



Bible Studies and Lessons

For Adults and Children

Studies for Adults

A Satisfied Creation

The call of creation resonates throughout Scripture for any with ears to hear and eyes to see. From the beginning of Genesis, the first words used to describe God are those of creation. Before we know anything else about God, we know God as Creator. From this knowledge of God, we come to know ourselves as created beings. The Bible portrays humanity as the pinnacle of an entire created order to which we are inextricably linked. And yet, it is all too easy to read Scripture with an eye solely for human affairs. It is when we read the Bible with a full appreciation for the significance it assigns to creation that we discover a richer, more complete account of the creative, sustaining and redemptive work of God in the world.

A great way to begin exploring what the Bible has to say about creation and our responsibility to it is by reading through the Psalms. Notice the number of times God's role as Creator is evoked. How does the Psalmist speak of nature and humanity's relationship to it? Below is a Bible study based on Psalm 104 that can be used to begin a discussion on creation care in your church.

Text: Psalm 104

Highlighted Verses: *You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth (vv. 10-14).*

Main Themes:

Emphasize God's role as Creator

Creation is ordered and every creature's needs are provided for

Humans are one part of an entire created order

Creation should be protected and preserved

Verses 1-9: The Psalm begins with a recitation of the original creative acts of God – stretching out the heavens, forming the earth, setting the boundaries for the sea (vv.

2-9). God's sovereignty above all others is affirmed through the description of the great forces of nature, including the wind and water, that are subject to God.

Questions for discussion:

What is the possible significance of the Psalmist beginning by recounting God's original act of creation?

What attributes of God stand out to you from these first 9 verses?

What are the implications of God's role as Creator?

Is there any part of the earth that is not under God's sovereignty?

Verses 10-23: These verses describe an ordered world in which the needs of creatures are provided for and patterns of life are set out. The word for 'use' in v14 can also mean cultivate. Humans are meant to care for and tend to the land. It is important to note that they play one of many roles in the order of creation. A majority of the verses in this Psalm are not focused on humanity, but other animals and plants. Throughout these verses it is God who provides for God's creation in abundance so that all the earth is satisfied.

Questions for discussion:

According to the Psalm, is creation a onetime event for God or something God continues to participate in?

What does it mean for us that God continues to be involved in creation?

How does the Psalmist depict humans and their role?

Does this Psalm suggest any kind of dependency between living beings?

Does this Psalm suggest that God views any part of creation as unimportant or without value?

Does this depiction of creation suggest there are boundaries to creation? Are these boundaries appropriate? Inappropriate? Beneficial? Harmful?

Verses 24-35: In the following verses the Psalmist praises God for the wonder of creation. God is shown to be the one who sustains the world by providing all God's creatures with food and good things, each in their own season. Verse 35 is not only a condemnation of sinners, but expresses the idea that the presence of sin could prevent God from continuing to bestow the good gifts of creation (see Jer. 5:23-26).

Questions for discussion:

How often do we view the earth as a glorious gift from God?

Does this gift come with any responsibilities?

Who ultimately has ownership over the earth, us or God?

What does the concept of stewardship imply?

What does the exclamation “May the glory of the Lord endure forever” (v31) mean? Is creation the glory of the Lord?

Do our current policies and practices show proper appreciation to God for creation?

Is failure to care for creation a sin?

God's Gift of Daily Bread:
Remembering that Enough is Enough

Text: Exodus 15 and 16

Main Themes:

God is the source of all we need to survive

God provides for us according to our needs, not for us to take in excess

Taking more than we need of the resources available to us is a failure to trust God

Take a moment to remember the Exodus story. Ask the group to collectively retell the story.

The Israelites had been living in Egypt, where the Pharaoh had made them slaves. Moses and his brother Aaron had demanded that the Pharaoh let the Israelites go, but he had refused. To convince Pharaoh, God sent ten plagues. The Israelites were set free after the tenth plague when the first born of every Egyptian family died. The Israelites fled Egypt but the Pharaoh questioned his decision and chased after them. They escaped when Moses parted the Red Sea and the Egyptians were drowned in the sea. As soon as they finish celebrating God's goodness in delivering them from their captors (see the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15:1-21), the journey into the wilderness begins.

Reflect on the how you might feel if you and your family found yourselves in the midst of a great wilderness (you might remember camping trips) with hundreds of other families and very little camping equipment, food, or clean water.

Within three days of entering the wilderness, the Israelites begin to complain. In Exodus 15:23-25, the people complain that the water is too bitter to drink, and the Lord meets their needs by giving Moses a way to make the water sweet and drinkable.

Anticipating that this will not be the last time that the Israelites will complain, God makes a deal with the Israelites in Exodus 15:25-26. God "puts them to the test," telling the Israelites that they must "listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes." If they do this, God promises "I will not bring upon you any of the

diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you.” God’s requirements are made clear. The Israelites must listen carefully to God’s instructions and commandments. Likewise, the benefits of doing so are quite clear. Life in abundance belongs to those who obey God.

You have been camping in the wilderness for over a week now. The excitement of the adventure is beginning to wear off. You realize that this is not a vacation, but a new way of life. What anxieties would you feel?

Just a few verses later, as expected, the Israelites are back to complaining (Exodus 16:2-3). They have not yet learned to trust that God will provide what they need if only they will remain faithful. These complaints, these endless worries about where their next meal will come from, sound all too familiar. They are understandably nervous about their fragile situation, but God wants them to *turn their focus away from worrying and toward obedience.*

In Exodus 16:4-5, God lays out a plan for meeting the needs of the Israelites. In verses 6-12, the message is delivered to the Israelites, reassuring them that God has heard their complaints and will meet their needs, day by day. In verses 13-19 demonstrates God’s faithfulness and wisdom. Each person has what they need, with no one having excess and no one facing a shortage. God designed the gift of manna in this way, so that all would have enough and no more. Trusting in God’s promise to provide them with *daily* bread, no one needed to possess more than a day’s supply.

Wow. What a relief to have bread. But there was only just enough today. Who knows if there will be enough tomorrow? Perhaps it would be prudent to save a little to the side for an emergency. While everyone else is resting on the Sabbath, I will go and gather a little extra. I will give my children an extra serving, to see the smiles on their faces and pad their bellies in case times get tough again. In what ways do you take more than you need from God’s bounty?

Unfortunately, some of the Israelites did not trust God’s promise nor take seriously God’s commands. They thought that they would be wise to save some of the manna for the next day in case there was not more to be gathered. But their wisdom was foolishness. God kept the promise of daily bread, and the manna they had foolishly saved “bred worms and became foul” (Ex.16:20). Likewise, on the seventh day, some of the Israelites desired more manna than that which God had already provided, so

they went out to gather more, despite Moses' instruction that they were not to gather on the seventh day, the day of rest. Their greed, their desire for more-than-enough, led them to disobey God's commands.

But eventually, the people did learn. They learned how to be obedient and trust in God's daily provisions. For forty years, then, the Israelites lived on manna, the bread of heaven. Their ability to survive from day to day was entirely dependent on God, on the promise that each sunrise would bring enough manna for the day to come. The Israelites understood where their food came from. Their relationship with God and their daily bread were one and the same. They must have been distinctly aware of their own fragility and dependence, but also distinctly aware of God's faithfulness and glory.

Exodus 16:10 is the first time in the Bible when the people *actually* see the glory of the Lord. What does it mean that the glory of God first appears when God tells the people that they are to trust the Lord to provide food? Does it seem strange to you that the first time God appears in glory, it is to talk about meat and bread?

The Israelites did eventually settle in a new land. They no longer relied on manna, but grew crops and raised animals. The relationship between obedience to God and having enough to eat remained strong. New commandments were given to the Israelites to fit their new circumstances. They were commanded to till the land for only six years and to let the land rest in the seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7). The law required that they not harvest the corners of their fields, but instead leave this part for the poor and for travelers who would be allowed to glean food from these places to sustain them on their journey (Leviticus 19:9-10). In this way, God continued to provide enough food for everyone.

Closing discussion questions:

Where does your food come from? Do you know? How could you find out?

Do you wake up in the morning and look outside to see if the Lord has once again blessed you with enough to eat? How would that change your attitude toward waking up each morning?

Do you know if the crop was good this year? Do you know where your food was harvested?

What is your relationship to the food you eat? How is God a part of that relationship?

Take-Home Activity:

Plant some herbs in your backyard or in a windowsill. Create a family ritual of waking up each morning and checking on the progress of your plants. Say a simple prayer together. Use this one or write one of your own.

Creator God, Thank you for the blessing of daily bread. Enough is enough. Amen.

Commit as a family to only seasoning your food with these herbs, so that you can taste God's blessing in every meal and learn to be a part of the ebbs and flows of God's creation.

You could also commit to a day or a week when you keep track of where all your food came from. Not the name of the grocery store, but the location of the farm where the food was grown or the animal was raised. It may be difficult at first, but will be a fun family activity. Farmer's markets are a great Saturday morning family activity that will help you stay connected to the miraculous provision of daily bread. To find a local farmer's market, go to <http://www.localharvest.org/>

Sabbath for the Land

Some passages of Scripture are difficult to engage; they can convict the reader with truths that seem unfair or harsh and they can even portray God as having problematic characteristics that do not correspond with the attributes of justice, mercy, and love. People of faith have a duty not to retreat from these passages, but to wrestle with them, praying for discernment and that God may add to our understanding of what these passages are communicating and how they can inform our lives. Often we will come away from the text with more questions than we do answers. We must learn to allow these questions to instruct us and help us grow in faith, trusting that God holds every answer we need.

When it comes to creation care, it is important to understand the glory of God's creation, the remarkable gift we have been entrusted with, and the responsibility we have to be good stewards of the earth. Scripture contains numerous affirmations of the goodness of creation and what humanity's proper relationship to the earth should be. The Bible also contains strong warnings about the consequences endured by God's people when they ignore their responsibility to God and abuse the land.

Leviticus 26 is a passage that affirms God's sustaining relationship with humanity through creation, but also convicts those who neglect God's commands. The curses contained in this chapter are troubling, both in their portrayal of God, and also how aptly they apply to our current global environment. Readers are directly confronted with the questions of God's agency in disasters. Is God the cause of tragic events that are meant to serve as punishment, or are tragic events the natural result of humanity disobeying God's commands? When the Bible speaks of humanity experiencing God's wrath, is it because God is acting out of vengeance and anger, or do we perceive those attributes because we have removed ourselves from the goodness and blessing of God by choosing to follow our own paths and not God's? As the world is ravaged by natural disasters, diseases, food scarcity, all of which can be linked to climate change, these are extremely difficult questions that must be grappled with. In the end, however, Leviticus 26 does not conclude with a word of judgment, but redemption. As much as disobedience and sin are part of the Biblical account, so too are healing and restoration. Those two threads are integral to understanding humanity's relationship with God and they must not be separated.

Below are some questions to help guide you through a discussion on Leviticus 26.

Text: Leviticus 26

Main Themes:

Humanity's relationship with God is intimately connected to the land

Being good stewards of the earth is one of the commands given to us by God

The consequences for humanity's disobedience to God are born out through the land

Repentance and obedience lead to healing and restoration

Verses 1-13: The chapter opens with a recitation of the good works of God and a description of humanity's intended relationship with God.

Questions:

- How is the relationship between God, humanity and creation depicted?
- What does it mean that the fruitfulness of the land is tied to following God's statutes and commands?
- Is there any significance to the fact that God's promise to provide rains and food is followed by an assurance of peace in the land?

Verses 14- 39: The list of penalties for disobeying God's commands raise the difficult questions about God's justice and character discussed in the introduction. Current economic and political climates should also be held in mind. Consider that the U.S. is borrowing money from China to buy oil from the Middle East to burn in ways that are destroying our environment. Consider also that droughts and flooding are creating millions of climate refugees, forcing populations to compete for dwindling agricultural resources and creating destabilized regions where terrorism can thrive. Lastly, consider that the spread of diseases such as malaria is on the rise globally in part because of changing environmental conditions. Keep these modern day issues in mind as you discuss the following.

Questions:

- Do we spurn God's statutes and abhor God's ordinances when we do not properly care for creation? Read Gen 2:15, Lev. 19: 9-11, 25: 24, Micha 6:8
- What does it say to us that in the midst of all the destruction that will befall humanity for its disobedience, God notes that the land will have its Sabbath?
- Does this passage connect punishment with how we treat the land?
- Do any of these punishments resonate with current global issues?
- Given what we know about the interconnected nature of climate change, poverty, disease, political destabilization etc, is it possible to view these punishments less as God's vengeance and more as an inevitable result of living outside of the relationship with creation that we were commanded to have?
- What do these verses reveal about the nature of God and human disobedience?

Verses 40-46: Redemption is possible. God will not forsake God's people or abandon them to punishment forever, but repentance is necessary.

Questions:

- Is restoration possible? What must humanity do?
- What does repentance look like in terms of our relationship to creation?
- Does a right relationship with creation put us back in right relationship with God?

Lessons for Children

Manna From Heaven

Text: Exodus 16:1-31

Highlighted Verse: *Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day."*

Main Themes:

God provides for our needs and the food we eat

We should only take what we need from the gifts God gives us

Lesson: Exodus 16:1-31 - Look for a Children's Bible paraphrase of this story.

After reading, ask a few basic questions to make sure they understood the story.

Activity:

Have children sit in circle. Tell them to imagine they are the Israelites. They are hungry and complaining. God comes in a cloud and tells them that they will have food in the morning. They close their eyes and go to sleep, excited to see what they will wake up to. Make sure everyone's eyes are closed and then place bananas in the center of the circle, one for each child (or cut them in half, leaving the peel on, and each child get a half). Then tell them to wake up and gather the food that God has given them.

Most likely, one child will take more than one banana, leaving another child without a banana. This is a good opportunity to remind them that God provides enough for each person to have some, but not enough that anyone can be greedy and take more than they need.

Discussion Questions:

What kind of food did God bring you?

God wants you to know where this food came from, so that you remember how blessed you are to have it. Where did this banana come from?

There will probably be some confusion about how to answer this question. You should explain that the manna that God gave the Israelites came from God, but that our food doesn't just appear that way anymore. Someone grew these bananas. Where did they grow? You will need to know this

question, so pay attention when you buy the bananas so that you have a good answer. It will likely be a South American country. Point out that the bananas have traveled a long way to get to us.

Activity:

Do the circle activity again, but this time, have the children wake up to a pile of french fries.

Again, ask the same questions:

What kind of food did God bring you?

God wants you to know where this food came from, so that you remember how blessed you are to have it. Where did this french fry come from?

Does it come from a plant?

Where does the plant grow? In a tree? In the ground? In what state or country?

Activity:

Do the circle activity again, but this time, the children wake up to a pile of cheese pizza. (You can cut bite-sized pieces.)

Again, ask the same questions:

What kind of food did God bring you?

God wants you to know where this food came from, so that you remember how blessed you are to have it. Where did this pizza come from?

Does pizza grow on trees? Does it sprout up from the ground?

What are the parts inside the pizza? (crust, sauce, cheese)

Where does the crust come from? (wheat grows in fields and is ground into flour)

Where does the sauce come from? (tomatoes grow on plants and are cooked and smashed to make sauce)

Where does the cheese come from? (cheese comes from milk which comes from cows. And cows eat grass!)

God didn't want the Israelites to be hungry and not have food. But that doesn't mean that God said they could eat as much as they wanted. Throughout the Bible, God and Jesus make sure that people have food to eat, but they also warn about taking more than we need. How can we make sure that we don't run out of food and that we don't disobey God?

In this story in Exodus, we learned that we should always know where our food comes from. We should try to eat the food that God made for us, instead of eating food that God made for someone else.

Let's pray:

God, thank you for creating bananas and potatoes and wheat and tomatoes and all the other foods we eat. Help us to remember how blessed we are to have food. Amen.

When you go home, ask your parents to help you figure out where the food in your house came from.

To Till and Keep

Text: Genesis 2:15-21

Highlighted Verse: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (v 15).*

Main Themes:

God created the world and everything in it
We are supposed to care for God's creation

Introduction:

Begin by reviewing the story of creation with your class, briefly sketching the seven days of creation. If the class is old enough this can be done as a group quiz to see if they can name what happened on each day. For younger children visual representations could be helpful (i.e. a picture of the sun and moon etc). Remind the children of what God thought at the end of each day – creation was pronounced good. Explain that God created the whole world and everything in it and cares very much about all of creation.

Lesson:

Read Gen. 2:15-21 with the class. Explain that after God created the world, God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to care for the earth and the animals. Again, depending upon the age group, visual depictions of animals, Adam and Eve, and a garden could be helpful. Ask the children if they know of any ways they can help take care of the earth. Explain the ideas of reduce, reuse, recycle and why they are important. Use props (ex. an old spaghetti sauce jar that can be used to hold screws or nails; a newspaper and soda can that can be recycled). Talk about how they can save water and energy by turning off running water and lights when they're not using them, such as when they are brushing their teeth or when they leave a room. Show them an energy efficient light bulb and explain how it can be used to save energy. If your church does anything to promote creation care (recycle bulletins, use energy saver appliances, have recycling bins) explain those actions to the children. Invite them to

use their imaginations to come up with ways they can help protect God's good creation.

Activity:

Plant seeds that the children can care for and watch grow.

Materials:

- Soil
- A place to plant: individual pots, a large planter, or perhaps there is a good place on the church property to have a small garden or flower bed
- Seeds: *Consult a local gardener or florist to help you evaluate important factors such as whether the plants will grow primarily indoors or outdoors, what will grow best during the time of year you do this lesson, the amount of care the plant will need, and how long they will take to grow in order to make the best choice for your class.* Some suggestions: many herbs, such as basil, and beans sprout quickly and are easy to care for. Good flowers include certain varieties of sunflowers, borage, and cosmos.
- Water

Have the children plant seeds so they can practice caring for part of God's creation. Individual plants could be sent home with each child with instructions on how to care for it. It may be more fun and instructive, however, if this is a class project the children can return to every week and that they can watch grow together (in this case it would be especially important to know what, if any, care the plant would need on more than a once a week basis). If the chosen plant is an herb, vegetable or fruit you can explain how God cares for us by providing food for us to eat and we are supposed to care for other creatures and plants. You can even write Gen 2:15 on the side of the pots or planter as a reminder of this lesson.

Alternate Activity:

Have the children draw pictures of God's good creation and ways they can care for it. Older children can look through magazines and cut out examples of things God made and glue them into a collage.

Materials:

- Crayons

- Markers
- Paper
- Glue
- Magazines
- Scissors