

Leader Guide



Genesis: The Creation of Relationships

Bible Study Sessions
for Christians involved with
God's redemptive efforts
in the world

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Genesis student guides are also available.

Acacia Resources

The biblical witness singles out acacia wood for its uniqueness. The only wood mentioned in the building of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the altar is acacia. Acacia wood is listed with other precious objects—gold, silver, fragrant incense, onyx stones—given to honor God.

The name *acacia* symbolically ties BCE's curriculum initiative to our biblical heritage. The acacia tree represents the wise value attached to the family, the diversity within families and the durability demanded for growing healthy Christians, whether they are singles, couples with children or senior adults.

Today's acacia tree is known for its ...



Value

Some acacia trees have fragrant flowers used in making perfume. The seeds are edible. The bark is rich in tannin, a substance used in tanning, dyes, inks and pharmaceuticals. Furniture, oars, tools and gunstocks are made of the hard lumber from the acacia tree.

Diversity

Some 1,200 species of acacia trees and shrubs exist throughout much of the world, including Africa, Australia and North America.

Durability

The acacia species is tough enough to survive the semiarid regions of Africa where its roots sink deep to capture the rare water which runs quickly into the soil.

Acacia Resources will guide Christians and draw them godward, as the ark of acacia wood guided the people of Israel in their journey and represented the presence of God in their midst.

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Teaching Tips

Leadership Call

Few positions influence others as that of teacher. You are a special person, chosen to teach God's word to God's people. The role of teacher is a powerful one. James even warned that "not many . . . should become teachers" (Jas 3:1). But teaching is the only way God's word will be communicated to people who are struggling to find a star by which to guide their lives.

You have been chosen for that special task. It is difficult, but it is so rewarding. Most of all, you are exercising the gift God has given you to teach. That means that you do not teach on your own. You teach with God blessing you through the Holy Spirit.

Your purpose as a teacher is not to impart information; it is to introduce people to God so the Spirit can work in their lives.

We believe in you, and we welcome you as a significant part of the teaching team. We will give you ideas on how to communicate the truths of the lessons. However, you must take these ideas and shape them for your class.

Leadership Overview

Genesis examines the relationships described in the first book of the Bible. We hope our suggestions will stimulate new ideas in your own mind.

Links to relevant Web sites appear at the end of many lessons. Visit these sites and decide how you will use them. You may use these sites as:

- ◆ an enrichment study for the teacher;
- ◆ a discussion starter;
- ◆ an attention-getter to begin class.

Leadership Weekly Checklist

- ◆ Start early in the week—some teachers start on Sunday afternoon.
- ◆ As you read and meditate on the lesson, think about the members of your class and how the lesson will apply to their lives.
- ◆ Read the Scripture references in several different translations.
- ◆ Look for articles in the paper and on the Web. Listen for current ideas on television or radio. And don't forget your own experiences which may apply to the lesson.
- ◆ Write out your own teaching plan.
- ◆ On Saturday or Sunday morning, pray for each member of the class as you make your final preparation.
- ◆ Ask God for help in making an impact on people you teach.

Leadership Teaching

Begin each class with prayer. Specifically pray for:

- ◆ wisdom;
- ◆ the courage to face biblical truths;
- ◆ commitment to make appropriate changes; and
- ◆ endurance to stay the course of change.

Keep in mind these tips for better group discussion:

- ◆ Enlist members in advance to read Scripture and portions of the lesson.
- ◆ Allow for silence, even though it might be uncomfortable, when you ask questions.
- ◆ Ask open questions that will allow members to share their feelings rather than closed questions that can be answered by short answers such as yes or no. A good way to generate discussion is to ask: "How do you feel about ...?"

Share the Take-home Line at the end of each lesson.

Begin and end on time.

Take-home Line

The Take-home Line is a summary of the lesson and a challenge for class members to consider throughout the week. Write it on a notecard and distribute it to each class member or ask members to write it at the top of their notes. Encourage them to memorize and recite the Take-home Line.

Teaching Notes

Preface

Genesis is a study of the relationships between God and humans, humans and humans, humans and the earth, and humans and the animal and plant kingdoms. Genesis is theology, psychology, ecology, biology and zoology.

All creation is important because God made it. All relationships are significant because they are God-designed. We have no right to denigrate any of the relationships that God established because all of his creation is intricately involved and related.

The primary relationship described in Genesis is how God relates to humans. The first three chapters of Genesis describe the initiation of these relationships, and the rest of the Bible describes how God continues to relate to humans—and how humans relate, or refuse to relate, to God.

Genesis describes the genesis, or beginning, of all relationships.

Sadly, instead of using Genesis as a guide for relating to others and the world around us, many people find in Genesis a battleground for defending their ideology. Faithful Christians must never lose sight of the fact that Genesis is about relationships.

This study of Genesis 1–12 provides an opportunity to examine some of these relationships through six sessions.

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Relationship with God

Genesis 1:1–2:3

Take-home Line

God created and it was good.

Teaching Aim

To show how Genesis describes God’s character.

Introduce the Lesson

Several short articles are available on the public debate between creationism and evolution. For more resources, go to:

- ◆ Appendix A, page 19
- ◆ Appendix B, page 20

Ask: What do you think when you hear the terms “creationism” and “evolution”? What images do these words bring to your mind? Why?

Share the following story: A scientist approached God and said, “Listen, we’ve decided we no longer need you. Nowadays, we can extract stem cells, clone people, transplant hearts, and all kinds of things that were once considered miraculous.”

God listened patiently, and then said, “All right. To see whether or not you still need me, why don’t we have a little human-making contest!” “Okay, great!” the scientist said. “Now, we’re going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam,” God said. “That’s fine,” replied the scientist, who then bent down to scoop up a handful of dirt. “Whoa!” God said, shaking his head in disapproval. “Not so fast, pal. You get your own dirt.”

Point out that the way we view God’s creation of the world says a lot about how we view God. Genesis describes God’s character so we can better understand God and creation.

Explore the Biblical Witness

Make a poster of the points below. Cover each point with a strip of paper until you are ready to teach it.

Keys to Interpreting Genesis

1. The context
2. The ancient mindset
3. That God exceeds all other gods
4. That God had a plan in creation
5. That God continues to maintain creation.

Uncover the first point. Use the *Student Guide* to give a brief lecture on the context of Genesis. Point out the following:

1. Genesis was written in the cultural context of people who had many religious beliefs.
2. The people who surrounded the Hebrew people had many other accounts of creation that differed greatly from Genesis.
3. The Genesis account has some parallels with these other accounts, but it rises far above it.

Uncover the second point on the outline. Explain the mindset by presenting the following points. Use the information in the *Student Guide* to expand on each point.

The Ancient Mindset

1. They viewed life holistically.
2. They saw themselves as an integral part of creation, not above it.
3. They thought the gods had all the characteristics of humans.
4. They recorded accounts of creation that differed greatly from Genesis.

Uncover the third point on the outline. Write headings for two columns on a board. Do not write the italicized material. That is there for your help only; members may suggest other correct ideas. Ask: What kind of gods did Israel’s neighbors believe in? List these on the chart below. Ask: How does the God of the Hebrews differ from these gods?

Other Gods

Capricious
Hard to please
Had human feelings
A part of creation
Violent
Vengeful

God of the Hebrews

Faithful
Holy
Completely unlike humans
Stands above creation
Loving
Creates by his word

Uncover the fourth outline point. Explain that creation is done in an orderly, progressive, logical manner.

Ask members to open their Bibles to Genesis 1–2. Assign half of the class to search these chapters to find how many times the word “create” is used (1:1, 27; 2:4). Ask the other half to identify the number of times “made” is used (1:7, 16, 25, 31; 2:4, 9, 22). Point out that Genesis used “created” to describe God’s bringing into existence the world, heavens, great sea creatures and human beings. For all other things, Genesis used the word “made.” No one else “created”; only God could fashion something from nothing.

Point out that each successive act of creation brought into being various parts of the universe—all in an orderly manner.

Ask: When was light created? (Day 1) When were the sun and moon created? (Day 4) How can there be light without the sun and moon? Point out that the writer’s intention was something other than scientific. Use the material in the *Student Guide* to explain this point.

Ask students to look at 1:24-31 to determine what God created on the sixth day. (Animals and humans) Explain that the Hebrew word *adam* literally means “humankind” which is how the NRSV translates it.

Read Genesis 1:27.

Creating humans is the height of God’s creation. Ask: What does it mean to be made in God’s image? After discussion, point out that since God is spirit, the image is not physical but is in our mental and spiritual capacities.

Ask: What makes humans different from the rest of the creation? (They are made in God’s image, and God gave them dominion over animal life on the earth.)

Ask: What responsibilities does being made in the image of God place on humans? (Humans have moral and emotional capacities that other creatures do not have. Part of this responsibility lies in caring for the world God made.)

Ask: Does God get tired? Why did God rest? Was this for God’s benefit or humans’? Use the *Student Guide* to discuss the three possible translations of the Hebrew word *sabbach*. Explain the implications of the Sabbath for human relationships.

Uncover the fifth outline point. Point out that God does not leave the world to function on its own. He is not an absentee landlord, but a very present Creator. God did not create the world and leave it to evolve without order and genius. God remains at the center of creation to keep it from regressing into formlessness.

Apply the Biblical Witness

Make a poster with the following outline on it. Cover each point until you are ready to teach it.

Contemporary Messages in Genesis

- ◆ Who vs. How of Creation
- ◆ Ownership by Creation
- ◆ Gender Differences/Similarities
- ◆ Cultural/Racial Differences
- ◆ Sabbath Observance
- ◆ Reason for Creation

Uncover the first point. Explain that Genesis is not an attempt to explain *how* creation came into being; it is an attempt to explain *who* created and *why*. *Theology* was uppermost in the mind of the writer, *not science*. Because of this, Genesis is timeless in its significance—making it relevant to the 21st century A.D. as well as to the 21st century B.C. That is why true faith has nothing to fear from true science. God created them both.

Ask: If we are made in God's image, how should this affect the way we work? How we parent? How we relate to people?

Uncover the second point on the outline. Point out that by virtue of his creating the world, God and God alone is worthy of worship and obedience. God is the only creative force that exists. Ask: Since God named, divided and set boundaries, how should that influence the way we relate to creation? How should our theology affect our ecology?

Uncover the third point on the outline. Explain that God created both man and woman in his image. As far as God is concerned, there is no substantive difference between sexes. Ask: Since this is true, how should the sexes relate to each other in society? In the church? In the home?

Uncover the fourth point on the outline. Explain that just as God created both man and woman in his image, he also created all races in his image. If we accept the Genesis account, all races came from the same source. Racial differences are the result of locale, nutrition and circumstances regarding survival. Ask: Since this is true, how should we relate to people of different races? What cultural elements affect how we look at people of different races?

Uncover the fifth point on the outline. Explain that the purpose of God's resting was that he had ceased creating; he did not rest because he was tired. The Sabbath offers a time for humans to relate to God through reflection and worship. Ask: What advantages do you see in having one day a week for reflection and worship? What happens if one has to work on the day traditionally established for this reflection and worship? How can we accommodate our schedules to allow reflection and worship?

Uncover the sixth outline point. Explain that God created humans so they could be caretakers of the earth. Ask: What does this concept have to say about how we take care of the earth? Should that influence the kind of cars we drive? The kind of chemicals we produce and how we dispose of them? The plants and animals we destroy?

Conclusion

Refer to the opening illustration about the contest between God and the scientist. Point out that it is the pseudoreligionist and the pseudoscientist that are in conflict. God has given humans great ability to understand and

to share his creative powers. In the final analysis, there is no conflict between creation and science because God made both. We will never go beyond his power. God alone gives us the power to create. That does not mean we have no responsibility; it does mean we should act within God's order, morality and ethicality.

Close with the Take-home Line

Relationship with Creation

Genesis 1:28-31; 2:15; 9:8-12, 15, 17

Take-home Line

Human beings are the crowning glory of God's creation, but not the only jewel in the crown.

Teaching Aim

To evaluate what we can do to enhance the relationship between humans and God's created world.

Introduce the Lesson

For more resources, go to:

- ◆ Appendix C, page 21
- ◆ Appendix D, page 22

Read Scenario 1 from the *Student Guide*. Ask: How many of you would reward this employee? Why? After a brief discussion, read Scenario 2. Ask: What are the similarities with Scenario 2 and Scenario 1?

State that the theme of relationships is especially prevalent in this section.

Explore the Biblical Witness

Make a poster with the following texts:

Genesis 1:28-31
Genesis 2:15
Genesis 9:8-12, 15, 17

Have someone read Genesis 1:28-31.

Ask: What two tasks were humans assigned in these verses? Basically the

tasks were procreation and dominion, although members may also suggest "fill" and "subdue" which are parts of dominion. How are they interrelated?

Ask: What is the difference between dominion and domination? Dominion is not domination. Dominion carries with it the responsibility of a caretaker and the accountability of an employee so charged. Domination carries the idea of crushing control.

Have someone read Genesis 2:15.

Using the *Student Guide*, describe the implications for humans of the two words "till" and "keep" (2:15). Point out the importance of obeying God and fulfilling our human responsibility in caring for God's creation. Ask: Is it always easy to know what God wants us to do with creation? How can we know we are obeying God's desire in caring for the world?

Have someone else read Genesis 9:8-12, 15, 17.

Briefly describe *The Gilgamesh Epic*, pointing out how it differed from the Genesis account.

Point out that Noah's purpose was to preserve a remnant of life on the earth. Ask: Why do you think God chose a flood to destroy the world? What covenant did God make with Noah? What was unusual about this covenant? Humans did not have to do anything; it was all at God's initiative. Why do you think this is significant? What value does this covenant have for us today?

Apply the Biblical Witness

Make a poster of the following:

Lessons for Life

- ◆ Caretaking Responsibility
- ◆ Work as Fulfillment
- ◆ Overpopulation Must Be Considered
- ◆ Another Catastrophe Can Happen
- ◆ No Room for Human Conceit

Display the first point. Ask: Why do you agree or disagree with the statement that everything God created has a purpose?

Uncover the second point. Ask: Why did God institute work? What role did work play in the garden before the fall? How did the concept of work change after the fall?

Be sure to point out that work is not the result of the fall. It was a part of God's original plan for humans.

Ask: What principles can we identify that would help us balance work and rest? How do we relate the concept of work to retirement?

Uncover the third point. Ask: What guidelines can we identify that will enable us to balance being "fruitful and multiplying" (1:28) with not overpopulating the earth? Should our concern for the food supply affect our concern for population? Why?

Uncover the fourth point. What significance does God's covenant with Noah—that he will never again destroy the earth by flood—have for us today? How safe should that make us feel? What should be our fear(s) today about destruction of the earth? Would you agree or disagree that we have the option of avoiding the destruction of the earth that Noah did not have?

Uncover the fifth point. Ask: What is the relationship between humans and the plant and animal world? Draw a ladder with seven or eight rungs on a board. On the top rung, write *humans*. On the lower rungs write such species as animals, fish, birds, plants, insects, microbes. Point out that humans are on the top rung of the creation ladder. Without comment, slowly erase each of the rungs below humans. When you have finished, ask: If we destroy the bottom rungs, where does that put us?

Ask members to share examples in which humans have destroyed God's creation and experienced the results.

Conclusion

Share the illustration in the *Student Guide* about the city of Moen-Jo-Daro and its destruction. Point out that time will tell if we as a species

turn to follow God's plan for creation and live, or continue our quest, as did Moen-Jo-Daro, and perish.

Close with the Take-home Line

Relationship between Male and Female

Genesis 2:18-24

Take-home Line

God made male and female as companions.

Teaching Aim

To lead members to see why the female is not inferior to the male by God's act of creation.

Introduce the Lesson

Ask members to speculate about the following: What do you think Adam and Eve's relationship was like before the fall? How did they relate to each other? How different was it after the fall?

Point out that God's ideal in creation was two humans created equally.

Ask: How different is the relationship between man and woman today? What brought about the change?

Explore the Biblical Witness

Explain that Genesis 2:4-24 offers another perspective on creation that is quite different from that in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Have someone read Genesis 2:4-24. Ask: What is not "good" in paradise? (For the man to be alone—v. 18) Ask: What is the primary difference in the creation of woman in chapter 1 and in chapter 2? (In chapter 1, God created male and female together by speaking; in chapter 2, God created the female later by a taking a rib from Adam.)

Share this Hebrew legend about how God created Eve. When God was on the point of making Eve, God said: "I will not make her from

the head of man, lest she carry her head high in arrogant pride; not from the eye, lest she be wanton-eyed; not from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; not from the neck, lest she be insolent; not from the mouth, lest she be a tattler; not from the heart, lest she be included to envy; not from the hand, lest she be a meddler; not from the foot, lest she be a gadabout."¹ Instead, he made the woman from the side so they would be equal.

Present the following information on the relationship of the woman as a "helper" to the man by sharing this information:

1. Ask: What title is used to describe the woman in v. 18? ("Helper")
2. Point out that the Hebrew term used here (*'ezer*, "helper") is used in other texts to apply to God. Ask members to look up these Scriptures and to read them aloud: Deuteronomy 33:7, 26; Psalms 33:20; 121:2; 146:5. Point out that this is strong evidence that the word translated "helper" does not carry the connotation of inferiority or subordination.
3. Explain that because of woman's ability to bear children and propagate the race, she is equal in status as the crown of creation. Her "help" is necessary and not something that mankind can do without.
4. Both the man and the woman answer only, and directly, to God because both man and woman are equal.

Apply the Biblical Witness

Ask the class to reflect on Genesis 2:18-24 on its own terms, not the terms of cultural bias. Ask: Do these verses send the message of female inferiority? Inequality?

Discuss why these verses are used to establish male superiority, especially since Genesis 1:27 speaks of the joint creation of male and female. Ask: Why have some groups emphasized one version and not the other?

Ask: Do we use the Bible to justify an agenda? Do we pay great attention to some verses and ignore others that trouble us?

Verse 24 says a man “clings to his wife.” Is this important? Why? What does it mean? Does it imply that a woman clings to her husband as well?

Discuss the difference between “I now pronounce you man and wife” and “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Conclusion

God realized it was not good for a human to be alone. Human partnerships completed God’s creation. Male and female became “one flesh,” stamping the idea of equality on the human species.

Close with the Take-home Line

1 Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), vol. 1, 66.

Relationship of Distortion between God and Humanity

Genesis 3:1-24

Take-home Line

Disobedience distorts our relationship with God.

Teaching Aim

To help members understand their own struggle with disobedience through the story of Adam and Eve.

Introduce the Lesson

Read Genesis 3:1-24. Be sure to emphasize the conflict inherent in the story of Adam and Eve disobeying God.

Ask: Is this story of Adam and Eve fact or fable? Read the following definition of “fable” from *Webster’s Dictionary*: “a fanciful, epigrammatic story, usually illustrating a moral precept or ethical observation. The characters are often animals, gifted with speech, and possessing the human traits commonly attributed to them, or they may be gods, persons, or things.”

Ask: In what ways is this story like a fable? In what ways is this story not like a fable?

Read the following from the *Student Guide*: “It reads as a fable, complete with a talking snake and God walking in the garden. But this story is not a fable as we think of fables. Rather, it is a paradigm of every person’s struggle with temptation and sin.”

Read the following definition of “paradigm” from *Webster’s Dictionary*: “an example serving as a pattern.”

Ask: How is this story of Adam and Eve a paradigm for our struggle with disobedience? Did both Adam and Eve disobey God? Did they take

responsibility immediately? Did they ever take responsibility? Did they pay a price for disobedience? Do we pay a price for ours?

Discuss the idea that a distorted relationship with God is the price we pay for disobedience. This distorted relationship then affects everything from the cradle to the grave.

Explore the Biblical Witness

Ask members to imagine that they are Eve, talking to the serpent. Now read Genesis 3:1-5. Ask: Did the serpent present a convincing argument for eating the fruit? What was the harm in knowing good from evil?

Ask members to imagine that they are Adam, taking fruit from Eve. Now read Genesis 3:6. Ask: Why did Adam eat the fruit? Because Eve gave it to him? Because he had no choice? Because he wanted to eat it?

Ask members to remember a time when they disobeyed: a parent’s rule, a boss’ order, even a spouse’s request. Now read Genesis 3:7-13.

Ask: Do we try to deflect blame, even when we know we disobeyed? Do we try to cover our shame? How did Adam and Eve handle their transgression?

Read Genesis 3:14-15. Verse 14 says God cursed the serpent above all other wild animals. In the chapter’s first verse, it says the serpent was craftier than the other wild animals. Is there a correlation here? Does this say something else about the character of the serpent (i.e. the deceiver)?

Read Genesis 3:16. God tells the woman that her husband will rule over her. Is this “curse” God’s command for the marital relationship? God’s description of it? God’s prediction for how the sexes will sometimes interact in the blame-game Adam and Eve demonstrated?

Read Genesis 3:17-19. In verse 17, God mentions that Adam listened to his wife and then disobeyed God. What was Adam’s problem? That he listened to Eve? That he failed to think for himself? That he chose to disobey God’s command?

Read Genesis 3:20-24. Do these verses contain any similarities to other

ancient myths? (See p. 14 of the *Student Guide* for a bulleted list of similarities.)

Note that Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in God ejecting them from paradise and preventing any possible attempt to restore immortality for themselves (v. 24).

Apply the Biblical Witness

In verse 5, the serpent tells Eve she will be like God if she eats the fruit.

Ask: Do we fall for temptations that promise god-like results and rewards? Do we think that money will make us more powerful? More irresistible? Do we think that we deserve a mansion because nothing is too good for us? Or, that we can always blame others because we're incapable of erring in judgment?

In verse 11, God asks Adam and Eve if they ignored the command about the tree.

Ask: Has God given us other commandments? Other parameters? Are we ignoring them? Is God questioning us? Are we hiding? And are we ashamed because we know we have disobeyed?

Conclusion

The story of Adam and Eve gives us an example serving as a pattern. In other words, the story is a paradigm of how humans disobey God; blame deceivers and each other; hide in shame; and pay the price of broken relationships.

However, God provided a means to restore those relationships through Jesus Christ.

Close with the Take-home Line

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Relationship of Conflict within the Human Race

Genesis 4:1-17; 6:5-8; 11:1-9

Take-home Line

Human conflict brings destruction.

Teaching Aim

To help members see the seeds of human conflict as described in Genesis.

Introduce the Lesson

Use the events of September 11, 2001, as a springboard for discussing human conflict.

Share the definition of “conflict” from *Webster’s Dictionary*: “a struggle between opposing principles or aims.” Ask: What conflicts (religious, national, economic, cultural, social) contributed to the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York?

Ask: What, if anything, prevents conflict from assuming the form of physical violence?

Explore the Biblical Witness

Ask members to remember a time when they were jealous of another person because of his/her accomplishments. Now read Genesis 4:1-17.

Re-read verses 3-8. Ask: Was Cain angry with Abel? With God? With himself? All three? Does our jealousy turn to anger? With whom are we angry if it does?

Does the account indicate that Cain sought to please God with a different offering? It does not. Do you think Cain tried to please God? If you think he tried, but still eventually murdered his brother, does that change your perception of Cain? Does that change your perception of others who

ultimately commit a crime?

Read Genesis 6:5-8. Verse 5 says that humans inclined toward evil all the time, so God decided to destroy the species, save Noah and his family.

Ask: Are we tempted to destroy what we understand to be evil? Think of the hijackers on September 11. Were they attempting to destroy evil? When allied forces began bombing Afghanistan on October 7, were we attempting to destroy evil?

Ask: Is evil the cause of conflict in the human race, or the result? Can we destroy evil, or can evil destroy us? Both?

Read Genesis 11:1-9. Re-read verses 4 and 6.

Ask: Were humans engaging in evil behavior by building the tower? If it was not evil behavior, what kind of behavior was it? Did this behavior anger God?

By confusing humans’ language, did God create conflict in the human race? As your class tries to answer this question, remember the definition of conflict offered above.

Apply the Biblical Witness

Ask: Is conflict ever appropriate? In the story of Cain and Abel, can you imagine conflict between the brothers that would not have resulted in murder? If so, how might such conflict have manifested itself?

Ask: Do you have conflicts with other people? What kinds of conflict? Does anything good come from those conflicts? Is it easy to let conflict feed sinful behavior? Can conflict be handled appropriately?

Think of the current “conflict” in Afghanistan. Discuss the various “opposing principles or aims” seen between the Taliban, for example, and the United States.

Is that conflict seen (and discussed) as a conflict between good and evil? Is it seen that way by both sides? Is it inevitable that conflicts “between good and evil” require loss of life? Is that a paradigm given in Scripture?

Conclusion

Genesis offers several accounts of human conflict leading to a lack of cooperation at best, and destruction at worst. Even the former eventually gives way to obliteration.

An us-versus-them mentality pervades human thought, exemplified by Cain's murder of his brother. Cain's belief and action led to his own demise and, worse, separation from God. The same fate awaits those who nurture unhealthy conflict.

Close with the Take-home Line

Teaching Notes

Relationship between God's People and the World

Genesis 11:30; 12:1-3

Take-home Line

God's blessing takes many forms. Can you count them?

Teaching Aim

To help members see how God directs his love throughout the world.

Introduce the Lesson

Share the following definition of "blessing" from *Webster's Dictionary*: "divine favor or the invocation of it" and "a piece of good fortune." Is there a substantive difference between these two definitions? If so, what is it?

Ask: Do you deserve a blessing? Why or why not?

The chorus of a popular hymn says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God hath done." Go around the room and ask members to name one blessing each has received.

Ask: When you receive a blessing, do you share it with others? Do you think God intends for you to share it with others?

Explore the Biblical Witness

Read Genesis 11:30 and 12:1-3. Re-read the last two verses.

Ask: How did God say he would bless Abram? Was Abram the only recipient of God's favor and blessing? Who else was involved?

Ask: Did God ask Abram to take any particular action? What was it?

Discuss whether or not Abram had doubts about God's promise of blessing. What reasons might Abram have had to doubt God's promise?

In verse 3, God pronounced a curse on whoever cursed Abram. Why did God couple a blessing with a curse?

Apply the Biblical Witness

In Genesis 12:1, God asked Abram to leave his country, his people and his father's house in order to claim an unknown land. In other words, God asked Abram to act on faith.

Ask: Can you think of a time in your life when God asked you to take concrete and significant action—action that required faith? How did you react? Did you have a spouse, family member or friend who supported you? Did not support you?

Did you receive a blessing for acting on faith? Did others receive a blessing through you? Did others receive a blessing that you yourself did not? If so, how did that make you feel?

Ask: Do you think we act in the best interests of our descendants? To put it another way, are we capable of sacrificing short-term and personal security for the security of those we may never know? Do you think God calls us to do that?

Discuss whether or not Abram felt pride at having received God's significant blessing.

Ask: What reasons did Abram have to remain humble, even in the face of God's overwhelming favor?

Ask: Do we sometimes confuse God's blessings with an inflated sense of our own self-importance? Do we see "blessings" as God's favor on us for a job well done?

Conclusion

God's blessing takes many forms. When God blesses us, God shows divine love to us. When we recognize God's blessing for what it is, we are able to share the blessing and thereby demonstrate God's love to the rest of the human race.

Close with the Take-home Line

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Appendix A

Evolution Deadlock Needs a New Script

Headlines declared “a creationist victory” after the Kansas Board of Education voted last week to eliminate evolution from the science standards.

But is it really? Confusing teachers and provoking bruising battles on local school boards—that doesn’t sound like much of a “victory” to me.

When will we ever learn? From the Scopes trial to the Kansas conflict, nobody wins when science education is turned into a political battleground. We all lose, because this never-ending fight undermines efforts to increase the scientific literacy so essential to our nation’s well-being.

The action by the Kansas Board sends a message: Avoid the E-word. The inevitable result will be watered-down science instruction from textbooks and teachers eager to avoid controversy. (And students won’t worry too much about anything that isn’t “on the test.”) The mess in Kansas is yet another warning that we need to stop shouting past one another and find some way to re-frame the whole “creation-evolution” debate. After all, neither side is going to “win” this fight until both sides abandon failed strategies.

Creationists take note: Creationism won’t replace evolutionary theory in the public-school science classroom. It won’t even be given “equal time.” The Supreme Court has ruled these options unconstitutional. Like it or not, evolutionary theory is here to stay.

Evolutionists, consider this: The way evolution is currently being presented in most textbooks and classrooms isn’t winning many converts. According to a CNN/Gallup poll, 68% of the American people want both “theories” taught, and 40% would support replacing evolution with creationism. Dissent from the prevailing theory in science isn’t going away.

So, is there any way forward in this confused and complex debate? Only if enough people on all sides (there are a variety of “creationists” and “evolutionists”) are willing to start a new dialogue focused on the real issue: the educational needs of our nation’s children.

Let me go out on the proverbial limb and make four proposals that may be a basis for finding common ground:

1. Teach about various religious views of origins and nature in social studies courses. And, where possible, offer religious-studies electives in high schools for a more in-depth consideration of how religions understand the universe.
2. Include in opening chapters of science texts or opening lectures of science courses a brief discussion of the relationship between science and religion, presented as part of a broader review of history and philosophy of science and scientific method. This will alert students to the fact that there are various ways to view the world—both religious and secular—and that some of these ways may conflict and others may agree.
3. Teach the controversy. Sections of texts and courses dealing with evolution, the big bang, and other issues that are controversial should provide some context for understanding what is at issue. For example, biology texts might explain briefly why many religious conservatives reject evolution and why many religious liberals accept it (although they may still have problems with neo-Darwinism).
4. In science classes, present the prevailing scientific theories widely accepted by most scientists, but also find room for those who criticize the prevailing view within the scientific community (e.g., those who argue for “intelligent design”).

Public schools shouldn’t be in the business of promoting religious views in science or anywhere else in the curriculum. At the same time, schools shouldn’t fall into the trap of teaching a kind of “scientism” (the notion that only science provides reliable knowledge about ultimate reality).

Public schools should find ways to expose students to the variety of ways—religious and scientific—in which human beings understand the universe. And, most important: In those areas where we differ, schools should be prepared to teach the controversy.

Write to Charles Haynes at the First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Ave. S., Nashville, Tenn. 37212. E-mail: chaynes@freedomforum.org

Charles C. Haynes writes a column for the Tennessean entitled Finding Common Ground.

Appendix B

New Theory Offers Alternative to Darwin and Bible's Explanation for the Origin of Life

There's a new theory in the debate over the beginning of the universe— Intelligent Design Theory (IDT). No longer do truth-seekers have to limit themselves to choosing between Darwin or the Bible for explanations for life's first days.

Proponents of this theory, led by a group of academics and intellectuals, accept that the earth is billions of years old, not the thousands of years suggested by a literal reading of the Bible, according to a *New York Times* article.

However, they dispute the idea that natural selection, the Darwinian explanation for evolution, is enough to explain the complexity of life on Earth. That complexity, they argue, can only be attributed to the work of an "intelligent designer."

The identity of this intelligent designer is left up to the imagination, but critics of the theory said it amounts to "stealth creationism" subtly promoting God as that designer.

The designer may be much like the biblical God, proponents said, but they are open to other explanations, the *Times* reported. Some alternatives include the possibility that life was seeded by a meteorite from somewhere else in the cosmos or the new age philosophy that the universe is suffused with a mysterious but inanimate life force.

The Discovery Institute, an intelligent design think tank in Seattle, Wash., promotes the theory "as a strategy for defeating what they regard as the immoral materialism of modern science," according to an article on Salon.com.

IDT's leading proponent, Michael Behe, brings a greater intellectual respectability to the movement by means of his impeccable credentials, [Salon.com](http://www.salon.com) reported. Behe holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Pennsylvania.

A devout Catholic, Behe never resorts to theological arguments. Instead, he relies on meticulous reasoning to infer that the observable complexity in living things can only be explained by the existence of an intelligent designer, Salon.com's article read.

Behe told the *Times* he believed that certain intricate structures in cells, involving the cooperative action of many protein molecules, were "irreducibly complex," because moving just one of the proteins could leave those structures unable to function. If the structure serves no function without all of its parts, Behe asked, then how could evolution have built it up step by step throughout time?

"Evolutionary biologists maintain that the arguments of intelligent design do not survive scrutiny, but they concede that a specialist's knowledge of particular mathematical or biological disciplines is often needed to clinch the point," read the *Times* article.

"I would use the words 'devilishly clever,'" said Jerry Coyne, professor of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago, speaking of the way the theory is constructed, according to the *Times*. "It has an appeal to intellectuals who don't know anything about evolutionary biology, first of all because the proponents have Ph.D.s and second of all because it's not written in the sort of populist, folksy, anti-intellectual style. It's written in the argot of academia."

Behe, William Dembski, member of the Baylor University faculty, and Phillip E. Johnson, professor emeritus of the University of California at Berkeley Law School, are regarded as the intellectual fathers of the design theory movement.

Jodi Mathews is BCE's communications director.

Visit <http://www.salon.com/>, <http://www.nyt.com/>, <http://www.discovery.org/> and <http://www.icr.org/> to learn more about the Intelligent Design Theory.

Appendix C

Fewer Americans Support Environmental Protection, Study Shows

As the Earth Day celebration nears its 31st anniversary on April 22, environmental activists will have a difficult time urging Americans to immobilize their vehicles during the “car-free day” on April 19.

Only 27 percent of the U.S. population is strongly concerned about the current state of the environment, according to an update of a March Gallup poll.

While the majority of Americans still supports regulation of industrial emissions and is opposed to drilling for oil in the Alaskan wilderness, the poll results showed the number of supporters is down.

Only 57 percent say protection of the environment should be given priority over economic growth, compared to 67 percent last year. Thirty-three percent of Americans—up from 28 percent in 2000—say economic growth should take precedence, even if the environment suffers to some extent.

However, 68 percent of those polled still say corporations are doing too little to protect the environment, as opposed to 4 percent who think the opposite.

Nearly half of adults interviewed said they would pay \$100 more each year if it helped increase efforts by businesses and industry to reduce air pollution.

The results reported were based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1060 adults, 18 years and older.

To learn more about the poll, visit <http://www.gallup.com/>

Appendix D

Jesus Speaks for the Environment

By Robert Parham

Two stories illustrate competing values.

One is about two men crossing a large lake. Halfway across the lake, one man begins boring a hole in the bottom of the boat with his pocket knife. His companion asks, "What are you doing?" The man answers, "I'm boring a hole in the bottom of the boat."

Alarmed, his companion warns that if the boat springs a leak it will fill with water and sink, and they will drown. The man with the knife replies: "Mind your own business. I'm boring a hole under my seat."

The man with the knife has an *individualistic ethic*, unconcerned about the harmful consequences his action has on another person.

The other story tells of a man who comes upon another man planting a tree. "Why are you planting a carob tree? Don't you know that a carob tree will not bear fruit for 70 years? Surely you will not live long enough to enjoy its fruits," he says. The tree planter replies, "My forefathers planted them for me and I plant them for my descendants."

The tree planter has an *investment ethic* concerned about the helpful consequences his present-day actions have for others in the future.

Many Christians have an individualistic ethic, driven by selfishness and governed by short-sightedness. No wonder we have so few Christian environmentalists.

When Jesus calls for neighbor love (Matt. 22:39-40), we define neighbor as those who live across the street or across the ocean.

But neighbors also include those who live across time. Neighbor love requires an investment ethic, thinking about and acting for our children's children and their children.

A friend of mine says, "The only way we can love our neighbor across time is to leave them a decent place to live."

Robert M. Parham is BCE's executive director and author of *Loving Neighbors Across Time, A Christian Guide to Protecting the Earth*.