

Appreciate God's Creation

GENESIS 1-2:3

1



GOAL

Youth notice the diversity and vastness of creation and call it good, just like our Creator has.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God,
When you created us, you called it good.
Help me continue to live into this goodness and inspire others to do the same.
Amen.

THIS SESSION

The first step in developing a care for creation that focuses on advocacy and stewardship is to develop a relationship with creation. When humans know and love something, they are more likely to want to support its well-being. It is difficult to care about something that we do not know or understand. Today's session tackles this first step of noticing, listening to, and witnessing the vastness of creation that God has created. From these actions, a relationship with creation is fostered.

THE BIBLE STORY

Genesis 1-2:3 tells us of God creating everything in the world and calling it good. The passage highlights the diversity and vastness of God's creation. When this passage is simply read through the binary lens of light and dark, sea-creatures or land-dwellers, and male and female, readers do not capture the full magnitude of God's abundant creation. A reading of this passage that acknowledges the things that exist between and outside of these binaries provide a greater depth to the creation that God calls good. As people made in the image of God, we too are called to understand the diversity, complexity, and uniqueness of God's handiwork in all creation.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Some youth have had the pleasure of living in rural areas surrounded by the outdoors and the creatures that inhabit these areas. Some have even helped raise animals, joined Future Farmers of America, have gardened, or tended to houseplants. Some visit wilderness areas, parks, or camps to enjoy the scenery. Some dwell in urban environments with manicured lawns and carefully placed trees. While young people's experience with creation is widely varied, all have interacted with nature in some form. Youth may need assistance with being intentional about noticing the creation in their lives and appreciating the abundance of living things in their daily environment.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Depending on the options you choose:
 - "Planting the Seed" (p. 9): Gather a variety of seeds, paper towels, and plastic bags. This activity will expand in future sessions throughout the unit. Read ahead to plan and gather supplies for future sessions. Be sure to research your area's growing season to note which plants may be successful during the current season.

GETTING STARTED

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- Name tags
 - Writing supplies

NAME TAGS C

As youth arrive, instruct them to write on a name tag their name and the name of something in nature that they enjoy (e.g., trees, waterfalls, clouds, cows, dogs). Invite youth to introduce themselves and talk about what they enjoy about nature from what is written on their name tag.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose two or more options.

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- Internet-connected device
 - Glory to God* hymnals, or hymnals with the song “Touch the Earth Lightly”

THE WORLD IN OUR CARE M T

Invite the youth to sing the first verse of the song “Touch the Earth Lightly” by singing along as you show the YouTube video “Touch the Earth Lightly” (bit.ly/FMTouchTheEarth, 2:18, stopping after the first verse at 0:33). You may also choose to use the *Glory to God* hymnals (#713) or hymnals with that song. After singing, ask the youth what they think it means to “touch the earth lightly” and “use the earth gently.”


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- Two sheets of newsprint
 - Marker

MAKING LISTS C CT

Explain that this unit is titled *Care for Creation*. Invite youth to identify examples of creation. Write their answers on one sheet of newsprint. When youth have finished or when the paper is full, ask whether there are even more things that are part of creation that they haven’t named.

Invite youth to imagine how people may care for the things they have listed. Write their answers on the second sheet of newsprint.

Explain that today’s session is “Appreciate God’s Creation.” Invite youth to wonder and guess at what they may focus on and talk about in the session.

 **Teaching Tip:** You can also watch “Categories Game!” (bit.ly/FMCategories, 1:33) to learn how to play.

 **Category suggestions:**

- Animals
- Plants
- Trees
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Sea creatures
- Water (rivers, streams, glaciers, clouds, oceans, lakes)
- Landscapes (hills, mountains, grasslands, forests, deserts)

CATEGORIES G

Gather youth in a circle. Direct them to pat their legs or a surface twice and then to clap twice. Repeat this pattern several times until youth are comfortable with the rhythm and beat. Explain that as you pat your legs you will say “Category . . .” You then clap twice. Pat your legs again and say the name of a category. Clap twice again. Youth will then go around the circle and name something that fits in that category during the pat–pat–clap–clap sequence. If youth cannot name something during that pattern sequence, or if they repeat something already named, they stop clapping and move slightly away from the circle. Continue the game until there is one person left. Play multiple rounds using different categories.

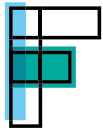
Ask if they think there are even more things in creation than what they named in the game. Challenge them to list some of these things. Wonder with them if there are even more things that God has created that we may not even be aware of.

TELLING A STORY

C AT

Tell a story of a time you noticed and connected to creation. Explain what you saw, how you felt, and what you learned in that moment. Form youth into pairs and invite them to tell their own story of a time that they connected to nature or another living thing. Allow each partner to talk for about 90 seconds.

After three minutes, gather the group together. Ask them to name what they talked about. Invite youth to describe what they recognized when they interacted with creation.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

INDEED GOOD

CT

Distribute paper and writing supplies. Have youth write “God created” in big, bold letters on the top of their paper. Explain that, as you read Genesis 1–2:3, they are to list the things God created. They are also to say “It is indeed good” each time you read the word *good*.

Read aloud Genesis 1–2:3. When you are finished say, “It is indeed good.” Ask for a volunteer to name what they listed on their paper. Have youth raise their hand if they wrote anything different. Invite them to name the unique things they wrote. Discuss what Genesis 1 tells them about humans’ relationship to creation.

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- Bibles
 - Paper
 - Writing supplies

GENESIS 1 VIDEO

T AT

Show the YouTube video “How Genesis 1 Communicates What the Whole Bible Is About” (bit.ly/FMGen1, 7:42). Invite youth to recall and describe what they found interesting and important in the video. Discuss what Genesis 1 tells them about the diversity and vastness of creation.

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- Internet-connected device

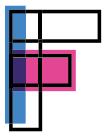
CREATION NARRATIVE

CT

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Have volunteers take turns reading aloud each paragraph. After each paragraph, encourage all youth to say, “It is still good.”

Ask if they believe all creation is good. Invite them to talk about when they might have difficulty calling something in creation as good. Wonder with them if God sees these things as good and why.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

FOREST BATHING

T

Explain that *forest bathing* is a practice of taking a short, contemplative walk in a forest. The activity first originated in Japan. The contemplative walk involves listening to, noticing, and appreciating the vast creation of a forest. Forest bathing has been shown to have both mental and physical

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- Internet-connected device

health benefits including lowering heart rate and blood pressure, reducing stress, boosting immunity and mood, and improving an overall feeling of well-being.

Show the YouTube video “Shinrin-Yoku, (Forest Bathing)” (bit.ly/FMForestBath, 6:05). As they view the video, encourage youth to take deep breaths and immerse themselves in the images and sounds. Facilitate a conversation with these questions:

- ➔ What feelings arose for you while watching the video?
- ➔ How do you think that forest bathing helps people appreciate God’s abundance?
- ➔ Where might people in our community do a similar practice? (Encourage youth to also think about places other than a forest.)

Internet-connected device

FOREST CHURCH

T C

Acknowledge that there is a growing movement around the world of “Wild Churches,” which also go by names of “Church of the Wild,” “Worship in the Wild,” and “Forest Churches.” These congregations from many different faith traditions or unchurched people meet in a natural environment and observe and listen to creation to appreciate the Creator’s handiwork, connect with the natural world, and grow closer to God.

Show the YouTube video “Forest Church, Gloucester. Discovering God Out in the Wilds!” (bit.ly/FMForestChurches, 3:34). Facilitate a conversation with the following questions:

- ➔ What different ways did people in the video worship God?
- ➔ How do you think this practice allows people to appreciate God’s abundance?
- ➔ How do you think this practice allows people to grow closer to God?
- ➔ How would you feel if you could worship God in this way?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

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- Paper
 Drawing supplies
 Clipboards or other firm, transportable surface for each youth

SKETCHING AND NOTICING

A

Gather youth and go to a spot on the grounds of your church where nature is present (outside, garden, near sanctuary flowers, near a large window). Invite youth to name the different things they hear and see. Challenge youth to look at one thing in nature for 90 seconds and observe its movement, shape, color, the shadow it creates, and other aspects of it. This is their subject.

Distribute the clipboards, paper, and drawing supplies. Instruct youth to choose one color and outline the subject they observed, paying careful attention to the shape of the subject. Explain that this is not an exercise about artistic ability, but simply noticing, listening to, and reflecting on nature. Have them use different colors to complete their drawing of the subject, paying careful attention to where the light hits the subject and the shadows around it.

After about 3 minutes for noticing and sketching, have youth draw a speech bubble over the subject and write something that their observed subject wants the world to know about caring for creation.

CONNECTING AND LEARNING

C

Copies of Resource Page 2

Facilitate a conversation using the following questions:

- ➔ Why do you think it is important to notice the creation around us?
- ➔ What cool nature facts do you know?
- ➔ Why do you think it is important for people to learn about creation?
- ➔ How do you think connecting with and learning about creation helps us connect and learn about God?

Distribute copies of Resource Page 2. Explain that they can use the resources on the page to connect to and learn about creation. Challenge youth to list other resources or practices that might help people appreciate God's abundance.

PLANTING THE SEED


X CT


Invite youth to tell stories of a time when they gardened or planted something. Explain that they are going to start a few seeds together and notice what changes occur over the coming weeks.

Display several different seeds to examine. Ask what they notice about the seeds. Encourage them to list similarities and differences between the seeds. Wonder with youth why each seed looks a little different. Invite them to guess what plants the different seeds will grow. Inform youth which seed belongs to which plant.

Distribute the seeds to youth so that each youth has a different seed. Distribute a piece of paper towel, a plastic bag, and a permanent marker. Have youth write the name of the plant on the plastic bag. They will get the paper towel moist with water and place it in the plastic bag. Explain that this creates a humid environment that encourages growth. Have youth place the seeds in the plastic bag on one side of the paper towel then seal the bag. Set the plastic bags somewhere in your church with plenty of light to help seeds grow.

- A variety of seeds
- Paper towels
- Water
- Plastic bags
- Permanent marker

 **Teaching Tip:** This activity will be built upon from session to session throughout this unit. Read ahead to best plan accordingly and gather supplies for future sessions.

 **Teaching Tip:** If you cannot leave the bags with seeds in your learning space, check with a church leader about a place to leave the seeds where they can receive sunlight and will be available to use in subsequent sessions.



FOLLOWING JESUS

IT IS GOOD PRAYER

Gather youth. Explain that they will each offer a sentence for what they hope people would do to appreciate God's abundance and to grow closer to both creation and the creator. After each person contributes, have the group say, "It is good!"

Conclude the prayer, saying aloud: "God, it is indeed good! Let us love our neighbors as you love us! Amen."

A Creation Narrative based on Genesis 1–2:3

In the very beginning, God created the skies and the land, and everything that dwells in them. The Earth was formless and full of chaos, but the Spirit of God was hovering over this chaos ready to give it order.

First, God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God made the light and the darkness distinct from each other. God noticed the full light, the full dark, and the in-between times of dawn and dusk with their sunrises and sunsets. God saw that this was good.

Next, God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate the water from the water.” So God made the sky. God noticed the patterns of the sky, the clouds and the stars that dwelled there. God saw that this was good.

Then, God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” God noticed the land with its hills, mountains, valleys, and flatness. God also noticed the swamps, bogs, and marshes where the waters meet the land. God saw that this was good.

God said, “Let the land produce vegetation.” God made the vegetation. God noticed the varieties of fruits, vegetables, trees, bushes, and grasses on the land above water. God noticed the kelp, algae, and seagrass growing on the land beneath the waters. God saw that this was good.

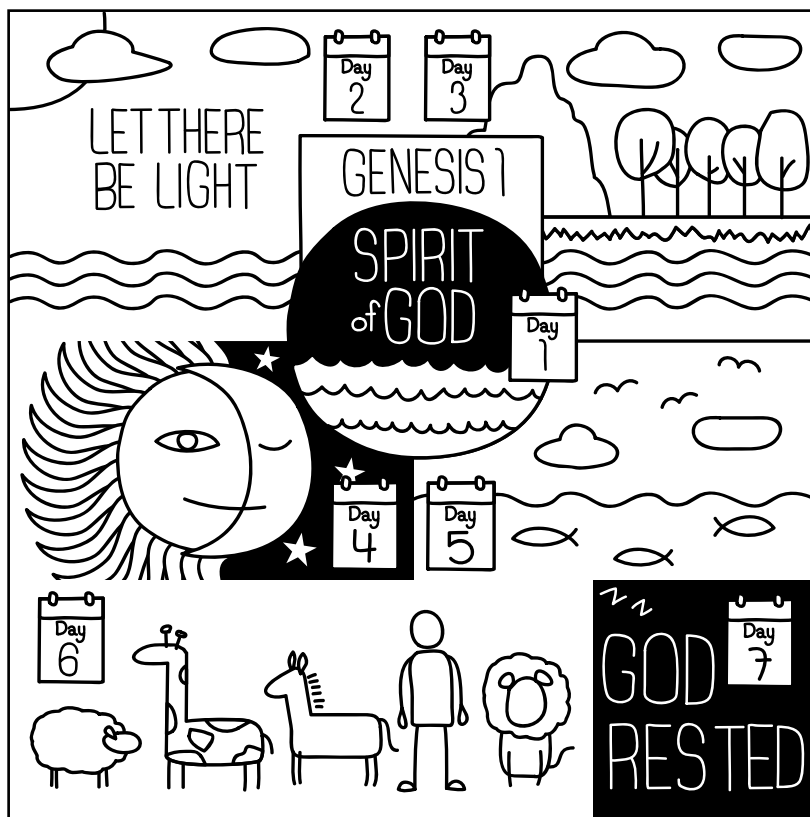
Next, God said, “Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night, let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, days, and years.” So God created a rhythm for creation with seasons and cycles. God noticed the phases of the moon, the cycles of the trees, and the flowering and the withering of the plants. God saw that this was good.

Next, God said, “Let there be living creatures in the water and the sky.” God made these creatures. God noticed the many different kinds of fish, sharks and rays, whales and dolphins, and squids and octopuses of the water. God noticed wrens, hawks, eagles, jays, woodpeckers, beetles, moths, butterflies, bees and wasps, and many more creatures that fly in the sky. God saw that this was good.

Then, God said, “Let the land produce living creatures.” God made the wild animals, the livestock, and the creatures that move along the ground. God noticed the variety in cattle and horses, sheep and goats, big and small cats, bears, deer, antelope, elephants, wolves and dogs, foxes, snakes, and all other creatures of the land. God noticed the frogs, otters, beavers, seals, hippos, and reptiles that dwell on both the land and in the waters. God saw that this was good.

Last, God said, “Let us make humankind in our image.” So God created them in God’s own image. God noticed them male, female, in-between, and outside of this binary, tall, short, skinny, toned, fat, and with black skin, white skin, brown skin, and many more hues. God saw that this was good.

On the seventh day, God rested and blessed it as a day of rest.



Connecting and Learning

Learn about plants and wildlife near you or across the world!

Apps

- iNaturalist—identify plants and various wildlife by crowd sourcing
- Seek by iNaturalist—uses image recognition to identify various wildlife
- vTree (Virginia Tech Tree ID)—identify various trees
- Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab—identify birds by sight and sound
- Sky Map—identify stars, planets, and constellations

Podcasts

- Completely Arbortary—learn all about trees
- WXPR Field Notes—take an in-depth look at different species of wildlife
- Wild Animals Podcas—a science podcast exploring the different things animals do
- Songbirding—learn to identify birds by their songs
- 30 Animals That Made Us Smarter podcast—learn about how studying wildlife influences modern human life
- Will and Ben, the Wildlife Men—learn about wildlife that is often overlooked

Websites

- naturetracking.com—identify different animal tracks

