

Appreciate God's Abundance

GENESIS 1:1-2:3; PSALM 104; MATTHEW 6:28-29

GOAL

Adults hone their awareness of the abundance and diversity of creation that God calls good.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

God of creation and providence, the earth is yours and is filled with your abundance. Even the stones cry out in praise to you! Amen.

THIS SESSION

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says that the Bible begins with abundance. The very first chapter of Genesis is a song of praise for God's generosity. "It tells how well the world is ordered," says Brueggemann. "It declares that God blesses—that is, endows with vitality—the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind." This is a beautiful vision of abundant life, but so often we focus on scarcity. We want more energy and resources, and we often make decisions out of fear and greed. We fail to see what Brueggemann calls "the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit."¹

We learn to appreciate God's abundance when we step out of our homes, offices, and churches and look around at the natural world. When we look for indications of God's activity, we find it in not only the words of the Bible but also the works of creation. Activities in this session encourage participants to do just this: to see and know that God and all that God creates is good.

THE BIBLE STORY

Three Scripture texts focus our awareness on God's generous abundance in creation. The repetitive pattern found in the first creation story, Genesis 1:1-2:3, presents God's work of making order out of chaos with a step-by-step account of each element being created and building on that which has been created. God does not hold back on creating a very rich diversity and breathes light and dark and goodness into being. God filled the earth and ordered creation in such a way that the needs of all are met. Psalm 104 paints a picture of God's abundant generosity when it proclaims to God, "when you open your hand, they are filled with good things" (Psalm 104:28b). On a mountainside, filled with natural beauty, Jesus says to his followers, "Consider the lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:28). Jesus reminds disciples that God provides what is needed to live out of the abundant goodness of creation, just as the lilies and growing things also receive what is needed to thrive.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Depending on the options you choose:
- "Planting Seeds" (p. 8): Gather supplies for starting seeds. Be sure to research your area's growing season to know which plants may be successful during the current season.

1. Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," *The Christian Century* (March 24, 1999), www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-01/liturgy-abundance-myth-scarcity.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and engage in gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the Unit Overview on pages 4–5 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 47 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

THE WORLD IN OUR CARE

Invite participants 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), or use the *Glory to God* hymnal (#713) or other hymnals that include this song. After singing, ask participants what they think it means to “touch the earth lightly” and “use the earth gently.”

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEOS

Show the “*Care for Creation Overview*” video and the “*Care for Creation Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the practice.

CARING FOR CREATION

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Talitha Amadea Aho’s quotation on page 5 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to discuss their thoughts and responses to the quotation.

Refer participants to the Unit Overview and the reflection questions (*Adult Reflection Guide*, pp. 4–5). Use the questions to begin discussion about the practice of caring for creation.

SONG FOR REFLECTION

Show the YouTube video “Morning Has Broken (with Lyrics)” (bit.ly/FMMorningHasBroken, 2:59). Invite participants to identify what they appreciate about God’s creation.

Refer participants to “Appreciate God’s Abundance” on page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Allow some time for people to read or review the introduction to this session. Discuss the reflection questions on page 8.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

INDEED GOOD

Refer participants to “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the opening paragraph. Distribute paper and writing supplies. Have participants write “God Created” in large letters at the top of their paper. Explain that, as you read aloud Genesis 1:1–2:3,

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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

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- Internet-connected device

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- Bibles
 - Paper
 - Writing supplies

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 1:1–2:3. When you are finished, say, “It is indeed good.” Ask for a volunteer to name what they listed on their paper. Have participants 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.

Use these questions to continue discussion:

- ➔ From the very beginning, all of creation is infused with the goodness of God. What does this say about how we should approach our task of caring for creation?
- ➔ How can we, as followers of Jesus, best participate in the flourishing of God’s good creation?

☐ Bibles

GOD THE CREATOR AND PROVIDER

Direct participants to “God the Creator and Provider” and “Consider the Lilies” on pages 10 and 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Form two groups. Assign one group to read Psalm 104. The other group will read Matthew 6:28–29. Have each group read information from the *Adult Reflection Guide*, then read their assigned Scripture passage, reflect on and discuss the diverse gifts of creation and how these impact their lives.

Gather all participants and invite each group to summarize their Scripture passage and the discussion that followed. Use these questions for further discussion:

- ➔ How does Creator God provide for the sustenance of all creation?
- ➔ How does God provide for us through the gifts of creation?
- ➔ Why does God provide for creation and for human beings?
- ➔ What other Scripture passages can you identify that connect to creation?



Additional passages about creation you might mention include Psalm 8; Psalm 24; Psalm 65:9–13.

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GENESIS 1 VIDEO

Show the YouTube video “How Genesis 1 Communicates What the Whole Bible Is About” (bit.ly/FMGen1, 7:42). Invite participants 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.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

INTRODUCTION

Direct participants to “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Form three groups and assign one of the first three paragraphs in this section to each group. Have groups read their assigned paragraph and discuss how the person described encourages others to pay attention to the natural world. They should identify the images and symbols used to inspire.

Gather all participants and have groups report highlights of their discussions. Ask participants how these saints, pilgrims, and poets affect their appreciation for the world around us.

FOREST BATHING

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 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](https://bit.ly/FMForestBath), 6:05). As participants view the video, encourage them 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 them to also think about places other than a forest.*)

FOREST CHURCH

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 non-churched 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.

PAYING ATTENTION

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

Distribute clipboards, paper, and drawing supplies. Have participants 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.

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- Paper
 - Drawing supplies
 - Clipboards

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

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- A variety of seeds
 - Paper towel
 - Water
 - Plastic bag
 - Permanent marker

 **Teaching Tip:** This activity will extend through two sessions. 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.

PLANTING SEEDS

Explain that participants are going to start a few seeds together and notice what changes occur until the next session.

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

Distribute the seeds along with a piece of paper towel, a plastic bag, and a permanent marker for each person. Have them 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. 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 the seeds grow.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Direct participants to “Practicing the Practice” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to read and discuss the ideas presented for paying attention to and appreciating the abundance of God’s creation. Encourage participants to name additional ideas that have helped them notice and appreciate the natural world.

Challenge each participant to pause and appreciate God’s abundance and creation in the week ahead. They will have the opportunity to tell one another about what they did at the beginning of the next session.

FOLLOWING JESUS

Direct participants to “Following Jesus” on page 17 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the verses from Psalm 24 in the callout circle. Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud the paragraphs in this section.

In unison, say the closing prayer by Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky.