



IN THE BEGINNING

A STUDY ON GENESIS 1-11

**THE FALLS
CHURCH
ANGLICAN**

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This little guidebook is designed to help you and a friend, or your small group, walk closer with Jesus. It follows “In The Beginning: A Study on Genesis 1-11” sermon series, inviting you to engage specific Bible passages and questions related to each week’s sermon.

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PRIOR TO YOUR MEETING

Listen to the sermon from the relevant Sunday. Pray for your group's time together.

FLOW OF MEETING



Read

Read the assigned Scripture passage(s) aloud. Also read the summary commentary about the passage provided in the guidebook.



Reflect

Open the floor for general thoughts or questions about the passage or sermon. Use the discussion questions as a guide for going deeper. The important thing is to prayerfully engage with friends around what God is revealing through His Word.



Pray

After approximately 30-45 minutes of discussion, shift to a time of prayer. A closing prayer is included for each section. You may consider singing a song together as well.



Respond

We have not appropriately responded to God's Word until we have reflected on it, prayed it, and then acted upon it. Towards the end of your group time, write down one concrete action that you hope to take in the coming week in response to what you've read, discussed, and prayed. As James writes, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).



Before Closing the Meeting

Asks if anyone in the group needs help with something in the week ahead. Meeting practical needs is one way we love each other.

BEGINNINGS MATTER

Beginnings matter, especially ours. People scour ancestry.com, hoping to discover who they come from. Counselors probe early childhood, helping patients see how their past affects their present. We wonder about an institution's founding because conceptions shape trajectories.

Beginnings matter. They help us know who we are and where we're headed.

The Book of Genesis opens with a single Hebrew word, *berēšit*, which translates, "In the beginning." These first chapters of the Bible reveal to us the beginning before all beginnings. Unless we understand their message, we risk misunderstanding everything else.

Genesis tells us that the world is not an accidental conglomeration of atoms. The world is a *home*. Carefully designed by God, the cosmos is capable of astonishing life and beauty. What's more, homo sapiens are more than well-developed mammals. We are God's *image*, created with astounding relational and vocational destiny—filling the new home with loving fellowship, cultivating and guarding its divine design (Genesis 1-2).

The honesty of these early chapters also instructs. Humanity's original descent into sin has ramifications that help us understand the complexity and pain of life today. People aren't just sick, depressed, or pathological; they're *sinful*, infected with a poison that wars against God's original intentions for life (Genesis 3-11).

Genesis 1-11 is the beginning of *your* family line—get to know it. Along with helping you understand why the world exists, who you are, who God is, and why life is so wonderful *and* tragic, these pages introduce you to a subtle but even more glorious reality: *grace*.

Despite our betrayal, failings, and violence, the Creator refuses to give up on His creation. Hence for Christians, we read of the First Adam and his descendants in light of the Last Adam and His new family (1 Corinthians 15:45). And we glory in this truth: the one who carefully made us is the one who patiently redeems us, and His creation will not be wrested from His hand (Colossians 1:15-20).

Reflect on this section with this question: What are some “beginnings” that matter to you – that shape you? Where you grew up? Your family background? The founding motto of your school or company?



NOTES

GOD THE CREATOR

Genesis 1:1-31



God reveals the world's beginnings not to answer questions of modern-day science—how, in material terms, did the world begin? How long did it take to make? The questions of “how” matter, but God desires to tell us something even more important.

The vistas of Genesis 1 are first revealed to Israel—God conveying them through Moses—when they are wandering in the wilderness. They've been enslaved for 400 years, undergone a dramatic exodus, and are now called to live into their destiny: God's people—His image—are to shine forth in the world God's glory (Isa 43:7). What must they know in order to do this?

God's disclosure of creation's mysteries serves the purpose of *formation*—the forming of His people. Wandering and wondering who they are, Genesis shares with God's chosen people foundational truths they must know: *who* God is, *what* the world is, and *why* God has created all things.

God: God is referred to thirty-two times in this chapter. He has no beginning; He is eternal. He creates with no help; He is self-sufficient. He creates by His Word; He is sovereign and all-powerful.

World: Seven times God declares His creation “good.” Its design is perfect. Habitats of sky, sea, land were lovingly made for inhabitants, the sun and moon, sea creatures, animals, and humans. It's the opposite of chaos (1:2), made with order, function, and purpose. Like a Temple, the world is designed as a sacred space—a home—where God dwells.

Before speaking about who humans are (1:26-27), Genesis spends twenty-five verses emphasizing who God is and what God is doing. God is the eternal, self-sufficient, sovereign Creator. God has made an ordered world with a divine design and purpose—and that world is His.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. Questions of science are important, but what questions can science *not* answer?



2. Paul says attributes of God are revealed through creation (read Rom 1:19-20). What does creation tell you about God?

3. God is happy, pleased with what He's made (God saw it was good, 7x). How might you enjoy God by enjoying His creation?

4. Read Psalm 19:1-4 and Psalm 148:1-5. How do they convey the purpose of Creation? As part of creation, how do you participate in this purpose?

5. If God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), is before all created things, then what is the most real reality—this material world or the spiritual world?



NOTES

All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!

Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.

Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father,
praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

Francis of Assisi,
"All Creatures of Our God and King"



PRAYER

O heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

Ask if anyone in the group needs help with something in the week ahead. Meeting practical needs is one way we love each other.

HUMANITY: CALLED

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:4-17



Humankind is the pinnacle of God’s creation, the only being made in His “image and likeness” (1:26-27). God has intelligence, reason, memory, ethical standards, and the capacity to love and communicate. We reflect Him in these.

Along with establishing the essence of human nature and dignity, being in God’s image also indicates human vocation. God’s image-bearers are His viceroys, His deputies in the world called to reflect His character and fulfill His purposes.

To “fill and subdue” the earth (1:28) suggests we image God the *King*. Just as He brought order to chaos and filled the sea and sky and land with created things, humans continue that kingly work by extending God’s good rule everywhere. By procreation, work, and righteous living, we fill the earth with the King’s image, bring forth creation’s potential, and subdue chaos.

To “work and keep” the Garden (2:15) suggests how we image God the *Holy One*. As later priests “keep and guard” the Temple (Numbers 4:28), Adam and Eve were to protect Eden from evil and mediate knowledge of the Creator to others.

Human beings are created and called to a kingly and priestly destiny. Such an identity bestows dignity, and also responsibility. We are not our own. We are accountable to God.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. Nothing else is created in God's image. How does this distinction make us different from other created things? How does it imply responsibility?



2. God is good and in bearing His image we're meant to "rule" the earth like Him. What are the qualities of a good ruler? Where has God given you "king-like" responsibility and authority—with your children, at work, at school? How can you reflect God's character in kingly work?

3. The verbs "keep and guard" are later used for priests (Numbers 4:26, 28, 31). Priests connect people with God, mediate God's word to people, and seek the holiness of the world around them. In what ways do you do priestly work (see 1 Peter 2:9)?

4. How does being created by God and for God challenge modern assumptions? How does it challenge the common assumptions that we are free to do and be anything we'd like?

"Love of neighbor is not dependent upon the manner of men but looks to God. The Lord commanded all human beings without exception 'to do good.' Yet the great part of them are most unworthy if they be judged by their own merit. But here Scripture helps in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love.... Therefore, whatever person you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, 'He is a stranger'; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of the fact that God forbids you to despise your own flesh."

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*



NOTES



PRAYER

O God, you made us in your own image, and you have redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



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HUMANITY: COMMUNAL

Genesis 2:18-25



The refrain that creation is “good” (Genesis 1) makes the declaration that the solitary human is “not good” (Genesis 2) all the more jarring. Though every individual is in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), the image bearing destiny is not fulfilled alone.

The sexual relationship of marriage (2:23-25) reveals another fact about the God whose image humans bear: God is *relational*. A God who is love (1 John 4:8) and exists eternally in the perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, gives to His image bearers a relational design. From Adam and Eve’s family, to the community of Israel, to the Church, the Triune God calls us into relationships of love and intimacy that reflect His own relational heart.

We are not told Adam and Eve’s ethnicity or IQ, but we are told their sex: male and female. Gender is a reality God stamps into body and soul. Adam’s “helper,” Eve, is not his inferior—God often uses the same word to describe himself as Israel’s “helper” (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:26). The term “helper” conveys their relationship as allies. Though truly distinct, the man and woman are of the same essence—“bone of my bone” (3:23). Their one-flesh union reflects the unity yet unique individuality of the Godhead—three distinct Persons, yet of same essence, forever One.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. What do our relational needs—longings for fellowship, being listened to, intimacy—tell us about who God is? What do they tell us about how God wants to relate to us?
2. If part of our bearing of God's image involves relationships, does the way you're relating to people in your life currently reflect who God is?
3. Neither Jesus nor Paul was married, but clearly bore the image of God (Jesus literally is the image of God). As individuals, however, their lives were deeply relational. How does the earthly life of Jesus and the life of Paul help single persons think about being in God's image? What type of community and covenant relationships marked Paul's life?
4. The Western world is terribly confused about gender. Do Genesis 1 and 2 suggest that maleness and femaleness are psychological (my gender is how I feel) or biological (my gender is my body—chromosomes, anatomy, etc.) realities? Consider how the formation of the first male and female is immediately followed by their one flesh—i.e., anatomically complementary—union as a clue (Genesis 2:24).

“If God created a home, he has made it as a place for relationship.”

John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*

“We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious, we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves.”

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*



NOTES



PRAYER

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who sets the solitary in families: We commend to your continual care the homes in which your people dwell. Put far from them every root of bitterness, the desire of vainglory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, and godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy matrimony, have been made one flesh; turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we may evermore be joined to one another with bonds of loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



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HUMANITY: CLAY-FOOTED

Genesis 2:1-3, 7-9



We kick against limitations and reach instead for the freedom and authority of our Creator. But limits are part of our design. Three stand out in Genesis 2: sabbath rest, feet of clay, and forbidden trees. Modern high achievers would do well to see in these not merely caution against hubris, but invitations to truer life.

Sabbath Rest: God is omnipotent, humanity is not. The Almighty rests on the seventh day not because He's fatigued but finished (2:2). He blesses and makes holy the seventh day for the sake of His people; it structures rest and worship for them. Though Christians don't follow the Jewish calendar, we should heed the essence of Sabbath: God is our provider and knows we require rest. Sabbath, as Jesus taught, is a gift (Mark 2:27).

Clay: God is omnipresent, humanity is not. God is Spirit (John 4:24); man is clay (Genesis 2:7). We cannot be everywhere at once, are vulnerable to the elements, bound by time, and susceptible to decay (2 Corinthians 4:16). We're breakable.

The Trees: God is life-giver and omniscient, humanity is not. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil represent man's *dependence* (2:9). We are not the source of life and wisdom (Job 28:20-21) but rely on God to bestow them. And our receiving of these gifts requires adhering to boundaries He sets (2:17).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. In today's technological age, what gets in the way of rest?



2. How do you experience finitude and limits? Do you kick against them? What might God be saying to you in these areas—how might these limitations be leveraged for a deeper relationship with Jesus?

3. How might you set aside time this week as holy to God?

4. God forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What might this indicate about human limitations and our *dependency* on God for wisdom? How is Google like the Tree of Knowledge?

“[W]e must rediscover that being *dependent* creatures is a constructive gift, not a deficiency.... Our dependency does not merely point to abstract ideas of divine providence, but takes concrete form when we rely on others, on the earth, on institutions and traditions. We must learn the value and truthfulness of our finitude, eventually getting to the point where we *might even praise God for our limits.*”

Kelly Kopic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News*



NOTES



PRAYER

O God Most High, Most Glorious, the thought of thine infinite serenity cheers me, for I am toiling and moiling, troubled and distressed, but thou art for ever at perfect peace. Thy designs cause thee no fear or care of unfulfillment, they stand fast as the eternal hills. Thy power knows no bond, thy goodness no stint. Thou bringest order out of confusion, and my defeats are thy victories: The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. I come to thee as a sinner with cares and sorrows, to leave every concern entirely to thee, every sin calling for Christ's precious blood; Revive deep spirituality in my heart; Let me live near to the great Shepherd, hear his voice, know its tones, follow its calls. Keep me from deception by causing me to abide in the truth, from harm by helping me to walk in the power of the Spirit.... Thy presence alone can make me holy, devout, strong and happy. Abide in me gracious God.



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SIN AND SHAME

Genesis 2:25-3:8; Revelation 19:4-8



We live in a world experiencing the profound consequences of sin, yet we're increasingly ignorant about what sin is. Genesis 3 dramatically sheds light not only upon sin's ancient beginnings, but it tells us something of sin's schemes and consequences.

Sin is cunning. It deceives. "Did God *actually* say..." (3:1)? It distorts. "You will not *surely* die" (3:4)—a half-truth, for spiritual, not physical, death immediately follows sin. It twists desire. Eve "saw the tree was good...a delight to the eyes...*desirable* to make wise" (3:6). Only now does sin come to fruition as action. They "took and ate" (3:6).

Sin is more than breaking a rule. Sin is betrayal and the forfeiture of human destiny. Humanity says to the God who would father them with life and wisdom (Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge), "we know better." They discharge their duty to "keep and guard" Eden by usurping the King's authority and welcoming evil into the Garden.

Before God says a word (3:8ff.), conscience awakens. To question God's commands is to invite God's evaluation. To break His law is to come under His judgment. Now, without the clothing of obedience and purity, man cannot bear the light. Sin. Shame. Hiding (3:7).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. If you were to ask your peers at school or work to define “sin”, what might they say? How would you define “sin”?



2. Genesis 3 reveals that sin is cunning and deceptive. What are some ways sin is deceiving people in our culture? In the church? In you?

3. People speak of “shame and honor” cultures. How would you define “shame?” How does shame play a factor in American culture? How do people deal with shame?

4. Read Revelation 19:4-8. These verses portray our salvation in Christ as being clothed in white robes of righteousness—humans fully in the light, fully accepted, and even being honored. Hebrews 12:2 says Christ “endured the cross, despising the shame.” How does Christ deal with our shame and replace it with honor?

5. Personal question: Where, or what, are you hiding? Can you bring this into the light before God?

“What do we know of sin? Geologists teach us that the very ground which seems so solid is in reality only a thin film over an ocean of liquid fire, forever trembling like the skin on milk about to boil.... How far down would one need to dig to rediscover the blue depths?”

Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*



NOTES



PRAYER

Merciful Lord, pardon all my sins of this day, week, year, all the sins of my life, sins of early, middle, and advanced years, of omission and commission, of morose, peevish and angry tempers, of lip, life, and walk, of hard-heartedness, unbelief, presumption, pride, of unfaithfulness of the souls of men, of want of bold decision in the cause of Christ, of deficiency in outspoken zeal for his glory, of bringing dishonor upon thy great name, of deception, injustice, untruthfulness in my dealings with others, of impurity in thought, word and deed, of covetousness, which is idolatry, of substance unduly hoarded, improvidently squandered, not consecrated to the glory of thee, the great Giver; sins in private and in the family, in study and recreation, in the busy haunts of men, in the study of thy Word and in the neglect of it, in prayer irreverently offered and coldly withheld, in time misspent, in yielding to Satan's wiles, in opening my heart to his temptations, in being unwatchful when I know him nigh, in quenching the Holy Spirit; sins against light and knowledge, against conscience and the restraints of thy Spirit, against the law of eternal love. Pardon all my sins, known and unknown, felt and unfelt, confessed and not confessed, remembered or forgotten. Good Lord, hear; and hearing, forgive.



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

Ask if anyone in the group needs help with something in the week ahead. Meeting practical needs is one way we love each other.

SIN AND EXILE

Genesis 3:8-24; Romans 5:1-11



Eden was home. As with healthy homes, its glow came from intimate relationships. “God walked in the garden in the cool of the day” (3:8), perhaps recalling daily fellowship between Him and His creatures. Adam and Eve “were naked and unashamed” (2:25), utterly safe and known before one other and God. As to sustenance, the fruit of every tree—save one (2:17)—meant daily feasting (2:16). As for work, in Eden, it sang like a craftsman cultivating art (2:15).

When sin enters Eden and God pronounces judgment (3:9-19), we tremble before the revelation of another consequence: alienation and exile.

The relationships that made Eden home are torn asunder: humanity at odds with creatures (3:14-15); woman at odds with man (3:16); man at odds with earth (3:17-18); humanity at odds with their Maker (3:22-24). And in their vocational identities—Eve the “mother of life” (3:20) and Adam the “worker of the ground” (2:15)—humanity will now know pain, toil, and the futility of death: “you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (3:19).

Life east of Eden, despite all the beauty of the created world, is marked by a profound sense of alienation and exile—we are never quite at home. It is no wonder the Good News includes Jesus “preparing a new home for us” (John 14:2-3), and the Bible culminates with God again making His home with man (Revelation 21:3).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. Read Genesis 3:9-12. How do Adam and Eve deal with their guilt? What does this tell us about our typical inclinations to equivocate, make excuses, and pass the buck?
2. Sin leads to exile—deep alienation between humanity and God, and between one another. Where do you see exile and alienation in the world today? Can you see how it issues from our sin?
3. The opposite of sin is being at home with God—in such intimate fellowship that we don't need to hide. Read Romans 5:1-11. In your relationship with Christ, in what ways do you feel more at home with God?

“The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home.”

Augustine



NOTES



PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

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SIN AND BONDAGE

Genesis 4:1-7; John 8:31-36



Genesis chapters three and four introduce us to sin with vivid portrayals—sin in real-time, deceiving, infecting, lying-in-wait.

As Cain’s anger boils, God cautions of the power of sin: “sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you” (4:7, NIV). Like a lion on the hunt, sin is stealthy, powerful, and hungry. But you “must rule over it” (4:7). There seems to be a narrow moment when Cain could have rejected his rising anger and admitted his sacrifice wasn’t heartfelt (Heb 11:4). But to indulge his ire was to invite sin’s overpowering attack.

Jesus warns, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Can we not relate? Nurse resentment, justify greed, indulge lust, and soon a bonfire of vanities consumes. Only submission to Christ frees us from slavery to sin (John 8:36).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. Read Genesis 4:3-5 and Hebrews 11:4. Why was Cain's sacrifice not accepted? In what ways might our own acts of worship be displeasing to God?



2. Cain's anger stems from jealousy that his brother's sacrifice was more acceptable in God's eyes. What causes you to envy? Have you ever resented God because He seemed to favor or bless someone more than you?
3. If sin is like a preying lion (4:7), what are areas of your life it might be lying in wait? Can you identify two areas you need to resist sin?
4. Jesus frees us from sin's penalty (death) and power (enslavement). But we often still experience sin as overpowering (Jesus says, "in this world you will have trouble" John 6:33). What are some ways Christians can help each other live into the freedom they have in Christ?

"He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly."

William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Iago (of Cassio)

"Master, I am in great distress! The spirits that I conjured up I cannot now get rid of."

Goethe, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*



NOTES



PRAYER

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

Ask if anyone in the group needs help with something in the week ahead. Meeting practical needs is one way we love each other.

SIN AND GUILT

Genesis 4:8-16; Colossians 1:9-14



Sin is cunning and enslaving, and its consequences include shame and alienation—the disintegration of relationships between man and God. However, the most pernicious problem with sin is that we commit it, and in doing so we incur *guilt* before God.

As He did when Adam and Eve sinned, God initially responds to Cain’s sin with a question, “Where is Abel your brother? What have you done” (4:9, 10)? The questions aren’t for God’s sake—as though He’s ignorant. God is pressing on a bruise; His questions intensify a sensation that Cain already feels: *guilt*. Guilt not only before man but before God.

We’d expect that the less that people believe in God the less they experience guilt over wrongdoing. Paradoxically, we’re witnessing, as one writer notes, “the strange persistence of guilt as a psychological force in modern life.”¹ Whether from systemic evils or personal failures, people feel more than upset, they feel guilty—and have no idea what to do about it.

Guilt is intuitive—it knows righteousness is real and convicts us when the scales of justice are off-balance. With our own guilt, denial or blame-shifting don’t unburden. Only the atoning sacrifice of Christ, true repentance, and divine forgiveness will do. This is why the early Christians loved so dearly Isaiah’s prophecies about Jesus:

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt.... By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:10-11).

Wilfred M. McClay, “The Strange Persistence of Guilt.” *The Hedgehog Review*. Vol 19.1 (2017).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. What are some ways you perceive guilt operating in our culture today? How do people deal with their guilt?



2. Is there a way to remove the guilt of humanity's sins, and uphold standards of justice and just retribution, without the Cross of Christ?

“By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God’s sight all such are murder.”

The Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 106



NOTES



PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

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THE ARK AND THE FLOOD

Genesis 6:1-8:22



The wickedness of modern man terrifies. Slave ships. Concentration camps. Ethnic cleansings. But it's hard to imagine living amid the pre-flood generation described in Genesis: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). Violence and sexual assault fill the earth (6:2, 11) and every intention of men's hearts is *always* evil. The home that creation was to be has become a torture chamber, and it grieves God deeply (6:6).

Modern readers struggle with God's judgment of the world by the flood. Isn't this unjust? But the text stresses the opposite: God's judgment upon evil and violence reveal that He is just. Righteous wrath is what holiness looks like when confronting the horrors of evil.

What does surprise in the flood account is yet another sign of *grace amid judgment*: God clothed Adam and Eve (3:21), protected Cain (4:15), and now, through Noah, preserves life and promises never to blot it out in this way again (8:21).

The flood prefigures the final judgment, something Jesus warns His disciples about (Matthew 25:31-33). Christians also know the ark prefigures Christ, who saves from that judgment (1 Peter 3:20-21). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). As Noah was carried through judgment in the ark, Christians pass through judgment in Christ.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. Do you feel God has a right to judge the world He's created? Why or why not?



2. Read the description of Noah in Genesis 6:9 where he is referred to as a "*righteous man*." This is the first use of that term in the Bible. How would you define it?

3. Despite his righteousness, Noah still proves to be sinful (Genesis 9:20). Noah came out of the Ark alive, but his heart was not made new. How is salvation in Christ different than Noah's salvation in the Ark?

"When the apostles preached, they could assume even in their Pagan hearers a real consciousness of deserving the Divine anger... It was against this background that the Gospel appeared as good news. It brought news of possible healing to men who knew that they were mortally ill. But all this has changed. Christianity now has to preach the diagnosis – in itself very bad news – before it can win a hearing for the cure."

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*



NOTES



PRAYER

O Lord of the oceans, My little bark sails on a restless sea, Grant that Jesus may sit at the helm and steer me safely; Suffer no adverse currents to divert my heavenward course; Let not my faith be wrecked amid storms and shoals; Bring me to harbour with flying pennants, hull unbreached, cargo unspoiled... I venture on thee wholly, fully, my wind, sunshine, anchor, defense. The voyage is long, the wave high, the storms pitiless, but my helm is held steady, thy Word secures safe passage, thy grace wafts me onward, my haven is guaranteed.



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

Ask if anyone in the group needs help with something in the week ahead. Meeting practical needs is one way we love each other.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Genesis 9:1-17



When Noah and his family stand again on dry land and receive God’s commission to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 8:18; 9:1), God is giving humanity a second chance, a new beginning. Three things will be crucial to this fresh start.

Justice: Unchecked by law and ruled by sin, human beings devolve into violence (6:5). Now, God puts into place a cornerstone for civility: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (9:6). Human laws and rights depend, ultimately, on God. And although we cannot banish evil in our own power, a legal system derived from God’s character and authority will, even in a fallen world, mitigate evil’s effects.

Covenant: God establishes a covenant with Noah, his offspring, and the earth (9:9-17), guaranteeing all parties that “never again” (9:11) will waters destroy all life. Noah and his descendants need this hope—for while the Ark preserved Noah’s life, it did not transform his sinful heart (9:21). Whereas the Noahic covenant *preserves* life, humans will ultimately need the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood, which *redeems* life (Matthew 26:28).

Worship: Noah is a righteous man who begins post-flood life with an offering to God (8:20). Nothing has changed regarding humankind’s fundamental purpose or needs: we are made to worship with and walk before God.

In the Noahic covenant, God preserves the natural order and societal order from once again devolving into diluvian chaos—however, He does not yet fix the human heart.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. According to Genesis 9:6, how humans treat one another depends on a principle of human nature—we are created in God’s image. Upon what principles do modern ideas of justice and morality depend? A random sense of right and wrong? Inarticulate assumption about human worth? Are these principles sufficient for governing human life?
2. Despite the awareness that humans are still sinful (Read 8:21), God makes a covenant with all people (“I establish with you and your offspring after you” 9:8 = all people). How does the universal and enduring scope of this covenant impact how we care about and work for the common good of all people?
3. There is no promise in the covenant with Noah to forgive sin or redeem sinners. How is the covenant that Jesus makes different than the covenant with Noah? Why does Jesus refer to His covenant as “the new covenant in blood”? Read Luke 22:14-22.

“Civil law aims to influence the conduct of human beings, an enterprise that requires an understanding of anthropology. Who are these creatures the law seeks to regulate? Why do humans create problems for their neighbors, rather than live in peaceful cooperation? Genesis offers an understanding of human identity, one that highlights the need for civil government but that also suggests moral and prudential limits on the exercise of coercion by the civil authorities.”

Randy Beck and David VanDrunen “The Biblical Foundations of Law,” in *The Law and the Bible: Justice, Mercy and Legal Institutions*



NOTES



PRAYER

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace to contend fearlessly against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and help us to use our freedom rightly in the establishment of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Genesis 11:1-9



The word “Babel” (11:9) means “to jumble or confuse,” and it functions here as a pun. Ancient Babylon boasted that it was the greatest city in the world. It had a tower (a Ziggurat) named “the house of the foundation of heaven and earth.” And the city’s name, in its native tongue, *Bāb-ilim*, meant “gate of god.” Mighty *Bāb-ilim* will become a pathetic *Babel*, a diluted mess of confusion.

The builders of Babel are in outright rebellion. God commanded humans to disperse and fill the earth (1:28; 9:1), but they settle (11:4). They don’t wait on God; they assault heaven (11:4). Created to glorify God’s name, these brickmakers boast, “let’s make a name for ourselves” (11:4).

God is not opposed to building cities. He’s opposed to hubris and horror. A city built around distorted human loves becomes a den of iniquity—especially that subtle yet deadly deceit, godless “success.” Babel represents the ongoing human delusion that we can attain true life—joy, meaning, immortality—by ourselves.

God disperses the people and confuses their tongues as a grace. He will then call Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans (ancient Mesopotamia—*Babylon!*) to begin a careful process of building another city—the New Jerusalem. This city, however, will be built to make a name, not for man, but for The Son of Man (Revelation 21:1-4).

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION



1. The builders of Babel seek a “name for themselves”—they fear being nobodies. In your life are you more concerned with your name (reputation) or God’s name? Could you be “a nobody” for God?
2. Where in modern culture might humankind be building “towers of Babel?”
3. God unites people from different nations in His church (Acts 2). How does the church build community differently than the world?

“Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God.”

Augustine, *City of God*

“The desire for fame tempts even noble minds.”

Augustine, *City of God*



NOTES



PRAYER

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



BEFORE CLOSING THE MEETING

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CLOSING REFLECTION



Augustine once wrote, “I do not know what ages passed before the human race was created, yet I have no doubt that no created thing is co-eternal with the Creator.” The bishop’s inclinations are right: the opening chapters of Genesis don’t quibble with questions of science; they reveal mysteries about life.

Where did all this life—this existence—come from? God, who exists eternally and is before all things, created everything.

Who are we? God’s man or God’s woman, created by Him, for Him, in order to be like Him. True life can only happen in dependent relationship upon God.

Why are we? We exist to glorify God by cultivating His creation and shining forth His character. To live for self rather than God is to not live at all.

What happened to us? We more than lack education, medicine, justice, and equal opportunity. We lack the spiritual ability to love God and neighbor. We are sinful sinners. Millenia of so-called progress and the promises of enlightenment still find humankind in a world of sin and death. We are creatures to whom something happened. We cannot rid ourselves or our world of evil.

What hope do we have? From Adam and Eve to Cain, to the generations of Noah, to Babel, humans have only one hope: God. More specifically, God’s grace. Despite our rebellion and violence, He will clothe, cover, bear up, and one day, through His Son, utterly restore.

These are questions we all must ponder. They are questions modernity cannot sufficiently answer. They are questions that draw us to the hope we have in God our Creator, who is God our Redeemer.

Reflect on this section with this question: How do *you* answer these foundational questions? Has studying Genesis 1-11 changed the way you answer them?



NOTES

The background of the entire page is a dynamic, abstract composition. It features a dense array of diagonal lines in various shades of orange and red, ranging from light, translucent tones to deep, vibrant reds. These lines originate from the top right and fan out towards the bottom left, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are set against a background of horizontal, slightly wavy blue lines that are more subtle and less prominent than the orange/red lines. The overall effect is modern and energetic.

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