

Gen. 1:1–2:4a

Ps. 8

2 Cor. 13:11–13

Matt. 28:16–20

In God's Image

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will reflect on the ways in which they can be partners with God in creation.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 1:1–2:4a

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Richard Boyce

There is a multiplicity to God's revelation in the world, which even (or especially) this opening prelude makes clear. The God of Scripture is just too big and mysterious and communal to allow a single subject (*'elohim*) to drive a series of verbs (create, said, see) that thereby describe this deity as *simply* a single actor over against the creation this particular God brings about. The spirit or wind of this God is also an actor; the spirit “sweeps, hovers, and broods” over the stuff of this world in a way that hints at relationship—both inside and outside the Godhead this passage portrays.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Melinda Quivik

This text offers the theological question of the value of creation. Out of nothing, something was made (*creatio ex nihilo*). Why is this important? The Creator's first pronouncement is that the creation is good. The goodness here is not an aesthetic or ethical proclamation about the nature of light; rather, goodness concerns the use to which it can be put for God's intention. We do not learn what that purpose is in these verses, but God is pleased. The light is “good.” God names it.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Carole A. Crumley

One significantly different understanding of the Trinity comes from Meister Eckhart, a fourteenth-century German mystic. He wrote that God the Father laughed, and the Son was born. Then the two of them laughed, and the Spirit was born. When all three laughed, the human being was born. For Eckhart, the mystery of the Trinity was surrounded by peals of golden laughter at the heart of the universe. What does your experience tell you about the Trinity? How would you describe the indescribable, incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity? Trust your spiritual heart to know the way. It is the only compass you need.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Dave Bland

What confirms God's special love for humans is that they are the only ones made in God's image (1:26–27). This is one of the reasons God insists on Israel not making images of the God they worship. God's image is already placed within humans; no other kind of representation is necessary. As God's image bearers, male and female are given a responsibility: to have dominion over the created order (v. 28). Humans are given dominion, not domination; they are caregivers, not exploiters (cf. Ps. 72:8–14). We do unto creation as God has done unto us; we express love and care toward the world. Being image bearers of God is also at the heart of how we see other humans, which results in treating them with dignity, regardless of race, age, gender, social or economic status.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people ask big questions: “Who is God?” “Why am I here?” “What is my purpose?” The story of creation in Genesis 1 invites them to ponder these and other questions, such as what it means to be created “in the image of God.” Many teenagers struggle with self-image. To hear that they are created in God’s image and that this is “very good” is an affirmation that can carry them through challenging times. As their understanding of their place in the world evolves, they will begin to find answers to their “big questions” and discover more.

God, may this time of preparation and with these young people show me what it means to be partners with you in creation. Amen.

■ LEADING THE SESSION

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ photos of nature scenes
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ two copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ length of fabric and items for creation story in a basket

For Responding

- ☐ option 2: cast material, water, permanent markers; optional: hairdryers
- ☐ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, optional: Internet-connected device

For Music Connection

- ☐ Internet-connected device

GATHERING

Before the session, gather these items in a basket: large dark-colored length of fabric; matches; foil plate; bubble mixture and wand; bowl of water; rock; three candles in holders; toy fish, birds, animals, and reptiles; paper doll chain or small dolls.

Before youth arrive, arrange nature photos to form a path in the meeting space.

Greet youth as they arrive and ask them to walk slowly along the pathway of nature scene photos. After everyone has had a chance to see all the images, invite each youth to choose a photo that reminds him or her of an experience in nature. Take turns telling the group about that experience. Discuss general feelings about being outdoors in God’s creation.

Distribute Bibles. As an opening prayer, form two groups to read the verses of Psalm 8 alternately. At the end of the reading, invite the group to pray their thanks for God’s creation silently.

EXPLORING

The first chapters of Genesis tell a story of how the world came to be. Invite youth to imagine that they are hearing this story for the first time. Spread the fabric on the floor of the meeting space and place the basket of items nearby. Invite youth to gather around the fabric. Recruit two volunteer readers and give each one a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (A Story of Creation). The rest of the group members can take turns placing the items from the basket on the fabric as the story is told.

Pause for a time of silent reflection at the end of the reading. Ask:

- ✠ What questions do you have about this story?
- ✠ What would you add to this story? Why?
- ✠ What do you wonder about when you think of the creation of the world?

Youth may have some questions regarding how the biblical stories connect with scientific theories of evolution. They may also have friends who attend churches whose members don't believe in evolution. The important thing is to hold space for their questions without feeling the need to provide answers.

Option: provide three or four different versions of the Bible and ask youth to read Genesis 1:28 from them.

EASY
PREP

Have youth find Genesis 1:1–2:4a in their Bibles and review the story. Ask:

- ✧ If you could use only one phrase to explain the purpose of this story, what would it be? Why?
- ✧ What does this story tell you about God?
- ✧ What does this story tell you about human beings?

Ask the group to look at verses 26–31, and discuss the following questions:

- ✧ What does it mean to you to be made “in the image of God”?
- ✧ Is this idea scary, or is it inspiring? Why?
- ✧ What is the work that human beings are given?

Ask youth to look at verse 28 and explain that various versions of the Bible use different words for the word *dominion*: *rule, bring under control, subdue, take charge*. The word *dominion* actually comes from a Latin word that means “God.” Ask:

- ✧ What do you think it means to have dominion over creation?
- ✧ When and where have humans misused this instruction?
- ✧ What are some good ways that humans have shown responsibility for creation?

The story of creation in the Bible comes to us as a gift. Its purpose is not to explain the beginning of the world in scientific terms but to spark our imagination. It helps us think about who we are, our relationship with God, and our responsibility to creation. Discuss together:

- ✧ How does it feel to hear that, because we have been made in God's image, we are partners with God?
- ✧ What do you think God is asking you to do as a partner in caring for the earth?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Midrash Workshop** Youth will reflect on ways in which they are partners with God by creating contemporary stories. Explain that Midrash comes from the Jewish tradition and is a story based on a biblical story, often embellished to help people think more deeply about the story or to answer a question raised by the story. Invite youth to imagine that after the sixth day of creation, God was asked, “Is the world finished yet?” and God answered, “I don't know. Ask my partners.” Have youth work individually or in small groups to create their own “Midrash” to respond to this imagined statement from God. The stories should emphasize humanity's responsibilities for creation.

Consider using hairdryers to quicken the drying procedure. Option: Use clay, paints, or pastels instead of cast material to create the images.

For videos about youth environmental activists go to:
Severn Cullis-Suzuki
(bit.ly/FWSevernToday)
or
Slater Jewell-Kemker
(bit.ly/FWSlater)

2. **Image Masks** Youth will reflect on ways they are partners with God in creation through an artistic activity. The biblical story of creation tells us that we are created in God's image. Ask youth to write down some of the ways that they consider themselves made in God's image. Invite them to work in pairs to help each other sculpt face masks using dampened plaster cast materials. As the masks are drying, ask youth to make lists of things they could do as "caretakers," working with God to take care of creation. Once the masks have dried, have youth use permanent markers to write their ideas and thoughts about being made in God's image on their masks.
3. **Creation Service Projects** Youth will name ways that they feel called, as partners with God, to care for creation. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Plan for the Future Now) and read together the story of Severn Cullis-Suzuki, daughter of Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki. If time permits, watch the video recording of her presentation to the Rio Earth Summit on YouTube. Discuss stories of other young people who have become involved in advocacy for creation. Invite the group to brainstorm ways in which they can care for creation in their communities and globally. Encourage each one to choose an action and write it on the bottom of the resource sheet as a personal commitment.

CLOSING

Invite youth to gather in a circle around all the items used to tell the story of creation. Invite each one to choose one of the items and think about how they could care for that part of creation. Then invite them to participate in the following "add-on prayer" by speaking a phrase describing how they will care for creation. Pray:

We have been created in the image of God and given a big responsibility.

As good stewards, we will care for creation by . . .

And with the whole community of creation, we say, Amen!

■ ENHANCEMENT

MUSIC CONNECTION

Listen together to "Blessed We Are" by Peia. Read aloud these lyrics: "We hold a prayer for the Earth, for the ones yet to come. May you walk in beauty and remember your song. Remember why you came here. Remember your life is sacred." The vocalist reminds us that life is sacred and that we have a responsibility to "hold a prayer for the Earth and for the ones yet to come." Ask:

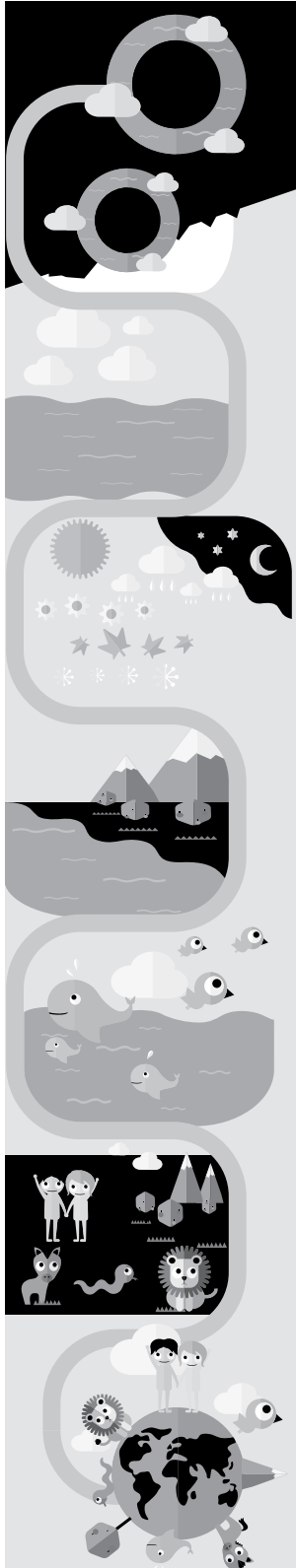
- ✠ How is this message similar to the Genesis message that God has given us "dominion" over the earth?

Invite youth to write their own "prayers for the earth."

For the song "Blessed We Are" from *Four Great Winds*, go to bit.ly/BlessedWeAre. Lyrics begin after the first minute of the song.

A Story of Creation

based on Genesis 1:1—2:4a



Reader 1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,

Reader 2: and the earth was empty, covered in water and darkness.

Reader 1: God said, “Light!” and light started shining in the darkness. (*light a match*)

Reader 2: God separated light from darkness,

Reader 1: and named the light “Day” and the darkness “Night.”

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the first day.

Reader 1: God said, “Sky!” and separated the waters above and below. (*blow bubbles*)

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the second day.

Reader 1: God said, “Land!” and ground appeared in the oceans. (*place rock in water*)

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the third day.

Reader 1: God said, “Sun!” “Moon!” “Stars!” to shine in the sky. (*light three candles*)

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the fourth day.

Reader 1: God said, “Fish! Sea monsters!” and they swam in the oceans, and God said, “Birds!” and they flew above the earth. (*place toy fish and birds beside candles*)

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the fifth day.

Reader 1: God said, “Animals! Reptiles!” and they appeared on the land. (*add toy animals and reptiles*)

Reader 2: And finally God said, “People!”

Reader 1: And humans were created, men and women in the image of God. (*add paper doll chain or small dolls*) God blessed them and made them responsible for all of creation.

Reader 2: Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day. And on the seventh day God rested.

Plan for the Future Now

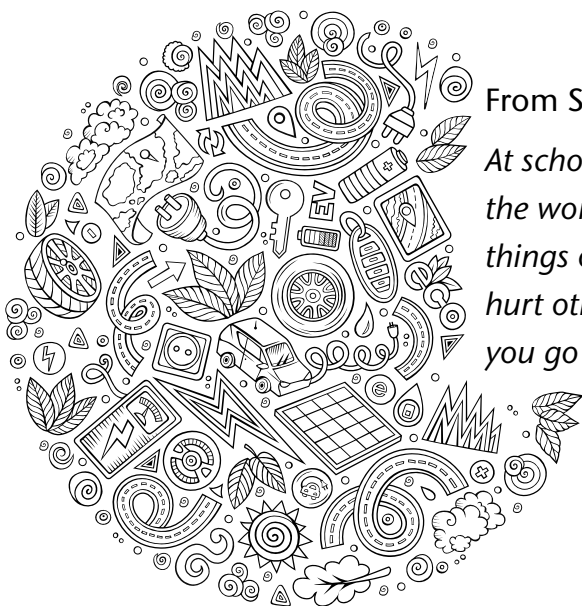
Severn Cullis-Suzuki is a mother now, but she has been an advocate for the earth since she was a child. Her father, David Suzuki, was a well-known environmentalist. Her interest in the environment was piqued when she and her father discovered pollution in the waters in Vancouver, Canada, where they lived. When Severn was nine, she and some friends founded the Environmental Children's Organization (ECO) to raise the awareness of children about the dangers facing environment. In 1992, they heard about an important meeting of people from all over the world to talk about environmental problems. Severn and three friends raised enough money to go to Rio de Janeiro to be observers at the Rio Earth Summit.

After they got there, Severn was invited to speak to the summit. You can hear her speech on YouTube.

Severn has never stopped being an advocate. She formed groups in college and even today speaks out for saving our earth for the future generations. Thinking about the future for the earth has always been at the forefront of Severn's thinking and speaking.

Today, she and her family live on the islands of Haida Gwaii off the coast of British Columbia, Canada. It is the home of the Haida Nation, one of the first nations of Canada.

To learn more about Severn, go to www.severncullissuzuki.com.



From Severn's speech at the Rio Earth Summit:

At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us to behave in the world. You teach us: not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share—not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?