PRESENT WORD ADULT LEADER'S GUIDE

FALL 2018
GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

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COMING NEXT QUARTER

The winter quarter begins with God's demands for our complete and undivided love as shown in passages from Deuteronomy and Psalms. It proceeds with our response to God's love in the advent of Christ and the Epistles' interpretations of the nature and extent of our responses to God's love in Christ. It concludes with passages from three of the Psalms expressing glorification of God.

Unit I, "God Commands Our Love, Respect, and Obedience" Unit II, "Loving God by Trusting Christ" Unit III, "Love Songs That Glorify God"

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ADULT LEADER'S GUIDE

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Cover

Noah and his family give thanks to God, having survived the great flood.



A Note from the Editor

Dear Partner in Educational Ministry,

Genesis's familiar words, "In the beginning..." (Genesis 1:1), introduce accounts of God's creation of everything that is. Genesis describes the beginnings of God's relationship with the creation, including humanity, in covenantal terms. Creation begins the story of God's work in the world and with people whose lives are related to God—in ways bad and good.

The book of Genesis is a rich narrative, full of memorable characters and events. The book, as the church's Scripture, points us toward our beginnings as a human race as well as the origins of our faith in the God who is revealed in Genesis. God cares and loves the creation and provides for the good of human creatures by being present with them.

In this quarter, we learn of God's ways in the world. God provides as a wise and caring creator. Like those in Genesis, we find that God is dependable. God is with us. The mystery of God's presence can never be fully explained, only experienced. We, as people in Genesis also found, experience God's directions in our lives—indirectly, but in genuine ways. We are tempted in many directions, to turn away from God or live life only as we want. But we can trust God's providence as God's benevolent guidance. In faith, we find God's good purposes for us. In our daily lives, we can live joyfully and with the assurance that God guides and cares for us.

In Christ,

Mark D. Hinds Editor



The Text in Context

In the beginning, we start with Genesis—a book about the beginning of God's activity in the world. Genesis gives a foundation for understanding God and all that God created. The fall quarter surveys the book of Genesis beginning with the primeval account of God's hand in the piece-by-piece forming of creation. Out of this creation come relationships, families, and divine promises. Weaving through each lesson is a focus on God's work with humanity in reconciling and re-creating order in all things.

Unit I, "God Created the World," has five lessons that take a close look at the work of God's hand in creating the heavens and earth, plants and animals, and people and family while also providing for continued relationship in the face of human sin. The first three lessons have God creating the universe, earth, and people and calling all created things good. Lesson Four presents the first relationships among humans: first with God, then with all living creatures, and finally with a companion and intimate partner. Lesson 5 reveals how human beings chose to do wrong and thus introduced sin into God's good world. Yet God stands by creation and God's people with just forbearance and justified consequence.

Unit II, "God Destroys and Re-Creates," has four lessons. In the first two lessons, Noah and his family are presented as righteous followers of God. Noah heeds God's instructions to build an ark and save a remnant of God's creatures from the great flood. The last two lessons focus on the family whom God chooses to repopulate creation and who become the forbearers of Israel: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah.

Unit III, "God Blesses and Re-Creates Regardless," has four lessons. God bestows divine blessing upon Isaac and God's chosen family, even as people falter and deceive one another. In Lesson 10, the sibling rivalry of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, shows God's remaining with God's people during conflict. In Lessons 11–13, God maintains relationship with Jacob and his family, despite their deceit and trickery. God blesses this chosen family with children and land, staying present and involved with them and carrying forward the divine intention for Israel.



Teaching Tips

Students of the Bible are likely familiar with the opening verses of the book of Genesis. People approach this biblical book with any number of perspectives. They may read the early chapters as complementary creation accounts. In attempting to understand the universe, they may be challenged to reconcile Scripture and science. They may view Genesis as a collection of myths or stories with helpful messages but that function as little more than fairy tales. They may read each word as literal truth. These varying perspectives prove challenging for the leader charged with facilitating a study of Genesis. An overview of the book of Genesis is presented to help you prepare to lead other adults in appreciating this rich text.

The first book of the Bible sets the stage for the revealing of God's work with God's people across history. The Bible itself provides a specific history of a specific people from a specific point of view. The aforementioned is the account of God's relationship with God's people from the voices of those who lived, reflected, and recalled God's activity for and among them.

The book of Genesis is an account of the beginning of all creation as God's people understood it. It does not begin with history; it begins with God's action to work systematically with the raw materials at hand to create order out of chaos. The poetic rhythm of Genesis 1 displays a forming of the essential elements of our universe into an ordered whole. God calls what God makes "good."

A fundamental theological assertion undergirds the first chapter of the first book of our Bible. This account of God and God's work with God's people—Israel—begins with God creating all things, all life, all relationships. Before Israel is born, before God's chosen people come into being, God creates everything. Thus, God is God for more than Israel alone. Nothing lies outside God's purview.

The early chapters of Genesis attempt to trace the primeval history and include explanations of universal concerns for families and people. Genesis 2 details the relationship between God and the first human, 'adam. The first thing that God

pronounces "not good" in creation is that 'adam should be alone (Genesis 2:18). God sets out to make a suitable companion and partner for the first human by giving naming rights and dominion over other living creatures. However, these do not give the human a helper or partner. God makes a second human out of 'adam. This one, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23), is an equal companion for 'adam. The two humans share a close bond, an intimate partnership; they delight in one another. God gives joy-filled relationship to these two humans, answering the void that existed in creation.

Genesis 3 details a break in the relationship between God and creation. The cunning of a living creature (serpent) meets the curiosity, mistrust, and desire of Adam and Eve, leading to their disobedience of God's commands. God knows. God is angry and disappointed. God calls these creatures to account for their actions. God punishes. God stays in a relationship with what God has made, even as the relationship has changed.

As the next chapters of Genesis unfold, God's people continue to choose unwisely. The potential to choose evil is introduced into God's good creation; humanity moves farther and farther away from good. In exasperation, God tries to wipe the slate clean and start again with righteous and faithful Noah. Surely, if God saves a handful of righteous people, the divine desire for a good relationship with creation and with people will prevail.

Following the rainbow promise God makes to Noah and his sons, Genesis 10 and 11's genealogies link Noah with the patriarch Abram. Thus, the good family whom God saved from the destructive flood begets offspring who become God's chosen people. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram and offers the divine promise: God will make Abram a great nation, blessing him and making his name great. Abram himself will be a blessing. God will bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. God will give land to Abram's numerous offspring and will be their God. Abram's name is changed to Abraham in Genesis 17.

This same divine promise threads its way through the whole of the Bible (Genesis 12:1–3; 22:15–18; 28:13–15; Exodus 2:24; Deuteronomy 1:8–11; Psalm 105:42–45;

Isaiah 61:8–9; Micah 7:20; Luke 1:72–75; Romans 4; Hebrews 6:13–15). The covenant seals the relationship between God and God's people and is brought forward from Noah, through Abraham, to Isaac, and on to Jacob and his sons. The accounts of these persons and their up-and-down relationships with God fill the remaining chapters of Genesis.

The book of Genesis provides a lens through which to read the rest of the Bible. God establishes creation and all that is in it. God enters a relationship with living beings and with creation. God executes justice when warranted, while maintaining a relationship with us. Poor choices, lies, rivalry, deceit, trickery, doubt, and sin strain but don't break the relationship God treasures. God makes and keeps the divine promise to be God for Israel. God stands by this promise with us, today.



Resources to Help the Leader

The following resources are suggested for those who are interested in doing additional research and study.

Bible Commentary Series

The New Interpreter's Bible. Neil M. Alexander, gen. ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Bible Dictionaries

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. David Noel Freedman, ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

Harper's Bible Dictionary, Paul J. Achtemeier, gen. ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.

Websites

Opening Doors to Discipleship is a series of four courses in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition to help teachers and leaders equip themselves to be faithful teachers and leaders (openingdoorstodiscipleship.com).

Worship Leaflets

Geneva Press offers *The Present Word* quarterly Worship Leaflets. Each leaflet includes a brief service of worship with prayers, hymn texts, and opportunities for reflection on the Scripture passage for the day. Additionally, that session's Scripture passage is printed on the leaflet in a format conducive to a responsive reading. Order your quarterly *Present Word* Worship Leaflets at pcusastore.com.



AT A GLANCE

Gathering

- 1. Greet the learners.
- 2. Open with prayer.

Exploring

- 3. Creation: who and what?
- 4. God precedes all.
- 5. Images of creation.
- 6. Experiences with God's creation.

Responding

- 7. Prayers and praise.
- 8. Close with prayer.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Bibles
- Student's Book
- Worship Leaflets for session 1 (optional)
- Selection of nature photography
- · Paper, pens
- Hymnals, songbooks

God Created the Heavens and Earth

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1–13

VERSES TO REMEMBER

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

—Genesis 1:1-2

TEACHING POINTS

The session invites learners:

- 1. To know that God alone, through the divine spoken Word, created an amazing and wondrous universe.
- **2.** To sense the importance of being a part of God's awesome creation.
- **3.** To celebrate God's creation through praise and prayers of thanksgiving.



PREPARING TO LEAD

The wonders of the universe amaze even the keenest of human minds. Genesis 1 informs us that God is the Creator of all these spectacular wonders.

In Genesis, two perspectives on creation are found. Genesis 1:1–2a encompasses God's creation of the whole world. Genesis 2:4b—3:24 offers a more intimate account, with God's creative activity located entirely in a garden in Eden. Both perspectives stand as confessions of faith. Each reveals a prescientific belief regarding how creation came into being. Genesis 1 and 2 recount God's vision, initiative, and actions in creating the heavens and earth.

After creating the world in six days, God rested on the seventh, inaugurating sabbath as a day of rest and including it as part of created order. God's creative work was orderly and symmetrical. In Days 1–3, God created day and night, separating sky and sea, drawing together dry land, plants, and trees. In Days 4–6, God populated creation with stars and planets, birds and sea life, and land animals, including humans. At each stage of creating, God evaluated what God made and pronounced it "good."

The opening verses indicate that some basic elements were present before God began working. There existed a formless void, darkness, the deep (waters), and wind. These verses stand as testimony to the creative activity of God that brought the world into being.

Gather and display a selection of nature photography for use in step 5. You may also invite participants to bring in their favorite nature photographs.



SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Read Psalm 33:1–9. Identify ways in which "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD." Give thanks to God for such abundant love.



LEADING THE SESSION

Gathering

1. Greet the learners.

Greet the learners and make any guests feel welcome. Are there ways that you can make the learners more comfortable?



My Notes:

2. Open with prayer.

Lead the group using the Worship Leaflet for the session (see Resources to Help the Leader) or offer an opening prayer or song of your selection.



My Notes:

Exploring

3. Creation: who and what?

Form two groups to read Genesis 1:1-13 antiphonally. Group 1 reads vv. 1–2, 6–8, 11–12. Group 2 reads vv. 3–5, 9–10, 13. Have participants review the text to identify:

- Who was involved in creating the heavens and earth?
- What materials were available in the ordering of creation?

In v. 2, the earth is described as a "formless void," yet light, darkness, water, and wind are also named as being present at the creation. Ask:

- What might this indicate about God's power and creativity?
- What was the place and role of the sweeping wind in God's work of creating?



My Notes:

4. God precedes all.

Review Genesis 1:1–13. Use notes from Preparing to Lead to identify patterns in God's creative activity: God speaks, God acts, and God pronounces it good. Discuss:

- What do the patterns in God speaking, acting, and pronouncing say to you about the character and purposes of God?
- How can we emulate God's patterns in the ways we make decisions? In what ways do you acknowledge that God precedes every decision you make?



My Notes:

5. Images of creation.

Display a selection of nature photography. Invite participants to identify the images that appeal to them. Discuss:

- What in these images affirms your faith in the Creator God?
- What qualities and characteristics of God are reflected in these images? (strength, beauty, love, faithfulness, and so on)

Distribute paper and pens. Encourage individuals or pairs to write a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for God's work of creation. Participants may use these in step 7.



My Notes:

6. Experiences with God's creation.

Form pairs and ask participants to recall experiences when they felt especially close to God or had a unique experience with God, especially in the outdoors surrounded by God's creation. Within the pairs, discuss:

- What were the settings and experiences?
- What insight about God did you gain?
- How was this experience valuable to you?

Gather participants and invite volunteers to tell insights from their pairs discussions. Ask:

• What helps you to feel part of God's creation?



My Notes:

Responding

7. Prayers and praise.

Provide hymnals or songbooks. Invite participants to identify favorite hymns that celebrate God's creation. Suggested hymns include "All Things Bright and Beautiful," "Spirit," "Morning Has Broken." Select a song to sing or read together to celebrate God's creation. Invite volunteers to pray their prayers written in step 5.



My Notes:

8. Close with prayer.

Use this prayer from the **Student's Book** or a prayer of your selection:

O creator God, you have brought into being all things. Your creative word is the source of the heavens and the earth. We praise you! We thank you for this wonderful universe with its vastness and greatness. We praise your creative power to establish meaning and purpose for all things. All creation exists to give you glory. May we live to give you glory too. May we tend to the earth, the home you have given us, as responsible stewards. May we behold your wonders and know the greatest wonder, that you love us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



My Notes:



MORE IDEAS

- 1. Take a nature walk and notice every God-created thing. Try to identify specific varieties of trees, plants, flowers, and so on.
- 2. Explore the impact of scientific advancements and an increased understanding of nature, the environment, and the effects these have on faith in God.
- 3. View YouTube.com "The Most Astounding Fact—Neil deGrasse Tyson." How do the images and information stir awe and wonder at God's creative work?