

Remember That You Are Dust

GENESIS 2:7; 3:19b; LUKE 12:16–21

GOAL

Adults acknowledge the transitory nature of earthly life and goods and seek to humbly walk in God's grace.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



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

PRAYER

God of all creation, my life bears your fingerprints and is held in your love. From dust I came and to dust I will go. All life is in your hands. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Human beings like to think of ourselves as the crowning glory of God's creation, exalted above everything else God made. Yet Scripture tells us that, when God created humanity, we were fashioned out of "the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). We are intimately connected with the earth and everything on it. Our earthly grounding is part of being God's good, beloved creatures. To walk humbly is to acknowledge the beautiful, fragile gift of earthly life.

As creatures of God's earth, we are utterly dependent on earthly things—air, water, food, shelter—to sustain our lives. Our treasures, though, are in heaven. To seek and hoard earthly goods can divert our focus from what matters most. God desires that we prioritize our relationships with God and creation and God's creatures where we can share in mutually sustainable living on the earth that God entrusted to us.

THE BIBLE STORY

Genesis 2 tells us that God formed humans from the dust of the ground. In a play on words in Hebrew, the human (*adam*) is created out of the ground (*adamah*). We humans are made from the stuff of the earth. In English, we can make our own play on words; the root of the word *humble* is *humus*, soil or dirt. To walk humbly is to stay grounded, to live like the earthlings we are. In Genesis 3:19, God reminds us that we return to the earth when we die. Like the rest of creation, we will one day die and return to the dust from which we came.

Jesus' parable of the rich man who built bigger barns to store up ample goods for himself finds his life cut short. It is a reminder of how fleeting life is; the security that is amassed in worldly goods passes at life's end.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Walk Humbly Litany" (p. 5): Write the litany on a sheet of newsprint and display. A similar litany will be used each session, with slight variations.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Dust to Dust" (p. 6): Gather supplies listed with the activity. Stir dirt into cups of water until the mixture is the consistency of tempera paint.
- "Cleanup Day" (p. 8): Obtain trash bags and gloves.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and engage in gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the summary of the practice found in the Unit Overview on page 4 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.

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

WALK HUMBLY LITANY

Before the session, write the litany on a sheet of newsprint and display it. To open the session, invite participants to read the litany responsively.

What does the Lord require of us?

To walk humbly with our God.

We, like all creation, are fragile and dependent.

May we be grateful for each day we are given.

Amen.

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- Newsprint
 - Marker

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEOS

Show the “*Walk Humbly Overview*” video and the “*Walk Humbly 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.

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- Internet-connected device

GREAT HUMILITY

Direct participants to the “Unit Overview” on page 4 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph. Discuss the two questions at the end of the paragraph.

Read aloud the paragraph that begins “Humility is hard to grasp” and discuss the reflection questions on page 5.

If there is time and interest, go back to page 4 and assign the remaining four paragraphs to individuals or small groups. Have them read their assigned paragraph and be ready to explain the insights presented regarding humility.

Gather all participants to review the various insights about humility. Discuss how these insights inform their understanding of *great humility*.

DIRT AND HUMILITY

Direct participants to the first set of reflection questions on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. After discussing the questions about participants’ relationships with dirt, refer them to the introduction on page 6. Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud the paragraphs in the introduction.

Discuss the second set of reflection questions about finitude and mortality on page 7.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

THIS HUMBLE LIFE

Refer participants to “This Humble, Human Life” on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Summarize or read aloud the information in the first two paragraphs. Have participants read Genesis 2:4b–7 on page 8. Discuss this question from page 9:

- ➔ How does it change your hearing of the Genesis story to understand that the Hebrew word for human (*adam*) is related to the term for earth, soil, or ground (*adamah*)?

Read aloud Genesis 3:17a, 19 on page 9. Discuss these questions:

- ➔ How does the biblical wordplay help you to remember that you are dust?
- ➔ What feelings accompany this message for you?

CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Direct participants to “You Can’t Take It with You” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite a volunteer to read Luke 12:16–21 on that page. Summarize or read aloud the interpretation of this Scripture passage using the two paragraphs that follow it. Discuss the reflection questions that follow on page 10.

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- Bibles
 - Dirt and water mixed to make a thick, muddy liquid
 - Paper
 - Paintbrushes
 - Supplies for cleanup

 According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), of the continents worldwide, North America ranks first in terms of life expectancy of (77 years for men and 81 years for women). Life expectancy is lowest in Africa at just 63 years and 66 years for males and females respectively. (Accessed on June 5, 2023.)

DUST TO DUST

Give each participant a sheet of paper and a paintbrush. Invite them to use the mud mixture to paint a picture of nature. As they paint, read aloud Genesis 2:4–15.

Ask what God used to make humans in the story. Point out that they just created a picture from dirt mixed with water. Ask them to predict what will happen when the picture dries. Explain that the mud will begin to flake off and the picture will not last. The flakes may crumble into dust.

Read Genesis 3:19. Remind participants that humans live on earth for only a little while, about 75–80 years. While we are on the earth, we can care for the earth from which we were made and to which we return.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Refer participants to “Ash Wednesday” on page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud the information about Ash Wednesday. If your congregation observes activities for Ash Wednesday and Lent, discuss what is done and the meaning these activities hold for participants.

Have participants read the final paragraph in this section (p. 12), then discuss the reflection questions that follow.

FUNERALS

Engage participants in discussion about funerals using the questions in “Funerals” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

Use information that precedes the prayer to explain its origin. Invite participants to read the prayer responsively with you. Use these questions for further discussion:

- ➔ How are human mortality and divine immortality contrasted in the prayer?
- ➔ What place does the rejoicing word, *alleluia*, have in the prayer? What message does this communicate?
- ➔ In what ways do funerals allow for mourning human finitude? How do they encourage rejoicing for earthly life and life eternal?

PARADOXICAL HUMILITY

Direct participants to the “Unit Overview” on page 4 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the paragraph with quotations from Augustine of Hippo and Francis of Assisi. Form two groups. Assign each group to discuss one of the quotations using these questions:

- ➔ How does the assigned quotation present the paradoxical nature of humility in Christian life?
- ➔ What truths do you find in this quotation?
- ➔ How does the quotation further the lesson of Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:16–21?

Gather participants to tell one another about discoveries from their small-group discussions.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Invite participants to take off their shoes, either from their seated place or to stand in the grass outside (weather permitting). Tell them to plant their feet firmly and feel the floor or ground beneath them. They should notice its temperature and texture. Consider other living things that are supported by this floor or ground.

Remind them that they are dust, like everything on the ground, and to dust they will return.

Encourage those who are able to stand and walk slowly and deliberately around your learning space. As they walk, encourage them to continue to notice their feet and how they move across the ground. Notice whether the walking surface is smooth, level, or uneven. Consider how walking offers a way to care for the self and care for the environment.

Have participants return to their seats. Use the reflection questions in “Start on the Right Foot” on page 14 for discussion.



If there is a grassy area around your church, plan to take the group outside to connect with the earth.

GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY

Invite participants to reflect on their experiences with gardening. This may include tending to a few houseplants or planting outdoor flower or vegetable beds. Invite them to discuss what lessons they learn about life and death from tending plantings. What lessons are learned about humility?

Refer participants to “Get Your Hands Dirty” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud a key idea from the first paragraph: “Humility is knowing, in the deepest sense, that we are all members of one human family, all residents of one fragile planet, all beloved creations of God. This spiritual union transcends soil and sin.”

Encourage discussion about participants’ reactions to this idea. How does humility unite us with one another and with creation?

Have participants identify different practices of humility suggested in this section. Discuss which practices resonate with them. Which activities have they engaged in? How did they practice humility in these activities?

Discuss the reflection questions on page 15.

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- Gloves
 - Trash bags

CLEANUP DAY

If time allows, take a walk around the church neighborhood. Collect trash to be recycled or thrown away. Ask how trash pickup affects a person’s humility.

Discuss the impact on the streets and the environment when there are efforts for regular trash pickup versus one-time cleanup days. Identify ways that participants can participate in regular trash collection or recycling as stewards of creation.

FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING ACTIVITY

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- Internet-connected device

Read aloud the final paragraph in “Following Jesus” in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Show the YouTube video “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go (Tune: St Margaret—4vv) [with Lyrics for Congregations]” (bit.ly/FMOLove, 3:13).

In unison, say the prayer from Catherine of Siena on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.