

Gen. 9:8–17

Ps. 25:1–10

1 Pet. 3:18–22

Mark 1:9–15

God's Covenant

Goal for the Session Youth will explore aspects of covenantal relationship and God's steadfast relationship in the midst of human rebellion.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 9:8–17

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Dianne Bergant

Several important aspects of this covenant should be noted. First, it was made with all of creation. Second, it was multigenerational, made not only with Noah and those present, but with all who would come in the future as well. The biblical flood narrative contains a story of deliverance and of relationship with God. God directed Noah, the only one who found favor with the Lord, to build an ark so that he and his family and some of the animals might escape the punishing waters of the flood. From this small community God then fashioned a new human family and established a covenant with that family and with the world as a whole. This is a story of deliverance and new beginnings.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Wm. Loyd Allen

The God revealed here is adaptable, touched to the heart by creation, and willing to accept hurt to keep hope alive. The God of this covenant is unchanging only in refusing to give up on creation. God keeps the future open by self-limitation when humanity threatens to close off hope by unlimited repeat offenses. God takes this risk because God's heart is touched by creation's suffering. The God declaring this covenant is not an objective judge meting out a just sentence, but a lover grieved to the heart at the beloved's violence, yet still seeking reconciliation. Readers will find divine regret throughout this covenant, but will look in vain for anger.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Jane Anne Ferguson

The creatures made in God's image may always resist God. Yet God lays down God's weapons against creation, against humankind. God puts the undrawn bow in the clouds as a personal reminder "never again" to destroy creation with a flood. In the light of that bow, the rainbow, humanity can see God as "One Who Remembers," even in the midst of chaos, even in the midst of rebellion by creation and its creatures.

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

— From "Homiletical Perspective," David J. Lose

The self-limitation and willingness to sacrifice divine freedom that this passage describes reach their climax in the passion of Jesus Christ, for which Lent prepares us. This passage invites us to reconsider our relationships with each other and, indeed, all creation. If God, who alone has the right to despair, judge, or destroy, surrenders the divine prerogative from covenantal commitment, might not we who have tasted this mercy look upon all persons and all things as inherently worthwhile, that is, as those things that God has called worthy?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 9:8–17

Focus on Your Teaching

The flood story in Genesis, in which mercy tempers judgment, provides a wonderful example of God's steadfast love for humanity in the midst of human corruption and rebellion. This message will especially ring true to your young people as they seek to make sense of the world around them and search for God's presence in their lives. In Genesis 9:8–17, participants will learn that God's unwavering love comes in the form of a covenant.

You are the God of justice and mercy, O Lord. Help me to see the ways you show your love to the entire world and the ways to express your love to those I teach. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- paper and pens
- newsprint and markers
- copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2
- Christ candle (white pillar candle)
- lighter or matches

For Responding

- option 2: recording of "I Will Not Forget You" and Internet-connected device
- option 3: paper, pens, colored markers, construction paper in each rainbow color (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo/dark blue, and violet/purple), newsprint

For Film Connection

- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

After you welcome youth, form groups of two or three and give each group paper and a pen. Invite each group to brainstorm human behaviors that are bad enough to deserve divine judgment. After a few minutes, give each group an opportunity to read their list to the rest of the participants, recording the behaviors on a posted sheet of newsprint.

Lead the group in spontaneously acting out the story of Noah's Ark (Genesis 6–8) from memory. Have participants work together to tell the story. Each time a new character is named, have a participant assume that character. Note that it is OK for the group to leave out parts of the story and that some participants may need to act out more than one character.

Pray:

God of the rainbow promise, thank you for calling together our community this day to explore your truth in Scripture. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (The Story So Far—Part 1) and Resource Sheet 2 (The Story So Far—Part 2). Read the story on the pages together, pausing after each section to explore these questions:

- ✪ What emotions are expressed by God in this part of the story?
- ✪ What reasons are given for divine judgment?
- ✪ What reasons are given for divine mercy?

Read Genesis 9:8–17 and discuss:

- ✪ What is a covenant? (*an agreement between two or more parties that involves some kind of oath*)
- ✪ What covenant did God make? With whom did God make the covenant?
- ✪ How long does God indicate the covenant will last?

- ✪ In what ways does God seem different in this Scripture passage compared to the story of the flood?
- ✪ What does it mean that God makes this eternal promise to every living creature and to the earth itself?

Call the participants' attention to the newsprint from Gathering, and explore these questions:

- ✪ Which behaviors on this list will cause God to break God's covenant? (*nothing*)
- ✪ In what ways are our lives affected by the fact that mercy wins out in the end?
- ✪ How does God's steadfast relationship to us free us to make new beginnings?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Give It Up!** Explain that some Christian communities encourage people to give up something during Lent as a spiritual practice in order to remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Discuss this spiritual practice in light of the covenant God has made in Genesis 9:8–17. If any participants have ever given up something as a Lenten practice, give them an opportunity to recall the experience for the rest of the group. Discuss:
 - ✪ Why do some people choose to give up something during the season of Lent as a spiritual practice?
 - ✪ How can abstaining from certain things or practices help us in our relationship with God and with one another?
 - ✪ What are some other spiritual practices in which we can participate that will help us in our relationship with God and with one another?
2. **Listening Together** Listen together to “I Will Not Forget You” and discuss:
 - ✪ Where is human rebellion evident in this song?
 - ✪ How does God's covenant and steadfast love free us to “dance a wild dance” in praise?
 - ✪ In what ways does God's covenant offer new beginnings?

One version of “I Will Not Forget You” can be found on YouTube at bit.ly/FOWNotForget.

Give participants modeling clay, and have them sculpt a response to the question: What kind of new beginnings is God offering me right now? When all are finished, offer participants an opportunity to show and explain their sculptures to the group.

3. **God Goes Green** Give each participant a sheet of paper and a pen. Provide one or more sets of colored markers for participants to share. Have each participant draw colored dots in order (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo/dark blue, and violet/purple) in a column on the left side of the page. Next to each dot, have participants write one way in which they can help participate in God's care of the earth, becoming part of the promise. Each idea must start with the same letter as the color (for example: *recycle* could be written next to the red dot). As participants work, tape each sheet of colored construction paper (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo/dark blue, and violet/purple) onto a separate, posted sheet of newsprint.

Invite participants to write their ideas for each color of the rainbow on the corresponding sheet of newsprint. When all have finished, ask:

- ✪ How is the destruction of the earth connected with human rebellion?
- ✪ Which ideas for taking care of God's creation most appeal to you?
- ✪ What is one thing you can do in the coming week to live out your covenantal relationship with God by caring for the earth?

CLOSING

Set the Christ candle in the middle of the meeting space and gather the participants around it. Light the candle and explain that it reminds us of the light of Christ that cannot be put out. Even in the dark days of Lent, that light shines as a symbol of the redemptive hope we are called to live.

Gather into a circle, making sure you can see the newsprint list from Gathering and pray:

God of deliverance and new beginnings, we ask you this today to forgive us for the ways we have rebelled against you. (Read each behavior from the list from Gathering. Have the participants respond, "God, have mercy," after each behavior is read.) Help us, Lord, to set aside the things we do that hurt our relationship with you, with each other, and with all creation that we may begin again. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

The film *WALL-E* (2008; G) chronicles the adventures of a small waste-collection robot after pollution made the earth uninhabitable. If your church has a viewing license, watch together the scene where WALL-E finds the plant and takes it with him (bit.ly/FOWWallEPlant).

Discuss:

- ✪ What similarities do you see between the story of WALL-E and the flood story?
- ✪ In *WALL-E*, what or who is the cause of the earth's destruction?
- ✪ Who was the real cause of earth's destruction in the Genesis story?
- ✪ What is the significance of WALL-E finding the plant?

If your church has a viewing license, watch together the final scene, starting with the captain planting the seedling through the end of the film (bit.ly/FOWWallEEnd). Explore these questions:

- ✪ Where is hope found in the end of the story of WALL-E?
- ✪ In what ways does the idea of life sprouting on the garbage heaps represent the steadfast promise of God?

The Story So Far—Part 1

(Based on Genesis 6:5–7:15)



God saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And God was sorry that God had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved God to God's heart. So God said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."



But Noah found favor in the sight of God. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood."



In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.

The Story So Far—Part 2

(Based on Genesis 7:21–8:21)



And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. God blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days. But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.



At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him anymore.



Then God said to Noah, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families. Then Noah built an altar to God, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when God smelled the pleasing odor, God said, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”