

main course

and god said...

INTRODUCTION

Here are some ways into Genesis chapter 1. Remember that people hold a wide range of differing views on this story. Some of them may not have discussed it before or be prepared for the approaches others hold. Help people to listen to one another respectfully, especially if some of them hold very strong views.

It is best to keep the session short and lively, finishing within the agreed time. Aim for no more than an hour and a half, perhaps including a mid-session drink. Leave people wanting more rather than being worn out. You will find other discussion ideas on the website

AIM

The aims of this session are:

- to explore a familiar biblical passage in a new way
- to think afresh about how we live in God's world
- to take Genesis seriously without taking it literally.

YOU WILL NEED

copies of Genesis 1 to Genesis 2: 3 for everyone – don't worry if people have a variety of Bible versions.

THINK ABOUT MAKING THINGS

Introduce the group to the idea that creating things is part of our nature – something we have an inbuilt desire to do.

Ask them to think of things they have created:

- a meal
- a piece of art work, a garment, some furniture
- a piece of original writing
- a plant they have grown
- a room they have decorated.

Invite them, in twos or threes, to share some of things they each create.

Then ask them to discuss these questions:

- why do they make things?
- how do they feel when something is finished?
- how do they feel about the way people treat things they've made?

READ GENESIS CHAPTER 1

One way of doing this is with four voices. Voice 1 opens and closes the passage, Voice 2 reads about light, Voice 3 about sea and sky and Voice 4 about life on earth.

If you can give the readings out before the group begins the readers will be ready to read

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well and alternate smoothly:

Voice 1 reads Genesis 1.1-2

Voice 2 reads Genesis 1.3-5

Voice 3 reads Genesis 1.6-8

Voice 4 reads Genesis 1.9-13

Voice 2 reads Genesis 1.14-19

Voice 3 reads Genesis 1.20-23

Voice 4 reads Genesis 1.24-31

Voice 1 reads Genesis 2.1-3

After reading the chapter here are three themes you might want to think and talk about. You may decide not to do them all in one session.

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING!

What does it mean to say, as Genesis does, that we are made 'in God's image' (1.27)?

Ask people to talk in their twos or threes about which of the following ideas make most sense to them:

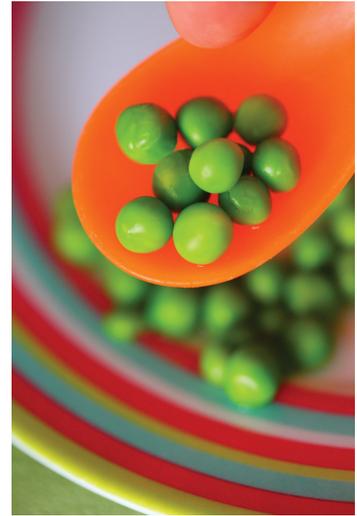
- people look like God does. If God came into creation, God would look like one of us.
- people can think like God can. We can reason, plan, decide, reflect.
- people can know the difference between right and wrong, as God does.
- people can relate to God, just as a glove is in the image of a hand. We are made to belong.
- people represent God on earth, and have a responsibility to be like God
- people can create and care for things, as God does.

With the whole group, ask how these ideas might connect to the idea of 'having dominion', which comes just before and just after the verse about God's image (1.26, 28).

Remind people of the way our culture focuses on 'image' – the brand you buy supposedly tells others the sort of person you are. The church projects an image too, but not always one that welcomes new people with their questions and needs.

Invite people to discuss, in their smaller groups, what sort of image they should be projecting to the world around them, both as individuals and as a local congregation.

Does this image need to change, in the light of what they have read about God in Genesis 1?



Remember that people hold a wide range of differing views on this story. Some of them may not have discussed it before or be prepared for the approaches others hold.

Be aware of people's sensitivities about this passage. Help them to listen to one another respectfully, especially if some of them hold very strong views.

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LITTER, LITERAL OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Describe how some Christians read Genesis 1 literally: the world was created in exactly six days. If science teaches otherwise, they say, something is wrong with science.

Some people think this text is litter – rubbish – because creation took much longer than six days and science proves it.

Ask people to talk in small groups about other ways of looking at this text which neither take it literally nor see it as something worthless, like litter.

Invite people to share their thoughts with the whole group.

HOUSE-KEEPERS FOR GOD

Introduce the idea that the bit of the universe we call Earth is our home.

We hear a lot today about 'the environment'. Is that the best name for it?

Ask people to get into twos or threes to discuss these ideas:

- is there anything in Genesis 1 that might influence our attitude to the planet?
- should our beliefs about creation affect the way we treat the earth?
- how might God feel about what people do with creation?
- how does this relate to our attitude towards the things we have made?
- how does what we have read suggest we should act now, as individuals and as a local church?

Invite people to share their thoughts with the whole group.

WHAT NEXT?

Decide if you would like to do a group action or activity centred on creation, in response to what you have talked about.

Identify what your local church might do today or tomorrow to make a difference where you live.

Close the session with prayer.

EVALUATION

At the end of the session ask people the following questions:

- what did you enjoy or like most about this material?
- what did you find most difficult or challenging?
- what would you like to do next?

