

The Essentials: The Book of Genesis

Session 1 - Participant Guide

Opening Collect

Together: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Watch Video

Read: Genesis 1:26-31 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Have you ever thought about the simple fact that you were *created*? What has it meant to you?
2. In our video, Colin said that evolution is a perfectly acceptable theory of origins for Christians. Have you struggled with this issue conflicting with your Christian beliefs? What is the difference between evolution as a theory of origins vs. evolution as a worldview?
3. What did Colin mean when he said that you are intended to have a power sharing relationship with God? How does that make you feel?
4. Our reading details how we are created, and it also describes how we're *given* an identity—an image—that is not of our own making. How has our own cultural moment encouraged you to find your own identity? In your own life, what have you sought out as an identity? And what does it mean that it is *given* here in Genesis 1?
5. Verse 31 tells us that God declares creation “very good.” How have you struggled to believe that all of creation (including you!) is created “very good”?
6. Is there anything that you feel God might be telling you in today’s reading from Genesis?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 1:26-31

[26] Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

[27] So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” [29] And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. [30] And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. [31] And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (ESV)

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Session 2

Opening Collect

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Watch Video

Read: Genesis 8:18-9:1 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Did you hear anything new from Margery's video? If so, what?
2. The flood is a common children's Bible story and has been widely used in popular culture. What have been your past feelings about the flood? What makes the flood story difficult?
3. Genesis 6:5 says "every inclination of the thoughts of their (humanity's) hearts was only evil continually..." Compare this statement with last week's reading about God declaring creation "very good." How can both of these statements be true? Are they both still true?
4. Margery said that the flood could be understood as an "embodiment" of sin's unmaking God's created goodness. What do you think she means? How do you see our sin (or other people's sin!) undo God's created goodness? Give some examples.
5. God's response to Noah's sacrifice is the promise (covenant) that he makes in v. 21. Read it again. Why do you think God establishes this covenant even when He makes the statement about the evil thoughts of human hearts? How does that make you feel?
6. Margery said that you could understand the rest of the Bible as God dealing with sin. With whatever knowledge of Scripture you might have, describe what you think that looks like in the rest of the Bible?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 8:18-22

[18] So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. [19] Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

[20] Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. [21] And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. [22] While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

9 [1] And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." (ESV)

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Session 3

Opening Collect

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Watch Video

Read: Genesis 15:1-7 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Did you hear anything new from David's video? If so, what?
2. God says to Abram, "Do not be afraid." What do you think Abram is afraid of?
3. How does Abram not initially trust/have faith in God by choosing *Eliezer of Damascus* as an heir? How do you struggle to trust in God?
4. God can redeem his world however he wants, but he chooses to work through individuals. Talk about why God might begin his plan for salvation with this particular man, Abraham, and his family?
5. Verse 6 says that Abram's faith was counted to him as righteousness. What does it mean to have faith? (Look at Galatians 3:6).
6. How do you foster faith in your own life?
7. God mentions what he has done for Abram. What do you need to remember that God has done for you?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 15:1-7

[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” [2] But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” [3] And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” [5] And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

[7] And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” (ESV)

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Session 4

Opening Collect

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Watch Video

Read: Genesis 17:1-11 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Did you hear anything new from Margery's video? If so, what?
2. In the previous session, the "mark" of the covenant on the side of Abraham was simply belief. What do you think it means that God no wants a particular response from Abraham to continue the covenant?
3. Margery mentions the way sexual sin is an ongoing struggle within the family of Abraham. Why do you think God seems to care so much about this very intimate human act?
4. Why do you think Abraham and Sara receive new names? Where else in the Bible do you see people receive new names? Why?
5. Obviously circumcision functioning as a sign of the covenant takes real intentionality! On the other hand, to *be* circumcised as an infant (what was required within the law) takes no intentionality on the part of the child. What could that mean about being brought into the covenant?
6. Margery mentioned the way the New Testament correlate of circumcision is baptism. Have you ever thought about that before? How does that make you think about your own baptism and your life in Christ?
7. At the end of the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible), Deuteronomy speaks about circumcision of your heart (Deuteronomy 10:16). What do you think that means? What might it mean for *your* heart to be circumcised?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 17:1-11

[1] When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” [3] Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

[9] And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. [10] This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. [11] You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. (ESV)

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Session 5: Genesis 21-25

Opening Collect

Together: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Watch Video

Read: Genesis 22:1-17a (out loud)

Discussion:

1. What are the challenges of this story?
2. In session 3 we discussed the significance of Abraham himself being God's redemptive plan for the world. Why do you think God chooses to test Abraham?
3. Do you think God still "tests" people? Have you ever been tested by God?
4. In the video, David said that Isaac is both Abraham's and God's—Abraham's beloved and God's miraculous work. Does that change how you read the story?
5. Have you ever loved something that pulled you away from God? What was it?
6. Have you ever sacrificed something to follow God?
7. Within the Christian tradition, Isaac has often been understood as a "figure" or representation of Christ. How do you think God the Father felt during the crucifixion of God the Son? How does this make *you* feel?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 22:1-17a

[1] After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."
[2] He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. [4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." [6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. [7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

[9] When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. [11] But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [13] And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

[15] And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven [16] and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17] I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, (ESV)

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Session 6: Genesis 26-30

Opening Collect

Together: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Watch Video

Read: Genesis 28:10-18 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Like Abraham, Jacob is a morally complex character. Jacob steals from his brother, and runs away while his mother covers for him. Is it fair that God chooses Jacob?
2. At the beginning of the video, Colin describes the way Jacob flees from his brother and finds himself in a truly desperate place, alone in the wilderness, in a “non-place.” But then God shows up and makes it into a “crucial place.” Have you ever been in a desperate place where God showed up?
3. Do you think Jacob’s dream is a revelation of the world as it actually is? That is, do you think the story tells us that there is traffic between heaven and earth even now? What does that look like?
4. How did Jacob’s vision change his problems? How might it change our problems?
5. Colin closed his video by mentioning how the ultimate purpose of God is that all of the world would one day be completely the house of God (Bethel). How does this change the way we see the world?
6. In John chapter 1, Jesus identifies himself as the ladder between heaven and earth. How is Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of this vision—bridging heaven and earth?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 28: 10-19a

[10] Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. [11] And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. [12] And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! [13] And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. [14] Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. [15] Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." [16] Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." [17] And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

[18] So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. [19] He called the name of that place Bethel, (ESV)

The Essentials: The Book of Genesis

Session 7: Genesis 31-35

Opening Collect

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Watch Video

Read: Genesis 32:22-32 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. In our passage, Jacob faces an inevitable confrontation with his estranged twin brother whom he wronged and is (rightly!) angry with him. Describe how Jacob must feel confronting his brother.
2. Jacob wrestles with God in his most desperate moment. Have you ever wrestled with God?
3. Margery described how Jacob receives two things after this mysterious night of wrestling: a wound and a new name. How do wounds play a part in our life with God?
4. Notice in verse 24 Jacob wrestles with God. But in verse 26 Jacob clings to God. Have you ever thought of the way contending with God might also look like clinging to him? How might that change the way you think about your life with God.
5. Why must Jacob wrestle with God before he confronts Esau?
6. In what ways does Jacob figure Christ?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 32:22–32

[22] The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [23] He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. [24] And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. [25] When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. [26] Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." [27] And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." [28] Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." [29] Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. [30] So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." [31] The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. [32] Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh. (ESV)

The Essentials: The Book of Genesis

Session 8: Genesis 36-40

Opening Collect

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Read: Genesis 39 (out loud)

Watch Video

Discussion:

1. Joseph rose to prominence after he was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. Have you ever found yourself in a place of leadership or favor that you didn't intend to occupy?
2. Read vv. 8 and 9. What does Joseph's response say about his character?
3. From what you've learned in this study of Genesis, would you say Joseph differs from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? How?
4. Verses 2, 3, and 5, all communicate how God was with Joseph. And yet Joseph still suffers a grave injustice. Have you ever experienced injustice? How did you handle it?
5. This pattern of God's favor continues in verses 21-23 even as Joseph is thrown into prison. What does this strange blessing say about God? Have you had times of blessing even in suffering?
6. Joseph ends up spending much of his life in Egypt, and yet he is not Egyptian. What would it mean for Joseph to remain distinct as son of the covenantal promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
7. What might it look like for us to live in Christian distinction from the culture that you inhabit?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 39

[1] Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. [2] The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. [3] His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. [4] So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. [5] From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. [6] So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. [7] And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." [8] But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. [9] He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" [10] And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

[11] But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, [12] she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. [13] And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, [14] she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. [15] And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." [16] Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, [17] and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. [18] But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house."

[19] As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. [20] And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. [21] But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. [22] And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. [23] The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed. (ESV)

The Essentials: The Book of Genesis

Session 9: Genesis 41-45

Opening Collect

Together: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Watch Video

Read: Genesis 45:1-9 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. When Joseph sees his brothers at the very beginning of our reading the text says he couldn't control himself and wept loudly. Why do you think he wept so dramatically?
2. Think back on all Joseph has endured—the violence of his brothers, slavery, and prison. Now he is a man of immense power. How might you expect him to act toward his brothers?
3. In v. 5 Joseph realizes the purpose of his life. Have you ever had a moment that you realized God's purpose in your own life?
4. Jacob forgives his brothers in v. 5. How do you think he is able to do that after what they have done to him?
5. In the video, Colin says that God's purposes are hidden. Where do you think God might be working out his purposes in your own life?
6. The sons of Jacob eventually become the 12 tribes of Israel. From what you've learned about Genesis, how do you think this story fits into the broader movement of Genesis?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 45:1-9

[1] Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. [2] And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. [3] And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

[4] So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. [5] And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. [6] For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. [7] And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. [8] So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. [9] Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. (ESV)

The Essentials: The Book of Genesis

Session 10: Genesis 46-50

Opening Collect

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Watch Video

Read: Genesis 49:28-50:3 (out loud)

Discussion:

1. Our reading begins where Jacob finishes blessing each of his 12 sons. Why do you think this blessing is significant? What does blessing something do?
2. The video describes how the 12 sons are united under Jacob (and reunited under Joseph), and yet they are distinctly blessed with a “suitable” blessing. What New Testament correlate strikes you as most obviously connected to this model of 12 distinct yet unified characters? What does that say about God’s people?
3. Jacob requests to be buried with his ancestors. What does it mean that God has a place for his people? Do you think he has a place for you?
4. David noted how the Egyptians weep over the death of Jacob. Do the children of Abraham offer anything to Egypt? In what ways have you seen the church bless the world?
5. Jacob is buried in Canaan, but the rest of his family remains in Egypt. How does this foreshadow what’s ahead?
6. What do you find most satisfying or hopeful about this conclusion of Genesis?
7. What is one thing valuable thing you’ve learned in this study of Genesis?

Check in and closing prayers

Genesis 49:28-33

[28] All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. [29] Then he commanded them and said to them, “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, [30] in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. [31] There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah—[32] the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.” [33] When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 50:1-3

[1] Then Joseph fell on his father’s face and wept over him and kissed him. [2] And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. [3] Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. (ESV)