



Faithful GOD

COVENANT People

a Good Soil series for small group study

#1: Made in God's Image: Finding our Purpose

Bible Reading: Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People

This series takes us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**. Our journey leads us from the stories of creation, through the Old Covenant with Israel, to the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, and on to the New Creation. We will explore different covenants and perspectives as we think about our relationships with God, consider what God is calling us to be, and how we should live as Covenant people. Throughout, we will hold in mind certain key aspects of Christian faith: that God is faithful, loving and forgiving. This series is best used in small groups, but can also be helpful for personal study. Each topic may stand alone, but should also be seen as just one part of a much larger biblical story.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

As you prepare to lead this session, think about the setting of the room, the refreshments, and how to lead into the opening time of prayer. Perhaps think about some music to help set the mood. As always, make sure the members of the group know when and where you are meeting, and (in your personal devotions) pray for them: that everyone will find this session helpful as you grow in faith together.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS – before the session

Before the session, take some time to go outside (or even just look out of the window) – in a garden, park, or in the countryside. If you're able, take a walk, or find somewhere to sit and think or pray. *How do you feel as you look at the beauty of nature or the changing seasons? Does it make you feel like giving praise or thanks to God? Do you feel closer to God when you get closer to God's creation?*

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Creator God,
you made this world, and you called it good;
you created every atom, every star and planet, every living cell in every animal and plant;
you have made us and you love us. So, with all creation, we worship you.
Help us, every day, to treat your creation with compassion and respect:
to love all that you love, in all its diversity.
Be with us in this time together, by your Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS

In your group, or in smaller groups of two or three, consider the following questions:

What amazes you about God's creation? What have you seen or studied about nature or science that gives you a sense of awe or wonder? How does thinking about the wonders of creation make you feel?

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

Read together the Bible passage: **Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

Genesis means ‘beginning’ or ‘origin’. It is part of the Hebrew Torah (the Law; the Books of Moses) – the first five books of the Bible. It is a starting point for Jews and Christians in understanding their faith; the opening of the history of God’s people. Genesis to 2 Kings form the first account of this history. These 12 books, collecting together stories from the oral tradition of the people of Israel, were possibly assembled during or after their exile in Babylon (around 500 to 600 years before Christ). It was vital to remember where they had come from and to bring their story up to date (possibly in case there was no one left to continue their traditions). We do not know who wrote these books, but many would say that the author is God – or at least God’s people giving an account of how God has been revealed to them and their ancestors through the centuries – the sacred stories that have been told and cherished for generations – and setting them apart as holy scripture. Genesis has a more ‘mythological’ feel than some of the Old Testament books, but that does not mean it should be discounted as ‘untrue’. God’s truth comes to us in many ways in the Bible: God speaks through myth and parable as much as in history, prophecy and song. Imagine you are a Hebrew child in Babylon, asking the question: “Where do we come from?” The answer is quite majestic.

Our reading is the first of two creation stories. While the second (in chapters 2 & 3) focuses on the *relationship* between God and humankind, the first gives humanity a *purpose* within the whole of creation: to be God’s representatives on earth – to reflect God’s image and likeness. There is no mention yet of a ‘Covenant’, but it is certainly a good starting point, as we seek to explore the purposes of our faithful God.

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

What parts of this reading do you find difficult? Is there anything that had not occurred to you before?

How might we reconcile this description of creation with the theories of modern science? (Can we?)

Do you think people today fully appreciate the world as ‘God’s creation’? What hinders our vision?

We might use the phrase “I’m *only* human” when we make mistakes. And yet, what is human? *What does it mean for you to be made in the image of God? (v. 26). And what powers or abilities does this give us as a collective human race? What can humanity achieve with God’s purposes in mind?*

“In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (v. 27). *What might this suggest about the gender of God? How does the chapter inform our understanding of God as ‘Trinity’?*

The command to have dominion over or to “subdue” the earth (v. 28) has often been used in negative, selfish, or destructive ways. *Was this the intention? How can we work together to restore goodness, to bring order out of chaos, to realise God’s purposes?*

PRAYING TOGETHER

In a time of prayer, as well as bringing to God any people or situations in need of healing, **pray for the environment and the future of our planet.** Pray for the places where there are droughts, famines, or natural disasters. Pray for wisdom and the will to act, that we may work together as one human family for the good of all. You might like to sing or read one of the following **hymns** (all from *Singing the Faith*): *Tell me who made all of creation (118), The day the universe was started (540), Beauty for brokenness (693), It is God who holds the nations... (705), God in his love for us... (727), Touch the earth lightly (729).* Conclude by saying **The Lord’s Prayer** together.

COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE – to think about afterwards

Right from the start, God gave human beings **responsibility** over this planet, but with the understanding that we use that privilege **as people made to reflect God; in God’s image.** *What will you do (or continue doing) in the coming weeks to take some responsibility for the stewardship of our planet, in protecting, planting, or even protesting? How can you encourage others to do likewise?*

Junior Good Soil, issue #1

CREATION: Who made us, and what are we here for?

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is designed for children's and young people's groups in churches. It is aimed at children aged from 7 to 13, but it may also be used with younger or older children. It can be easily adapted for shorter or longer sessions, and you can add your own ideas! We would always value feedback on how it has worked in your group, or how to improve it. Please do contact Andy at geordie_smurf@hotmail.com with your comments.

PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

Today we are starting a journey that goes right through the Bible – it's about God's relationship with us, and how we relate to God. God loves us and wants the best for us. God made us and sent Jesus to us, but how do we know what God wants us to do? And how should we try to live as God's people? We start at the very beginning – with the Bible's story of how the universe came to be: The story of creation.

QUIET TIME – a prayer

Dear God, we thank you that we can be here today;
We thank you that you made us and you love us; You have given us life, and we are precious to you.
Help us never to forget how much you love us. Be with us as we learn and worship you now. **Amen.**

TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... Genesis chapter 1 verse 1, to chapter 2 verse 3.

This is an amazing story! Maybe close your eyes as you listen to it, and imagine everything going on...
Here are some suggestions of suitable versions of the Bible story (choose the best for your group):
Gen 1:1 - 2:3 (New Century Version), **Gen 1:1 - 2:3 (Good News Bible)**, (click on links)
or, for younger groups, you could show **this children's video**: youtube.com/watch?v=teu7BCZTgDs

WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

This very old story was written before we had much scientific knowledge, but it describes in amazing detail how God made EVERYTHING in a sequence of creation! Before, there was nothing, just chaos (a big mess) but God's Spirit moved, and God spoke, and started to put everything in order: creating light, stars, planets, and all kinds of life. Last of all, God made human beings, but we were given a special role: to be like God, to show God's goodness, love and creativity to the world, to look after all creation, and to bring order where there is chaos and confusion. Then God had a rest! And so should we!

LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

Make a giant timeline of Creation as a poster or frieze, using your own artwork or cutting out pictures. God made us to be creative like him. What can you create or invent? Write a poem, make a model, construct something new with Lego, paint a picture. Or talk about how you would make a perfect world. Think about all the ways we can help to look after our world today. What will you do this week?

PRAISE AND WORSHIP – hymns and songs (can be used at the start or end, or whenever!)

Everywhere around me (Singing the Faith **118**) youtube.com/watch?v=F4sVrj-iU0c
Who put the colours in the rainbow? youtube.com/watch?v=UV3xLhapiNM
God made it all! youtube.com/watch?v=d1HEaqFCS8c
He's got the whole world in his hand (Singing the Faith **536**) youtube.com/watch?v=wsW4VT8gfSU