with Abram that will create and shape the entire future of the Israelites.

Into the Story

If you have ever read Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid*, you know that it is very different than the story you remembered from Disney's animated movie. Can you think of other stories that you learned as child but experienced very differently as an adult? Today's Bible story is found in many children's Bible storybooks, baby nurseries, and countless toy ark play sets, but it is not really a story fit for children.

Learning the Story

*Generations after the creation of the first people, God sees that humanity has become wicked, so God resolves to start over by creating a flood to wipe out all of creation, saving only Noah, his family, and representatives of every species of animal on an ark.*

**Read Genesis 6:5-8 – The Wickedness of Humankind**

- ❓ Have you ever been overwhelmed by all the complex and seemingly unsolvable problems in our world? Ever heard a story that breaks your heart, or had an experience that cannot be adequately described without using the word “evil?” Share an example with the group.
- ❓ Why do you think a world that God called good in the creation story (Genesis 1) could turn evil so quickly? Why do you think God lets evil happen?
- ❓ What do you think of God's solution “to blot out from the earth the human beings [God] has created”? Do you think God's reaction was extreme?

**Read Genesis 6:9-22 – The Solution: Pick One Family and Start Over!**

- ❓ In the familiarity of this story we can easily lose sight that this is a story of global destruction by God's hand. What do you say when a child asks you about what happened to all the other people?
- ❓ Some Christian leaders today talk about hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters as if they were signs of God's wrath. How do these statements make you feel? How do they fit, or not fit, with your understanding of a loving God?
- ❓ How would you react if you were in Noah's shoes? Would you argue or try to bargain with God, like Abraham (Genesis 18–19) and Moses (Exodus 32:9-14)?

Bible Connections

- ✚ In Genesis 1, God created order out of watery chaos. After each act of creation, God declared it to be good.
- ✚ The author of Hebrews praised Noah as an example of faith because he respected the warning of God and built an ark (Hebrews 11:7)
- ✚ God threatened to destroy the Israelites after they built a golden calf, but Moses argued with God (Exodus 32:9-14).

**Read Genesis 8:6-12 – The End of the Flood**

- ❓ How would you feel if you were with Noah in the ark, waiting for the floods to subside?
- ❓ How would the return of the dove make you feel?
- ❓ After leaving the ark, Noah and his family immediately build an altar and praise God. What would be the first thing you would do after getting off of the ark?

**Read Genesis 9:8-17 – God Does Something Radically Different**

- ❓ How does it change the way you read this story if you think of it not as a story about God destroying the world but rather as a story of God who—faced with human sinfulness—chooses to put aside divine destruction in favor of pursuing a relationship with us?
- ❓ The rainbow may have had additional meaning for the original audience: it may have represented a weapon, such as a bow and arrow. What does it mean in that sense, that God is laying down God’s bow in the sky? Does that deepen the meaning of the promise?
- ❓ Verse 10 states that the covenant is with every living creature on the planet. What does it mean that the covenant is made not just to us, but to every creature, too?

**Living the Story: Worship**

Place a bowl in an easily accessible location, such as the center of the room. To remember the promise of forgiveness at baptism, have everyone hold their hand over the bowl, then pour a pitcher of water slowly over the hands, making sure to get every hand wet (in large groups, you may need to divide into two or more smaller groups). As you pour the water, have someone read the following prayer:

**Supplies**

- ✝ Bowl
- ✝ Pitcher of water
- ✝ Towel

Lord God, you preserved Noah, his family, and the animals from the waters of the flood and cast a rainbow in the sky to remind us of your promises of grace and forgiveness. Through baptism, you promise that same forgiveness, forever making us your children. Help us to live into the freedom of our baptisms by the faith you daily renew in your grace and forgiveness. Amen.

**Closing Prayer**

Divide the group into three smaller groups. Each group will do an action, to simulate a rainfall. Group One starts by snapping their fingers at random intervals. After about thirty seconds, Group Two starts clapping their hands. After an additional thirty seconds, Group Three starts to pat their hands on a table or their legs. Have one participant read the following prayer:

Gracious God, in the midst of rain and storm, lightning and thunder, wind and hurricane, we know that you are there. We know that you care deeply for creation, to the point that it grieves your heart when creation turns from you. Help us to trust in your promise, and help us to see the rainbow you set in the sky to remind us of your deep, deep love.

At the end of the prayer, stop the actions in reverse order. After a few moments of silence, the prayer leader concludes with: “And the people of God say...” and everyone responds, “Amen!”

## Bible Nuts & Bolts: A Brief History of the Bible (Part 1, Old Testament)

The Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, was written over a period of several hundred years by a variety of different authors. According to tradition, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, including Genesis, from which we get today's story; however, it is more likely that these books were compiled from various earlier sources during or soon after the Babylonian exile, around 600 BCE.

### At Home

- ✝ Write down a list of five goals you hope to achieve over this year through your small group, such as regular devotions, following the daily readings, or praying for each other daily.
- ✝ Pay attention to the weather this week. Notice the clouds, the sun, and, if it rains, the rain. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the weather every day. And, in cases of dangerous weather, pray for God's protection, especially for those who need it the most.
- ✝ Pray for the members of your small group as you begin this journey together.

### Daily Readings

#### **Sunday—Read Genesis 6:5-22; 8:6-12; 9:8-17**

The story of Noah and the ark and God's promise with Noah and all of creation. Reflect on God's promise.

#### **Monday—Read Genesis 9:18-29**

Noah's sons accidentally see him naked, so Noah drunkenly curses one and honors the other two. This is an odd story from the Bible. Why was it included in the Bible, what does it mean, and what, if anything, can we learn from it today?

#### **Tuesday—Read Psalm 93**

This psalm praises God, perhaps referencing the floods and waters of Noah's story. Say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the resource of water; pray for those who may not have access to clean or drinkable water.

#### **Wednesday—Read Psalm 104:1-9**

Another psalm, this one a prayer of thanksgiving, referencing God's creative energies. Do something creative today: write a poem, draw a picture, sing a song, etc.

#### **Thursday—Read Psalm 104:24-35**

Continuing the reading from yesterday, the psalmist sings of how God provides for all. Set aside and donate some non-perishable food for a local shelter, food pantry, or other service agency that collects food for those in need.

#### **Friday—Read Genesis 11:1-9**

Out of pride, humanity attempts to build a tower to reach the heavens, but God thwarts their plans. Search the Internet for the Lord's Prayer in a language you do not know and pray it, reflecting on the beauty and diversity of language.

#### **Saturday—Read Genesis 11:26-32**

Abram settles near the land of Canaan. Canaan would become the home of the Israelites. Reflect on what home means for you: what makes a place—or people—home?