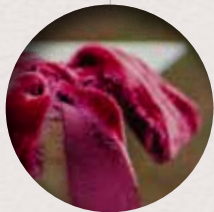
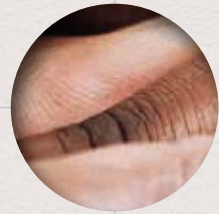


Leader Guide | Genesis 1-19



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Winter 2023-24 • CSB

ORIGIN STORIES

In recent years, Hollywood has discovered a way to expand the world of some of its most valuable franchises. In the past, studios simply released a sequel when one of its movies hit it big. That still works, but they've also added another tool to their toolbox: the origin story.

More than a prequel, an origin story digs into the early lives of individuals, usually characters that have created a special bond with audiences. As consumers, we like to know more about the heroes on the screen. We want to see where they came from and what shaped their lives. It's important for us to connect the dots and to understand how the storyline got from Point A to Point B. And the movie makers are happy to scratch that itch.

Our fascination with origin stories can probably be traced, at least in part, to a longing to understand our own backstory. We dig into the lives of superheroes and special agents, magical characters and mythical beings, to make sense of our own roots. We find security and purpose for our future when we understand our past.

In Genesis 1–19, God pulls back the curtain and reveals humanity's origin story in vivid detail. We see the first days, the first marriage, and the first family. We also see the first sin—and how that single sin opened the door to injustice and depravity on a global scale.

Thankfully, we also get our first hints of God's plan to restore His fallen creation. His promise of a Redeemer in Eden, His preservation of a remnant after the flood, and His calling of Abram to build a new nation all remind us that stories can change. We can flip the script of sin.

God has made that plot twist possible through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. If you're ready to accept the salvation that only He can provide, here's what you need to do . . .

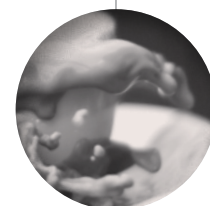
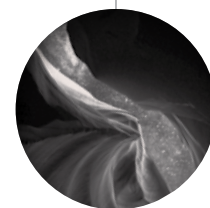
- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS

Sam Crouch wrote the Leader Guide commentary for these sessions on Genesis 1–19. Sam currently lives in Tucson, Arizona, after serving churches for more than 52 years as a minister of youth, curriculum editor at Lifeway, and senior pastor at churches in Louisiana, New Mexico, Tennessee, Germany, Arizona, and Nevada. Sam holds an undergraduate degree from Baylor University, along with a master’s degree and a doctor of ministry degree from Southwestern Seminary. Sam and his wife Jan have one daughter, a son-in-law, two granddaughters, and a great-grandson.

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A WORD FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

I recently had an early flight to catch. To get to the airport on time, I was in my car and on the road before the sun came up. The drive was dark, unhurried, and serene. It was a far cry from my typical morning routine. Then, the sun began to rise. In a matter of minutes, the entire landscape came to life. A new day was unfolding—it was majestic. In the quiet moments, I felt hopeful curiosity. What would this day bring? These first magnificent moments hinted that good things lie ahead.

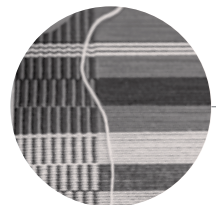
Genesis offers a similar beginning. While all of God’s Word reveals who He is and what He is like, Genesis lays important groundwork. This quarter we will study God’s design for all He has created and His plans for His people. God’s character shines through these initial pages of Scripture. He is creative, holy, and merciful. God makes promises, then faithfully keeps them.

Studying Genesis gives us a front row seat to learn about God and His relationship to His people. And knowing God, getting deeper glimpses into who He is, makes me hopeful for what’s to come.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

amber.vaden@lifeway.com



Why People Should Leave Your Group

Lynn H. Pryor

We love to see our Bible study groups grow in size. After all, one sign of healthy church growth is when more people are engaging in Bible study and discipleship. And yet, another sign of healthy church growth is a reduction of the number of adults in your group!

That may sound odd, but look at it from a parent's perspective. Parents love to bring a child into the family. It's a joy, and they love to watch the child grow. But there comes a time when a parent knows the best thing for that child is to leave the home, become an independent adult, and maybe even start his or her own family.

No one likes to see people leave the Bible study group. Admittedly, I don't. But if adults are leaving the group for the right reason, it's a great benefit. It benefits the individuals, as it can strengthen their discipleship; and it can certainly strengthen the ministry of the church. But what could possibly be a good reason for people to leave?

SERVING IN THE CHURCH

Group Bible study is not simply for the sake of Bible study. At least, it shouldn't be. As we engage in the study of God's Word, we also see how it applies to our lives. Bible study is more than knowledge; it is also action. We learn about God, we learn how He works in our lives, and we respond with action. A key part of our growth in Christ occurs as we serve and minister to others.



Think about how you have grown since you started leading a group. No doubt, leading a group has made you a better student of the Bible, stretched your faith, and shaped who you are today. Some of the people in your group could experience that same kind of growth, and we may be cheating them from growing by not giving them permission to leave our group.

As we lead our groups week after week, our instruction should include encouragement to step out and lead in some capacity—and that may very well mean they teach or serve at the same time your group meets!

There’s an old adage that eighty percent of the work in the church is done by twenty percent of the people. I don’t know who originated that statistic or even how accurate it is, but it is surely close. In my own experience, I’ve seen that when we discover a committed Christian who is willing to serve in some capacity, we tend to give this person more . . . and more . . . and more to do. We know this individual will say yes if we ask! Meanwhile, other believers in the church go untapped for service.

Ideally, all Christians should have at least one ministry/task they do in the church’s overall ministry. Unfortunately, it seems every church has individuals who are content to be “pew-warmers,” doing nothing more than attending the worship service. But there are others, including many in your Bible study group, who would step up and serve if asked or given permission to do so.

I’m not a fan of the blanket, broad announcement: “WE NEED SOMEONE TO TEACH THE EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS!” Typically, the person who responds is the person who is already doing six things in the church.

A better approach is three-fold:

- First, talk individually with those in your group who could serve in a particular area. You have observed their participation in the group. You have seen how they interact with others. With time, you see their skills and giftedness, so tell them what you have seen. Challenge them to step out and serve as God has equipped them.
- Share names with the one needing help. Let the leader know you have a member of your group who would be a great asset to the ministry. This leader, in turn, can talk with the individual with more clarity about the ministry opportunity.
- Give people permission to leave. Some may feel they are abandoning you or feel an allegiance to you and the group, especially if you helped

them through a rough time. Remind them that the greatest complement a person could make to you is to follow your example by becoming a leader of a group.

Most people will not step up unless asked. I know; my wife is just such a person. Her gift is service, but she doesn’t readily volunteer. When asked, she gladly helps. She is currently working with one-year-olds each week—because someone asked!

MOVING ON

One person who may need to leave your Bible study group is you! If so, bring someone alongside you to lead the class. Mentor and model what is involved in leading a group. Let the person see how you prepare. You could even tag-team teach for a season, with the goal of handing over the leadership reigns permanently. That frees you up to start a new class!

Lead and disciple your Bible study group with an eye on getting others to step out and lead. The church benefits with additional servants and leaders, individuals will exercise their gifts and grow in their spiritual journeys, the kingdom is expanded, and God is honored.

Lynn H. Pryor is the publishing team leader for Bible Studies for Life. A resident of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Lynn serves as the discipleship director in his church. He offers a weekly blog at lynnhpryor.com.

WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Abel [AY buhl]—second son of Adam and Eve (Gen. 4:2); offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother Cain, who murdered him (Gen. 4:4-5,8; Heb. 11:4); name means “breath, vapor, meadow” and is associated with the shortness of life

Abram [AY bruhm]—personal name means “father is exalted”; God changed his name to Abraham, meaning “father of a multitude” (Gen. 17:5)

Babylon [BAB ih lahn]—translated from the same Hebrew word as Babel (Gen. 11:9); eventually became a large empire and absorbed the nation of Judah and destroyed Jerusalem

Cain [KAYN]—firstborn son of Adam and Eve; murdered Abel his brother (Gen. 4:1-8)

Canaan [KAY nuhn]—the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River

Eliezer [el ih EE zuhr]—the servant born in Abraham’s house who would have been Abram’s heir if he had remained childless (Gen. 15:2)

Hagar [HAY gahr]—personal servant to Sarai; given by Sarai as a concubine to Abram; mother of Ishmael (Gen. 16:1-16)

Haran [HAY ran]—the city that became Abraham’s home until he left it in response to God’s call (Gen. 11:31-32; 12:4-5)

Isaac [IGH (eye) zik]—only son of Abraham and Sarah; name means “he laughs.”

Ishmael [ISH may el]—son of Abraham by the Egyptian concubine Hagar (Gen. 16:11)

Lot [LAHT]—Abraham’s nephew (Gen. 11:27); rescued from Sodom by two angels (19:12-16)

Mamre [MAM rih]—place near Hebron where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived (Gen. 13:18; 35:27), famous for its oak trees; name means “grazing land”

Sarai [SEHR igh (eye)]—wife of Abram/Abraham; when she was almost 90 years old, God changed her name from Sarai (“princess”) to Sarah (an alternate form of “princess”) and promised her a son, whom she bore a year later (Gen. 17:15-16; 21:1-7)

Shinar [SHIGH nahr]—located in the plains of Mesopotamia and came to be known as Babylonia; place where the tower of Babel was built

Zoar [ZOH uhr]—the town Lot and his family fled to when leaving Sodom; originally known as the town of Bela but called Zoar (meaning “small”) to remember how Lot described it to the angels (Gen. 19:20-22)

BIBLE READING PLAN

DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Genesis 1:1-5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Genesis 6:5-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Genesis 13:14-18
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Genesis 1:6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Genesis 6:9-13	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Genesis 14:1-7
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USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. CREATE A GROUP TIME PLAN.

Craft a group plan that helps adults discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan you created, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

AUTHORSHIP

Genesis, the first book in the Bible, is the book of beginnings. In fact, the Hebrew name of the book is taken from the first words in Hebrew “in the beginning.” In this book we see the beginning of the created world, the beginning of man and woman, and the beginning of sin in the world.

With the rise of wickedness, we see in the story of Noah and the flood the beginning of an ongoing series of divine judgments. There is also the story of the beginning of diverse languages. Most importantly we see the beginning of God’s interaction with Abraham and his descendants through whom the remedy for the sin of the world will come. Soon after Adam and Eve’s fall in the garden of Eden, God promised a Redeemer who would destroy the works of Satan and offer human beings a way out of their slavery to sin. Abraham and his offspring represent the next phase in God’s plan for salvation.

The book of Genesis is the first of five books known as the Pentateuch (meaning “five books”) which include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Historically, Genesis and the other four books have been attributed to Moses. While there have been many attempts to propose different authorship over the years, there are many reasons to hold to the historical understanding that Moses compiled these writings.

Among those reasons is the internal evidence presented within the Bible itself. Throughout the Pentateuch, readers find references to Moses writing down God’s instructions for His people. Other places in the Old Testament also speak of God’s instructions found in the “book of Moses” (see 2 Chron. 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1).

The New Testament also alludes to the Mosaic authorship of these books, including Genesis. Jesus Himself, in referencing the Pentateuch,

identified Moses as the source for these teachings. For example, in Matthew 19:5, Jesus pointed to Genesis 2:24 during a debate with religious leaders over the matter of divorce.

Obviously, some passages, such as the narrative of the death of Moses (Deut. 34), were not written by Moses. However, the vast majority of the content was most likely recorded by Moses. Many of these passages were written down at the command of God (for example, Num. 33:2 and Deut. 31:24). This fact doesn’t negate the possibility that the organization of the Pentateuch into its final form may have been the work of others.

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

The book of Genesis, as well as the other books of Moses, was written during the exodus event and the years of wandering in the wilderness. The exodus from Egypt probably took place around 1445 BC, thus the composition of these books could be dated between 1445 and 1405 BC. Remember, Moses’s task was to shape a group of former slaves into a nation that would serve as a testimony to God’s work in the world. To aid him in teaching the ways of God to these people, God inspired him to write this beginning history of God’s early activity among the human race, in general, and the people of Israel, in particular.

During the 400 years they were in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham would have been exposed to various Egyptian myths and rituals dealing with creation. In addition, they had been overwhelmed with pagan Egyptian religion. Likewise, once in the promised land, the Israelites would be confronted with the idolatry of the Canaanite tribes.

Because of these factors and others, God inspired Moses to write the true account of creation and the beginning of civilization. The children of Israel in the wilderness needed to be reminded of the unique relationship they had with God through the Abrahamic covenant.



Once they understood who they were—God’s chosen people—it would also be necessary to give them written instructions on how to live and how to worship as the people of God.

OCCASION

The book of Genesis readily divides into two sections, chapters 1-11 and chapters 12-50. The first section is a rapid look at the beginnings of the world and human civilization. Chapters 1-11 quickly introduce the reader to a number of “firsts:” the first man, the first husband and wife, the first sin, the first sacrifice, the first children, the first murder, the first rain, the first covenant between God and humanity, and the first languages.

Beginning in chapter 12, the narrative slows from its rapid pace and begins telling the story of Abraham. In this, it gives readers a detailed look at the foundation of the relationship between God and His chosen people. What is quickly apparent is the fact that the entire relationship begins and continues at God’s initiative. He chose Abram and Sarai to leave their pagan backgrounds behind and to begin a new chapter in the human story. This choice was not based of anything they had done. Instead, the selection was entirely based on the Lord’s plans and purposes.

Another way to look at the organization of Genesis is to track a key phrase that is repeated throughout the book: “family records of” This phrase is found 10 times in Genesis and represents the equivalent of introducing us to a new family tree that links Adam’s lineage to Noah’s lineage. Noah’s line included his three sons. The lineage of one of those sons, Shem, leads to Terah and Abraham.

Later in the book, “family records” highlights the lines of significant members of Abraham’s family: Isaac, Ishmael, Esau, and Jacob. This phrase, which speaks of origins or genealogies, serves as our source for the book’s English title. In the third century translation of the Old

Testament from Hebrew to Greek (called the Septuagint), this collection of family trees were referred to by the Greek word *geneseos*, from which we get the name “Genesis.”

MAJOR THEMES

Relationship. Moses wrote Genesis to help the children of Israel understand and appreciate their unique relationship to the God of creation who had chosen them as His special people.

Creation. Genesis explains how things came to be. To that end, the book is clear that God created everything that exists by His authority and through His spoken Word.

Gender and Marriage. God created humans in His image for the purpose of relationship as well as dominion over His creation. He created them male and female (1:27; 2:18-24). It was God’s design for Adam (male) to have a female mate with whom he would share his entire life. It was God’s design for Eve (female) to have a male mate with whom she would share her entire life. Together, they made up a family and were tasked with procreating and raising children. Gender was not and is not fluid. Gender is assigned by God at conception.

Work. God Himself worked in creation, and His design was for humans to work and flourish through oversight (dominion) over creation, tending the garden (2:15), and working the ground (2:5). Before the fall these would have been easy, painless, and successful. After the fall, work became harder and less fruitful.

Love and Grace. Underlying the entire book of Genesis is the amazing story of God’s pursuing love. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, He didn’t write them off. While He did judge them, He also set in motion His plan to redeem fallen humanity through the Messiah. This theme of God’s pursuit of wayward humanity culminated in Christ. Thus, Genesis records the beginning of God’s redemption!

OUTLINE

- I. God's Perfect Creation (Gen. 1:1–2:25)
- II. Humanity's Fall (Gen. 3:1–24)
- III. Adam's Family and Sin's Results (Gen. 4:1–6:8)
- IV. Noah's Family and the Flood (Gen. 6:9–9:29)
- V. The Nations and the Tower of Babylon (Gen. 10:1–11:26)
- VI. Abraham and God's Covenant (Gen. 11:27–19:38)
- VII. Isaac and the Promise (Gen. 20:1–25:11)
- VIII. Ishmael's Family (Gen. 25:12–18)
- IX. Rivalry: Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:19–35:29)
- X. Esau's Family: Father of the Edomites (Gen. 36:1–37:1)
- XI. Jacob's Family: Joseph and His Brothers (Gen. 37:2–50:26)

The First Week

SESSION 1

Genesis 1:1-5,26-2:3

Memory Verse: Genesis 1:1

God created all that is, including humans who bear His image.

The Hebrew Bible begins with a single Hebrew word that means “in the beginning.” This first word is the name of the book in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, this is the pattern in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. Each carries the first word of the book as its Hebrew name. In the case of Genesis, this name, “beginnings,” serves as a great summary statement of the book. It is a book of beginnings.

In these opening chapters, we see many firsts: God’s creative activity in the first week, the first man and woman, the first sin, the first children, the first sacrifice, the first murder, the first rain, first covenants between God and man, and first languages. As you prepare for this first session, remember that every day can be a first day for you and your group members. Each day is a fresh start for following God more closely. Be encouraged to dedicate this day and this study as a new beginning for serving God.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week’s study on Apple podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



When we look at the earth and beyond it into space, there are many breathtaking wonders to see. In Arizona, there is the expansive geological wonder of the Grand Canyon. Near the Arctic Circle is the phenomenon of what appear to be the dancing lights of the Aurora Borealis. On the border of Nepal and China rises the highest summit on the planet, Mount Everest. And as we look up at a clear sky on a moonless night, we might be able to see the splendor of the Milky Way. God created it all. (PSG, p. 10)

What should be our response to the Creator?



Understand the Context (Genesis 1:1–2:3)

The first chapters of Genesis are probably the most contentious passages in all the Bible. Nothing stirs greater debate than the origin of the earth. And yet, Moses knew nothing of such controversy. For him, the fact was straightforward: God created the heavens and the earth. There was no room for any other thought.

Following our understanding that Moses was the author of these passages, consider why this creation account was included in the Pentateuch. In the books of the law, Moses was codifying the commands God passed down to him for the people of Israel. But why was it important to include the creation narrative?

The key thought here is that Moses was writing for a people who had been in Egyptian bondage for four centuries. As Moses worked to shape this group of slaves into a nation, there were things to be learned, along with things to be unlearned. Without a doubt, the children of Israel were influenced by the paganism of the Egyptian religions with their multiple gods.

Egyptian culture also had its own creation stories, as did the pagan cultures they would encounter in the promised land. These mythical creation stories were celebrated with yearly rituals that included magic and similar practices. Their intent was to guarantee food production from the earth and to ensure that human reproduction would continue another year.

As God’s chosen people, Israel needed to set aside these pagan ideas and embrace the only true Creator and a true knowledge of how the world began. This would be essential as the nation entered and lived out their covenant relationship with the true God and set-

led in the land that He gave them. They needed to see that the Lord God alone was Creator of everything.

The intent of this narrative, like other parts of Moses’s writings, was to establish for the Israelites the understanding that there was only one God who deserved their absolute loyalty. Unfortunately, the history of the Israelites illustrated their repeated failure to learn this lesson. So often, they rejected God—or mixed their orthodox religious practices with the worship practices of the nations around them. Still, their lack of faithfulness does not diminish the faithfulness of God’s work and Moses’s account of His creative acts. God still remains the Source of all that exists.

Genesis 1 offers a quick summary of the six days of creation that climax in the creation of human beings. The first three verses of chapter 2 explain the origin of the Sabbath, instituted by God as He finished His creative work. This day of rest was given as an example for humanity to imitate and to obey.

As you read Genesis 1:1–2:3, consider what God revealed about Himself. (PSG, p. 11)



The Pentateuch

Get a deeper understanding of the Pentateuch and its importance to God’s people.



PREPARE: On the board, write: *Describe something you built recently, including the process you went through to build it.*

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, direct attention to the board and encourage them to share their responses. Discuss what supplies were needed for each project. Talk about the feeling we get from having “created” something from scratch.

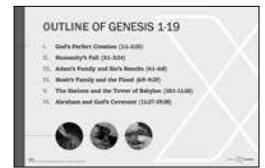
ASK: **Where have you seen God’s creative wonder in nature?**

DISCUSS: Call for volunteers to share some of the natural wonders or places they’ve seen and experienced.

ASK: **What should be our response to the Creator?** (PSG, p. 10)

OVERVIEW: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Genesis 1–19*) and note that this session begins a study of Genesis. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Genesis Time Line*) and **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Background of Genesis*) to the group. Allow time for the group to review the information on the handouts then share key points to set the context for the book of Genesis.

TRANSITION: *We’re going to start at the very beginning. This lesson will lead us to explore the truth that God created all that is, including humans who bear His image. As we move through this study, look for God’s intentional activity.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

If you can, show a lyric video for “Indescribable” by Chris Tomlin. If you cannot show the video, secure an audio version. Play the song/video. Lead the group to share their reaction to the lyrics of the song. Highlight the numerous creation images. Emphasize that God is the One who is indescribable. Ask: **How do you see that reflected in creation?**

The Beginning (Genesis 1:1-5)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. **3** Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

(v. 1) In the beginning: Genesis begins with this simple, yet profound, statement. God stands alone as the absolute **beginning** of everything, but He is eternally existent. He has always been. “Beginning” also anticipates an “ending” that will eventually come. At the very outset of Scripture, God is moving history toward a purposeful ending (see Isa. 46:10).

(v. 1) God: God stands alone as the central figure of Scripture. From the beginning He is seen creating and reigning. The word “God” is actually plural in the Hebrew (*Elohim*). The use of the plural speaks of God’s majesty and power. *Elohim* appears 32 times in Genesis 1. God’s covenant name, Yahweh, is not found until Genesis 2:4.

(v. 1) Created: God initiated creation deliberately and purposefully. In the Old Testament, this word rendered **created** (*bara*) is used frequently with God as its subject and speaks of His new or renewed activity.

The wording also emphasizes a finished work and never speaks of materials used in creation. Because of this, many scholars highlight God’s creation out of nothing. Because there is nothing else “in the beginning,” the focus is entirely on God. (See Heb. 11:3.)

(v. 2) Darkness: While **darkness** is often used as a metaphor for sin, this context speaks of physical darkness rather than the darkness of evil. This is seen in the fact that in verse 5 God gives a name to the darkness: “night.”

(v. 2) Spirit of God: It is important to remember that, in Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity is not fully developed until the New Testament. There are, however, glimpses of God’s triune nature in the Old Testament. Bible scholars are almost unanimous in understanding the role of each member of the Godhead in the creation process. Here, Moses provided a hint of the role of the **Spirit**, turning what is lifeless and empty into something with life and purpose.

(v. 3) God said: God speaks ten different times in Genesis 1. The powerful, authoritative Word of God seen throughout Scripture is the creative Word that brought about creation. The created world was the result of the spoken word of God. Again, we see a hint of the Trinity. John 1 speaks of Jesus as the Word and as the agent of creation (John 1:1-3). The same emphasis is found in Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2.

(v. 4) Good: The Hebrew word for **good** carries a variety of meanings, including pleasant, beautiful, righteous, and excellent. By saying the **light** was good, God affirmed that it was fulfilling the purpose for which it had been called into existence. All that God created was made with a purpose in mind.

(v. 5) One day: The pattern of **evening** and **morning** designating a particular day is repeated six times in Genesis 1. This pattern mimics God’s creation of turning **darkness** (**night**) to **light** (**day**). The Hebrews picked up on this pattern in their own designation of the calendar day. For Jews, each day begins at sunset as darkness/night begins.

Key Concept

Order in Creation

Heavens and earth (v. 1) speak of the entire created order, the totality of the universe. God’s creation never suggests disorganization. God creating chaos is illogical! But that raises the question of the bleak description of the world in verse 2.

The words **formless and empty** point to a harsh environment unable to sustain life. This description is not necessarily a negative picture of God’s creation, but it does suggest an environment empty of life. The picture is that of a blank canvas, ready for the Master Painter to do His work. The stage is set for the six days of creation to follow.

EXPLORE Genesis 1:1-5



APPLICATION POINT: God created all that is with purpose.

CONTEXT: Review Understand the Context (PSG, p. 11) to highlight the importance of recognizing God as Creator. Emphasize that, as Creator, everything belongs to God and He is sovereign over all creation.

ASK: **What does it mean for God to be sovereign?**

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:1-5**, as the group listens for what God did on the first day of creation.

EMPHASIZE: Highlight this statement: *The Hebrew word translated “create” in the Old Testament is used to describe an activity of God alone.* (PSG, p. 12) Share that the Latin term *ex nihilo* means “out of nothing.” Provide copies of **Pack Item 9 (Handout: Creation Accounts)** and encourage adults to work in pairs to read and reflect on the information. Emphasize the distinctions between the mythical pagan accounts and what Christ followers believe about the world.

DISCUSS: Display **Pack Item 3 (Poster: Days of Creation)** to highlight the days of creation. Discuss how the events line up on the poster. Use information from page 13 of the PSG to discuss what “good” means in the context of creation.

ASK: **What is the importance of God being the One who initiated creation?** (PSG, p. 14)



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson

Call for three volunteers to compete in a paper airplane contest. Instruct them to construct a single paper airplane that will be judged based on design and its ability to fly. Give two of the volunteers a sheet of paper, but give nothing to the third volunteer. Give the volunteers thirty seconds to work. After time expires, call for each person to show their creation. Talk about why the third volunteer didn't make a plane. Discuss responses to this question: ***Is there anything that we create that comes from nothing?*** Discuss what it means for God to create out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).

The Image Bearers (Genesis 1:26-31)

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” **27** So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. **28** God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” **29** God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, **30** for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth — everything having the breath of life in it — I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. **31** God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

(v. 26) God said: To this point, Moses had cataloged five days of creation following a pattern of forming and filling. **God** formed the sky (vv. 6-8), the land, and the sea (vv. 9-10) on the first three days. On the third day, he also began filling by creating plants and vegetation (vv. 11-12). Then, on days four, five, and six He filled the sky with greater and lesser lights (vv. 14-18), and the sea, air, and land with all sorts of animals (vv. 20-22). The creation of man and woman during the last half of day six is the pinnacle toward which this entire narrative moved (Ps. 8:3-8).

Key Word

Us

In verse 26, a dramatic change took place. **Let us make** is a totally different decree than the verbal commands God had issued to the rest of creation. As to the identity of “us,” there are a wide variety of interpretations. Some scholars believe this is a “plural of majesty” that emphasizes God’s power and authority by using a plural name of God. Others propose that God was deliberating with Himself. Perhaps the two most logical interpretations point to either a heavenly council that included the angels or to an early allusion to the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(v. 26) Our image . . . our likeness: There are two keys to understanding humans being created in the **image** of God. The first is mirroring, which means humanity shares characteristics that God also demonstrates. These could include the ability to reason, to communicate, to be creative, and to exist in relationship with others. Self-determination and a spiritual dimension are also a part mirroring.

The second key is representing. Humans are called to reflect God’s glory, as well as elements of His character such as love, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and faithfulness (see Gal. 5:22-23). In addition, humans represent God through dominion over the earth. We are not God, but we reflect Him to others.

(v. 27) Male and female: Note that being created in God’s image applies equally to both **male and female**. In verse 27, male and female speak of human sexuality, affirming that God created two genders equal in dignity. Both are absolutely necessary to carry out the task of dominion and to fulfill God’s command to multiply and fill the earth.

(v. 28) Blessed: To “bless” means to impart benefit on someone. The theme of God’s blessing is revealed throughout these verses. God’s blessing came first on the animals (1:22). Here, it falls on the first humans. A part of humanity’s blessing is reproduction and dominion. This blessing will move out from Eden to encompass all of humanity through Abraham in Genesis 12.

(v. 29) Food for you: Originally animals and people were vegetarians. Things changed after the flood, when God allowed for the eating of meat (Gen. 9:3).

Key Doctrine

God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. (See Psalms 8:3-6; 19:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17.)

EXPLORE Genesis 1:26-31



APPLICATION POINT: God created humanity to represent His interests in His creation.

- READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud **Genesis 1:26-31**, directing the group to listen for how God’s creation of human beings differed from how He created everything else.
- EXAMINE:** Place the group into two smaller teams. Instruct the first group to use pages 14-15 in their PSG to describe days 2-5 of creation; instruct the second group to use pages 15-16 of the PSG to describe the sixth day of creation. After several minutes, call for volunteers to share their findings.
- ASK:** **How did God reveal organization and purpose through the days of creation?**
- REVIEW:** Guide the group to review and discuss the information on page 15 of the PSG related to humans being created in the image of God and what that implies. Point out that humans were also created for a purpose: to rule the earth and to fill the earth.
- ASK:** **How does being created in the image of God point to the task assigned humanity?** (PSG, p. 16)
- TRANSITION:** *God created everything, including the first man and woman, in six days. The seventh day was different, but just as significant for us today.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Research and report

Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to provide a report on places the Trinity is seen in Scripture. Encourage the volunteer to use a Bible dictionary, concordances, and other Bible resources for the research. After the volunteer shares, direct adults to Genesis 1:26-31. Ask: ***Where might the Trinity appear in these verses?*** Discuss responses. Share that many scholars believe the words “us” and “our” represent the first mention of the Trinity in Scripture.

The Rest (Genesis 2:1-3)

1 So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. **2** On the seventh day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. **3** God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation.

(vv. 1-2) Completed: The word used here refers to bringing a process to conclusion. The word can also be translated “finished.” Nothing else needed to be done. The created universe was perfect in every way. Genesis 1:31 states that God judged everything He created as “very good indeed.”

This perfectly ordered world stood in sharp contrast to the blank canvas described in 1:2. The process that began with the words “let there be” in 1:3 now came to completion with the words “very good.” God’s intent at this point was that His creation would enjoy a perpetual period of rest. Unfortunately, the entrance of sin into the world changed everything.

(v. 2) Work: The completion of creation is emphasized again with the statement that God stopped working. He was totally satisfied with His **work**. The Hebrew word for “work” does not refer to the tedious, back-breaking labor that we often associate with the term. Instead, it suggests skilled labor that produces satisfying and pleasing results. In verses 2-3, the word “work” is repeated three times to emphasize that this was God’s activity and His alone.

(v. 2) Rested: God **rested**, not out of fatigue but out of satisfaction. The picture is that God stopped because there was nothing else to do. The word also carries the idea of sitting down or being still.

This Hebrew word is closely linked to the word “Sabbath,” which speaks of an “intermission” (though “Sabbath” is probably the more intensive of the two words). The text in the Hebrew Bible puts particular emphasis on the “seventh day” by repeating it three times. This highlighted the importance of that particular day, not just for the Creator, but also for the pinnacle of His creation. Later, God instructed the Israelites to rest on the seventh day, shifting to the term “Sabbath day” (see Ex. 20:8-11)

(v. 3) Holy: After blessing the created animals (1:22) and humanity (1:28), God blessed the seventh day. Here the blessing comes in the form of God proclaiming that the day would be **holy**. This word indicates dedicating the day or setting it aside for special use. In this case, the day was set aside for God and was to be different from the normal routine of the other six days each week.

This day belonged wholly to God for His prescribed use and honor. It was a day dedicated to worship and praise for the Creator of all things. The day became a way in which human beings, made in God’s likeness, can follow His pattern of work and rest.

Later this observance would be codified in the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Sabbath was a day designed for unwinding, removing distractions, and focusing on God and His active involvement in the life of His creation.

Key Cross Reference

Moses’s original audience would have been familiar with God’s laws regarding work and rest. Through Moses, God had demanded that Israel not work on His weekly Sabbath day, because it is a day of rest. When one counts up all the time set aside for rest, God required His people to rest nearly one-third of their lives. Such times of rest are still a reminder for us to honor our God as sovereign over all creation and all of our lives. Read the passages below. In a journal or in the margins, record what each says about rest:

- Exodus 20:8-11
 - Leviticus 25:1-7
 - Leviticus 25:8-22
-

Key Question

- **How does observing a day of rest affirm God’s activity in creating all we know and see?** (PSG, p. 17)

EXPLORE Genesis 2:1-3



APPLICATION POINT: God set aside the seventh day to reflect on God's creative work.

READ: Call for the group to read silently **Genesis 2:1-3**, looking for words that are repeated.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the words that are repeated in Genesis 2:1-3 and to identify the importance of each. Use information from page 22 of the Leader Guide and pages 16-17 of the PSG to supplement the discussion.

ASK: **What are some things you typically do on a Sunday?**

EMPHASIZE: Affirm that for many adults, Sunday can be as busy as any other day of the week. Point out the information about "rest" in verse 2 on page 17 in the PSG as related to the Sabbath. Discuss how believers can apply this concept to their own lives and why it's important to do so.

DISCUSS: **How does observing a day of rest affirm God's activity in creating all we know?** (PSG, p. 17)

TRANSITION: *God created all that is with purpose and with design. Men and women are His representatives on earth and have the responsibility to reflect His character and nature. One way we do that is by taking time to rest and reflect on His work in our lives and in the world around us.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

To gain a deeper insight into the creation story, spend time reading and meditating on other passages in Scripture that speak of God's creative activities in the beginning. Begin by understanding creation as an act of God's will (read Rev. 4:11; Isa. 45:18). Next look at the pinnacle of creation (Ps. 8). Study the agent of creation (Ps. 33:6-9; John 1:1-3,10; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2). Close in worship by reading Psalms 104 and 136:1-9 as a prayer of gratitude to God.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *God created all that is with purpose.*
 - *God created humanity to represent His interests in His creation.*
 - *God set aside the seventh day to reflect on God's creative work.*
- APPLY:** Call for volunteers to pick one of the statements and suggest how they could put that principle into practice this week.
- DISCUSS:** Guide the group to discuss the last question under Apply the Text on page 18 of the PSG: **What impact should it make on your life when you recognize God created you with a purpose to be fulfilled?**
- PRAY:** Close in prayer, thanking God for being the Creator and for surrounding us with His creative wonder. Ask God to help each adult dig into that wonder and to worship God in response. Pray that each person in the group would bear His image well in all they do this week.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by contacting adults through a group email or text. Encourage them to share where they see signs of God's creation around them. Also, challenge them to consider how they are reflecting God's image to others each day.

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