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Living the Word: Small Groups

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Living the Word

Small Group Guides

Narrative Lectionary, Year 4



Discussion Guides

Sample Guide

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God's Good Creation

God Provides Blessings

About the Story

Today marks the beginning of the Narrative Lectionary cycle for this year. For some this is the first time through, others are coming back to the beginning after a short break. It is also the beginning of the program and school year in many places, picking up again after a season away. It is therefore appropriate to begin “in the beginning,” with the story of the creation. Many people are surprised to learn that this is one of two creation stories in the Bible. The second, in chapter 2, offers a slightly different take on creation, and is the starting point for Year 2 of the Narrative Lectionary.

The Point:

God's blessings begin with the careful work of creating an ordered world. Life can feel chaotic and out of control at times. Literal and metaphorical storms can cause us stress. But from the beginning of time, God has been involved in the world, guiding it toward God's purpose.

Our story today describes creation in an orderly fashion, demonstrating God's careful concern for each element created. Most likely written down after centuries of being passed down orally, it helps to read it aloud. This gives us the opportunity to hear the rhythms of repetition. Imagine teaching this to children around a campfire, counting on the fingers, and inviting them to chant the refrain with you as you come to the repetitive ending to each day.

As you read, try to bring a different mindset to the text than you often hear in popular culture. Rather than hearing this as a story that is attempting to tell you *how* the world came into being, listen for why the world was created. The original storytellers were not so much concerned with a factual explanation as modern people usually expect. This is not intended to be history. Instead, this is a story that points to a larger truth about our relationship with God and with the rest of creation. It offers a view of creation in which there is order growing out of chaos, and in which God is an active and engaged mover. For people throughout history, chaos has appeared to be the primary force in nature. This story offers a contrast to chaos, demonstrating that God is able to tame even the most ancient forces that stand against order. This is a reassuring word for all, whether the turmoil we face is in nature or in society.

Opening Prayer

God of creation, with love and care, you created the world and all that is in it, including us. Be with us now as we open your Word. Teach us how to be stewards of all you have given us, in the world and in ourselves. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last Week/ Next Week

This is the where it all begins! From the beginning of time, God has been blessing each and every aspect of creation, declaring that it is good in God's sight. Next week, we will see how God's blessing of creation plays out in the lives of specific people. God blesses Abraham and Sarah with a son, and extends that blessing by providing even what they need to worship God.

Into the Story

Go around the circle and share with one another some of your favorite ways to create. Are you a painter, a knitter, a musician, a dancer, or..? Try to think outside the box. What do you do, either for fun or for work, which feels creative to you? How did you come to do this? What about it keeps you at it?

Learning the Story

This is where the story begins. Out of the chaos that precedes God's ordered world, God creates everything there is. After six days of creation, God rests and enjoys God's very good work.

Read Genesis 1:1-5 – Day 1

- ❓ Was there anything at all before God got to work? What was there, according to the text?
- ❓ What tool(s) does God use to create?
- ❓ Why do you think God chose to create in this order?
- ❓ What does the text tell us God thought about the day's work?
- ❓ What surprises you about this first day of creation?

Read Genesis 1:6-13 – Days 2 & 3

- ❓ What did God do on the second day?
- ❓ Does God give an opinion about this second day's work, as on day one? Why, do you think?
- ❓ What happens on day three? What things does God create?
- ❓ What do you think is the difference, if any, between the "Earth" in verse 10 and the "earth" in verse 2?
- ❓ What is God's judgment about the work of day three?

Read Genesis 1:14-23 – Days 4 & 5

- ❓ What happens on day four?
- ❓ What did God think of that work?
- ❓ What happens on day five?
- ❓ Why do you think these first five days of creation are told in the order that they are?

Read Genesis 1:24-31 – Day 6

- ❓ What happens on day six?
- ❓ What seems different about day six from the previous five days?
- ❓ What is God’s opinion of the work of day six?
- ❓ What relationship does God establish with the creatures of day six?
- ❓ What surprises you about the order of creation from day one to day six?
- ❓ What is God’s opinion of all of God’s creation? How is it different from the opinions that came before?

Bible Connections

- ✚ The psalmist praises God for the work of creation (Psalm 104).
- ✚ God brings life where there is no hope of it (Ezekiel 37:1-14).
- ✚ The Word of God has been at work from the beginning (John 1:1-18).

Read Genesis 2:1-4a – Day 7

- ❓ How is day seven different from the days that have gone before?
- ❓ What do you think God wants you to know about creation?
- ❓ What do you think God wants you to know about your relationship with God?
- ❓ What do you think God wants you to know about your relationship with creation?

Living the Story: Worship

Light a candle in the center of the room, and dim the lights if it is comfortable for everyone to do so. Listen together to the song “What a Wonderful World,” by Louis Armstrong. Imagine as you listen that this is God’s voice singing about creation. Read the text from Genesis again, and have everyone join in for the repeated lines at the end of each day, “And there was evening and there was morning,…” Play the song through again, and sing along as you are able, using the printed lyric sheets as a guide. Move to the closing prayer.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: A Brief History of the Bible, Part 1, Old Testament

The Old Testament is comprised of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Many Christians call this section of the Bible the Hebrew Scriptures, acknowledging that the New Testament does not replace but rather builds on the scriptures of Judaism. They are the complete sacred writings used by our Jewish neighbors.

It took several centuries to write down and compile the Bible into the order that we have today. Many passages, such as the creation story, were likely handed down orally for generations before being committed to writing in Hebrew and Aramaic, probably around 600 BCE. New Testament writers were most familiar with a Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Most modern English translations use the original Hebrew and Aramaic texts as their starting point.

Closing Prayer

Stand or sit in a circle. Going around the circle once, each person offers a prayer of thanksgiving for their favorite aspect of creation. After each petition, the group responds, “And God saw that it was good.” Go around the circle a second time, each person offering a prayer of thanksgiving for the person to their right. After each petition, the group responds, “And God saw that it was good.” After all petitions have been offered, close by saying together, “God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. Amen.”

At Home

- ✚ For the next seven days, create something (art, poetry, dance, etc.) each day to mirror the creation story. For example, on the first day, create something related to light.
- ✚ Find a coloring book or print a coloring page off the Internet (mandalas and other adult coloring pages are very popular right now). Color one page each day, and allow this to lead you into meditation on creation.
- ✚ Investigate local environmental advocacy organizations. How does their mission statement relate to the commission God gives to humans in verses 26-28? Consider ways that you might support their work.

Daily Readings

Sunday – Read Genesis 1:1-2:4a

God creates an ordered world out of chaos, and declares it to be good. Search the Internet to find a poem about creation, and use it as a starting point for your prayer time today.

Monday – Read Genesis 2:7-9, 15, 18-25

A second creation story gives a different account of how humans were created. Using play clay, or mud, create a human figure. As you work, pray for friends and family who need prayer.

Tuesday – Read Genesis 3:8-19

After having disobeyed God, the first humans receive God's judgment. Write a short diary entry in the voice of either Adam or Eve, recounting your feelings at God's words.

Wednesday – Read Genesis 12:1-9

God calls Abram and promises him blessing and land. Draw a map and plan a journey that would require you to trust God.

Thursday – Read Genesis 15:1-6

As Abram continues childless, God reiterates the promise to make him the father of nations. On a clear night, go outside and count the stars to see how many descendants Abram would have.

Friday – Read Genesis 17:15-21

God again reiterates the promise to make Abram and Sarai the parents of nations, and gives them new names and a covenant sign to reflect this promise. Research the meanings of the names of your family members, and reflect on how these names have affected you.

Saturday – Read Genesis 18:1-15

Abraham and Sarah host God, and Sarah laughs at the promise. Invite someone you do not know well to join you for lunch or dinner.