

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

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LIVING THE WORD

Narrative Lectionary



Small Group Guides

Discussion Guide

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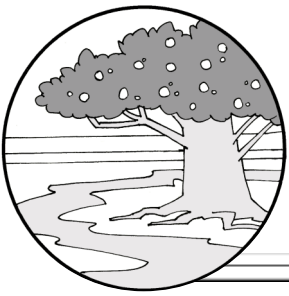
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God Creates Humans

God Creates Family

About the Story

Welcome to the Narrative Lectionary! We begin our year of study and spiritual practice together at the beginning of the Bible with the second of the creation stories.

The first two chapters of Genesis have two creation stories—and they are quite different! In the first (Genesis 1:1–2:4a), the world begins as a watery void. In six days, God creates light, sky, dry land and plants, sun and stars, creatures of the sea and birds of the air, animals of the land, and finally humans, made in God’s image, male and female together. Then God rests on the seventh day. Today we read the second creation story (Genesis 2:4b-25). In this story, the world is dry, with a periodic stream of water. In no specific timeline, God begins by creating a human out of the dust, followed by plants and trees, a watering river, birds of the air and animals of the land, and finally by creating woman and man.

The Point:

We are created to be partners in God’s work. Today we hear the story of how God created the first humans, the first family. Their relationship is defined by love and cooperation as it is with the best of all human families, no matter what their shape or size may be. And, it is out of these loving relationships that God’s kingdom of peace and justice is formed.

Both creation stories answer questions about how the world came to be—but also create more questions for us today. For instance, in today’s story, the first human is created before plants and animals. The geological record shows that many varieties of plants and animals existed long before humanity began. The writers of Genesis were not trying to create a scientific or historical origin story for the world. Instead, the story is meant to show readers who God is, who we are, what the purpose of the world is, and the relationship between all of us. God created and sustains all of creation. We were made to care for creation, and creation cares for us, too!

Another question is about the first two people. Many jokes have been made about who really came first (was Adam a rough draft?) and sometimes this order of creation has been used to justify male domination over women. Many early Jewish and Christian writings about today’s story point out that the first woman was not made from man’s head to rule him or from his feet to serve him, but from his side to be his equal partner and helper.

There are many more questions that this story brings up. But at the heart of the story it is about a God who loves us so much that God creates an intricate ecosystem to sustain us and a family to share in life’s joys and sorrows.

Last Week/Next Week

Today's story is the start of the Narrative Lectionary year, so we start at the beginning of God's relationship with humanity in Genesis. Next week, the story continues the theme of God's relationship with humanity as God promises a child to Sarah and Abraham.

Opening Prayer

God of creation, you created the first human family and provided a home for them in the garden. As we begin our time together this year, bind us together so that we may be one family with you and all of your creation. We pray this in your holy name. Amen.

Into the Story

If you were going to tell the story of your family, where would you begin? What people in your life have been your closest partners and helpers? Go around the group and share your answers. If your group is new together or has a lot of new members this year, please introduce yourselves to one another, as well!

Learning the Story

God forms the first human from dust and God's own breath. Then, God creates animals, but none of these could be Adam's partner. God separates this first human into male and female, creating the first family.

Read Genesis 2:4b-9 – The First Human

- ❓ What does it mean to you that the first human was made from the dust of the ground?
- ❓ In this story, the first person is made before any plants grow in the world. Have you ever been in a place without trees or plants? What did it feel like?
- ❓ What do you think the first human's thought was after receiving the breath of life?

Read Genesis 2:10-17 – The Garden

- ❓ The first human was charged with tilling the garden and keeping it, and in return, the garden provided food and shelter. Have you ever been charged with taking care of something that also took care of you?
- ❓ What do you think the purpose of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was, if it only was going to later cause trouble? Are there some things in creation today that should remain a mystery from us? Why or why not?

Bible Connections

- ✚ The first creation story is told in Genesis 1:1–2:4.
- ✚ In Genesis 3, the story of the first humans continue as they disobey God and eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.
- ✚ In Romans 5:12-18, Paul contrasts Adam, the first man, with Christ, the new Adam, referencing today's story.

Read Genesis 2:18-25 – The First Woman

- ❓ If you have time, read through Genesis chapter 1 and compare that to the story for today. What are the differences and similarities of the two stories? Why do you think the writers of the Bible included two different versions of the same story?
- ❓ There are several relationships described in this passage, such as the relationship between humankind and animals, the relationship between God and humankind, and the relationship between the first man and the first woman. How do these relationships differ? What does this story say about these different relationships?

Living the Story: Prayer

Split into pairs and take a few minutes to discuss what you hope to get out of this discussion group this year. Think of a way to form that into a petition for a prayer for the Closing Prayer. For instance, if you hope to form a new devotional practice, your petition might be “I pray that this year might strengthen my devotional practice.” No need for all answers to be religious, joining this class to meet new friends is a perfectly good reason! After discussing with your partner and coming up with your petition, write it down if you wish. When you are finished, rejoin the large group.

Supplies

- ✚ Optional: paper, pens or pencils

Closing Prayer

Have someone begin the prayer by saying the following or similar words:

“God, thank you so much for this opportunity to learn and study the Bible together. We pray for...” Go around and have each person share their petition for what they hope to get out of the class this year. When everyone has had an opportunity to share, the person who began the prayer says, “And the people of God said,” to which everyone responds, “Amen!”

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Brief History of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible—Old Testament—was written over a period of nearly one thousand years. Many of the stories of the Hebrew Bible were passed down orally from one generation to the next. Today’s story is in Genesis, the book of beginnings. Genesis and the four books that follow it are part of the first section of the Hebrew Bible called the Torah, also called the Pentateuch. The Torah, along with much of the rest of the Hebrew Bible, was put together from various earlier sources around 600 BCE. The rest of the Hebrew Bible is divided in the Jewish traditions into the Prophets and the Writings. In Christian Bibles, the Historical books follow the Torah, then Wisdom Literature, and then Major (longer) and Minor (shorter) Prophets.

At Home

- ✝ Start a journal where you can write any thoughts, reflections, and prayers that come to mind as you journey through the Bible this year. For your first entry, you can write down your intentions and hopes for the year.
- ✝ One of the key relationships in today's story is the relationship between humanity and the Earth. Think of small ways to care for the Earth this week, such as recycling, volunteering to pick up trash at a local park, or switching to reusable shopping bags.
- ✝ Read the daily readings this week to get in the habit of spending a little time each day meditating on Scripture.

Daily Readings**Sunday—Read Genesis 2:4b-25**

God creates the first humans to care for God's creation. If the weather is agreeable, spend some time in nature reflecting on the gift of God's creation.

Monday—Read Genesis 3:1-21

Adam and Eve disobey God and eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Think of a time that you have disobeyed someone, whether it was a parent, boss, loved one, or friend. What were the consequences?

Tuesday—Read Genesis 11:27-32

A brief genealogy of Abram (Abraham) is provided. Do you know your genealogy (biological, adoptive, or otherwise)? If you do not, ask a relative who may be able to provide some information. Was your faith passed down from generation to generation, or are you the first in your family? Reflect on how you can pass down your faith to future generations.

Wednesday—Read Genesis 12:1-9

God appears to Abram and promises to make a great nation through him. Make a list of blessings in your life and say a prayer of thanksgiving for each one.

Thursday—Read Genesis 14:14-20

Abram is involved in a battle. Pray the prayer in verses 19-20.

Friday—Read Genesis 17:1-8

God creates a covenant with Abram, newly renamed Abraham. Reflect on the differences between a covenant and a promise—feel free to use the Internet or ask a friend for help!

Saturday—Read Genesis 17:15-22

God promises Abraham that his wife, Sarah, will have a child. Say a prayer on behalf of a child in your life—whether it is your own child, a grandchild, or the child of a friend or church member.