



ORIGIN STORY

A STUDY IN GENESIS

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

AUTHOR

As a whole, Genesis is closely associated with Moses, and he is traditionally considered the author of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Together these books are known by various names including the Torah, the Law, and the Pentateuch. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, they are referred to collectively as “the Book of Moses” (see 2 Chronicles 25:4; Nehemiah 13:1); Jesus refers to them as “the Law of Moses” in Luke 24:44. While some parts are directly attributed to Moses in the text, some parts were clearly added after his death. Many modern scholars, such as Dr. Tremper Longman III, reject the idea that Moses was the only author, instead maintaining that Genesis finds its origins in Moses, who likely consulted other sources, and whose writings were added to and shaped after his death.

DATE OF COMPOSITION

Scholars date Moses’ writing in Genesis to around 1600-1400 B.C., during the forty years that Israel was wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. According to scholar Peter Enns, “the Pentateuch as we know it is the end product of a complex literary process—written, oral, or both—that did not come to a close until the exile (586-539 BC) and postexilic period.”

RECIPIENTS

The first audience for Genesis was the second generation of Israelites after the Exodus from Egypt, who are about to enter the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership. This generation has been brought up in the wilderness of Sinai.

LITERARY STYLE

Genesis is written in historical narrative style. It is true history written in particular story form, and it is also archetypal: there are recurrent patterns, symbols, and motifs that unify it and also connect it to the rest of the Torah, the Old Testament, and all of Scripture. It is a masterful literary work, incorporating countless ancient literary and storytelling techniques, often hard to see on casual reading. Just as with every historical account, it is written from a certain point of view and for a particular purpose to lead its audience to believe certain truths. As such, it only includes what is necessary to that end, and not necessarily all of the details we might wish for. The Hebrew word Torah means instruction, and while the Torah contains laws, Genesis is primarily God's instruction for His Chosen People, the Israelites, and ultimately for all of His people who come after them.

PURPOSE

Genesis is a book of origins or beginnings, laying a foundation for the Israelites with regard to their identity and origin, the origin of the world as they know it, and how they came to be slaves in Egypt. Genesis also gives the context for the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Genesis has widely been called “the seed plot of the Bible,” and has been described as God giving His chosen people “roots and shoots.” As God is about to lead them into the Promised Land, they need to know who they are and whose they are as they become a full-fledged nation amidst a sea of pagan cultures. Egyptian, Canaanite, Babylonian and other religious mythologies abounded. Genesis speaks truth into those mythologies, detailing the source of the Israelites' identity as God's chosen covenant people. It helps the Israelites make sense of the reality in which they lived, corrects the false narratives that were common in the world at that time, and safeguards them from contamination and corruption by those false narratives.

ORGANIZATION

Genesis is organized as a series of “birth accounts,” or related origin stories. The phrase, “This is the account of” is repeated throughout the book a total of ten times. These ten accounts trace the history of humanity, zeroing in on Israel and their enemies, and are organized into two broad “movements,” as Bible Project scholars call them:

Movement 1: *Creation to Babel*

Genesis 1:1-2:3 (the macro story of creation); Genesis 2:4 (the micro story of creation, focused on humankind); Genesis 5:1 (the story of Adam and Eve’s family); Genesis 6:9 (the story of Noah, his wife, and their family); Genesis 10:1 (the story of Noah’s sons and the origin of the nations).

Movement 2: *Abraham to Israel*

Genesis 11:10 (the story of Shem’s family); Genesis 11:27 (the story of Terah’s family, centering on Abraham and Sarah); Genesis 25:12 (the story of Abraham, Hagar, and family through their son Ishmael); Genesis 25:19 (the story of Abraham, Sarah, and family through their son Isaac); Genesis 36:1 (the story of Isaac, Rebekah, and family through their son Esau); Genesis 37:2 (the story of Isaac and Rebekah’s son Jacob/Israel and family).

Genesis ends with Jacob’s family, the Israelites, numbering seventy in Egypt. The first part of Exodus continues the story of Jacob’s family there. Exodus 1-14 is the birth account of the nation of Israel, complete with the exodus or delivery through the sea and into the wilderness.

MAJOR THEMES

Beginnings/origins
Wilderness
Creation and decreation
The Spirit of God
Separation/order/holiness
Light and darkness
Heaven and earth
Life, blessing and fruitfulness
Kingdom/the Gospel
Covenant
Priesthood/sacred identity
Sabbath/rest/sacred time
Temple/sacred space
Trees/gardens
Wisdom and instruction
Testing
Sin, curse, and death
Sacrifice/atonement
Exile
Re-creation



WEEK ONE





THE ORIGIN OF EVERYTHING

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:1 aloud at least three times.

MEDITATE

2. According to this passage, answer the following questions the best you can without using outside resources. (Note whether any of these questions is difficult to answer and also whether you are tempted to add to what the text actually says or to jump ahead to the rest of the chapter to find an answer.)

Who created?

What was created?

When was it created?

Why was it created?

How was it created?

3. Which of the above questions do you think, is the most important? Why?

4. Which of these questions seems most controversial to you? In other words, when people debate about the origin of the universe, which of these questions sparks the most disagreement? Why do you think that is? Which question, if any, provokes uncertainty in you?

Hebrew key word: Elohim (pron. EL-OH-HEEM). The Hebrew word for God in the very first verse of the Bible is *Elohim*. Rather than a name, *Elohim* is a title. God, the One who made the heavens and the earth, is before all and above all, the supreme God above all gods. Fascinatingly, *Elohim* is also a plural noun in Hebrew. (More on this on Day 2.) *Elohim* is the Author of the cosmic origin story in which we find ourselves. There is no one higher than or previous to God. Some scholars even include the connotation of Creator with this title. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to *Elohim*/God as “our Father.” Ancient Near Eastern peoples, including the Israelites, thought quite differently about creation than many modern people. Where we want to primarily determine how God created in a material sense, ancient peoples thought of creation as related to functionality. There was no question in their minds that creation was a divine act and that all “matter” had a divine source. What God wanted them specifically to know and what would have been more important to them, is that not only did He make everything, but He gave everything its order, purpose, and function.

RESPOND

5. What are some of the biggest questions you have about your origin? Do your questions have to more to do with “material” matters (i.e. where your material body came from) or “functional” matters (i.e. why you are here and what is your purpose) Spend some time talking to God and journaling questions or thoughts you might have. End your time with a prayer of thanks to the Author and Father of our origin story.

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:1-2 three times, at least once aloud.

MEDITATE

2. How does the Bible describe the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2? Try to picture it in your mind. Maybe even try your hand at drawing it on a separate piece of paper. (No one is looking to see if you are an artist!) Does it sound like someplace you would like to be?

Hebrew key word: tohu va-bohu (pron. TOH'-HOO VAH-BOH'-HOO) is a Hebrew phrase translated into English as “formless and void.” Tim Mackie of Bible Project translates it as “wild and waste.” The ancient understanding of this phrase would be a place that is uninhabitable and unsuitable for life, specifically like a desert. Later Bible accounts that take place in a wilderness setting are meant to connect back to this original *tohu va-bohu* state. These include the wilderness of Sinai, where the Israelites find themselves in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and the wilderness in which Jesus was tempted (see Matthew 4:1-11). In the ancient mind, the wilderness was an undesirable place, a place most people would avoid, even a place to be feared. Right at the outset of Genesis, then, a problem is presented: *tohu va-bohu*. But as we will soon see, what humans think of as a problem, God has orchestrated as an opportunity.

3. Remember yesterday when we learned that the word for God in verse 1 is the plural Hebrew noun *Elohim*? We now have God expressed by a second term in verse 2: the Spirit. We begin to gain an understanding for the plural title. In some mysterious way, God is One and more than one all at the same time. Look up the passages below and record what each tells you about the Spirit.

Job 33:4

Psalms 104:24-30

John 1:32

John 6:63

Figurative language: The word picture in Genesis 1:2 is deliberate. Over the tohu va-bohu, right on top of the darkness, the Spirit hovers like a mother bird over a nest. This is an origin story, after all, a birth account. No human or animal mother could be as pregnant with expectation and anticipation as the Spirit of God about to create. Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey often observed that God is a Father who acts like a mother.

4. Does this word picture of God resonate with you? In what way?

5. Now read John 1:1-5. According to John, who else was present in the first verses of Genesis with God and the Spirit? What is His name and how is He described?

Genesis 1:3, “And God said...” Do you see the hint of the Word, Jesus, there? The first audience would not have known the full significance of the language here, but the Gospel of John reveals it to us. Into the chaotic and dark emptiness, utterly unsuitable for life, God speaks life and shines light. The supreme *Elohim* has a plan and purpose. “In Him was Life and that Life was the Light of all mankind. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5)

RESPOND

6. Does *tohu va-bohu* seem like a problem for God? When your life or the world seems a dark and chaotic wasteland, how can the knowledge that God has been the Life and Light from the beginning encourage or comfort you? In what areas of your life or the world might you ask God to make you aware of His Life and Light?

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:1-25. Consider reading the passage aloud or listening to an audio version of it.

MEDITATE

2. What words or phrases are repeated in this passage? Mark them in your Bible or list them below.

Hebrew key word: yom (pron. YOHM) The Hebrew word *yom* is translated into English here as “day” and can refer to a “day, time, year,” or more generally “as a division of time,” or, “a general time period.” Think of the English expression, “In my day, we used to...” *Yom* was a word that could have a definite length, i.e., “24 hours,” or a more undefined length, depending on context. In Jewish culture and throughout the Bible, a 24-hour solar day begins with evening when the sun goes down. Just as creation began with darkness, so does each day.

3. Now fill in the chart according to Genesis 1:3-25

WHAT WAS FORMED	HOW (WITH WHAT) WAS IT FILLED?
DAY 1:	DAY 4:
DAY 2:	DAY 5:
DAY 3:	DAY 6:

4. Do you notice anything that feels chronologically unexpected? This passage is structured in a parallel pattern. Day 1 corresponds to Day 4, Day 2 with Day 5, and Day 3 with Day 6. This structure is a common literary design technique in the bible called a chiasm. The repetition, chiastic structure, and other elements in this literary unity suggest the account is poetic. If this is a narrative poem about creation, how does that affect the way a reader should interpret it?

RESPOND

5. Does seeing this passage as a story account rather than a page from a science textbook change how you understand it? Think about how elements in stories, even true ones, can be rearranged out of strict chronological order to serve the storyteller's particular purpose. What might God's purpose be in directing the author to order the story of the creation of "the heavens and the earth" in the way He did in Genesis 1?

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read through Genesis 1:1-2:3.

MEDITATE

2. Separation is a very important concept in the creation account of the Bible. Look through the text and circle every instance of the words separate or separated. Also note anytime the text implies separation, for example when it uses the phrase “...according to their kinds...” What does all this separating tell you about God? About His creation?

3. How is the seventh day separated from all the others? Note anything that is different about it. What do you think it means that God made the seventh day “holy?” It may help to look up the word “holy” in a dictionary.

Hebrew key word: qadas (pron. KAW-DASH). This word carries with it the meaning of “to be set apart, be consecrated, make holy” or “to keep apart or separate.” Interestingly, Genesis 2:3 is the only instance of the word *qadas* in the entire book of Genesis. However as we have already seen, the concept of separation is clearly important to God, and it is notable that the seventh day receives this specific designation. Throughout the Bible, the number seven has a special significance that suggests completion or holiness. This verse introduces a very important Biblical concept: sacred time. We will explore this further in Week 6. Notice also that God is the one who makes something holy; He sets apart. When something or someone is made holy, it is receiving an action of God. Later on, when people make something or someone holy, their action should always agree with God’s own action.

4. Look up the following passages and note what you find about “holy” or “holiness” in each.

Exodus 13:2

Exodus 19:23

Exodus 20:8-11

Leviticus 11:44-45

1 Peter 1:14-16

RESPOND

5. The word holy can both have positive and negative connotations in our culture, but the Bible almost always shows it in a positive light. What might it mean for you to be holy? How can you live in such a way that puts action to your God-given holiness? Spend some time thanking God for making us holy through His Son Jesus Christ, and giving us the Holy Spirit so that we might live out our holiness.

DAY FIVE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:26-2:14 at least 3 times.

Cultural key: Genesis 1:1-2:3 is one literary unit, and 2:4 begins a new literary unit. The chapter divisions in our contemporary Bibles do not reflect the original and natural structure of the Hebrew. At Genesis 2:4, “This is the account of” is the beginning of a second retelling of creation. See comments on birth accounts in the Introduction to this study guide.

MEDITATE

2. We will spend focused time on humankind and relationships next week and the week after. For now, note how God provided for His creation, and specifically for humankind’s physical needs in today’s passage. Make a list of everything He gave them.

3. Do you think God left anything out that humankind needed? List anything you can think of.

4. Look up the following passages and note what they say about our needs.

Psalm 23:1

Matthew 6:31-32

2 Corinthians 9:8

Philippians 4:19

2 Peter 1:3

RESPOND

5. Often we have the tendency to focus on what we don't have, what we feel we lack. But the Bible is clear that followers of Jesus have everything we need in Christ. That means that even if we don't have all we materially need, in Christ we have enough, even if we have nothing. What are some ways you try to provide for yourself outside of Christ? What is one step you can take toward more fully trusting God to provide for you?

6. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me understand that I am _____.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. When people debate about the origin of the universe, which of these questions sparks the most disagreement, in your opinion: who, what, when, why, or how? Why do you think that is?
2. Does seeing Genesis as a story account rather than a page from a science textbook change how you understand it?
3. In what ways is Genesis 1 primarily about the “who” and the “why” of creation (a functional account of creation), rather than about the “how” (a material account of creation)? Note any words or phrases in Genesis 1 that describe God forming and filling and ordering and assigning purpose to parts of creation.
4. What are some of the biggest questions you have about your origin? Do your questions have to do more with “material” matters (i.e. Where your material body came from?) or “functional” matters (i.e. Why you are here and what is your purpose?) What value is there in understanding the origin of everything as told in Genesis?
5. From your perspective, when God created everything, did He provide human beings with everything they needed? Why or why not?
6. How do you try to find provision outside of Christ?

LIFE GROUP NOTES

WEEK TWO





THE ORIGIN OF IDENTITY

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:26-27. Write these two verses out below.

2. Now choose at least one different translation and read the same passage. For instance, if you usually read the NIV, take a look at the NLT or NASB, or vice versa. (You can access multiple translations at www.youversion.com or www.biblegateway.com.) Are there any differences between versions in the language used? Note any here.

MEDITATE

3. What stands out to you in these verses?

4. Why do you think the Bible says “Let *us* [emph. added] make humankind in our image”? (Hint: Think back to week 1 and our discussion of *Elohim*.) What do you think “in our image” means?

RESPOND

5. Do you believe that you are made in God’s image? Is that easy or difficult to believe? Why? Spend some time thanking God for making human beings, including you, in God’s own image.

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:26-27 again. Then read Genesis 2:7.

MEDITATE

2. Yesterday, we began to explore what the Bible means that humans were created “in the image of God.” Today let’s dig a little deeper, literally and figuratively. First, the literal—what do verses 2:7 tell us that God made humans from? What was the raw material?

Hebrew key word: tselem (pron. AW-DAHM’ TSEH’-LEM). The Hebrew word for “image” is *tselem* and denotes in English, “image, likeness, semblance.” The Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon notes the relationship between the word *tselem* (translated “image”) in Genesis with other Hebrew words for “idol” or “statue” found elsewhere in the Bible. (See for example, Numbers 33:52; 1 Samuel 6:5; 2 Kings 11:18; Ezekiel 7:20) They all relate to the idea of cutting, carving, or fashioning, as making a figure out of stone, metal or clay to make a statue.

Did you catch that? The original audience for the Genesis accounts would almost certainly have been thinking of idol statues when they heard Genesis 1:26-27, as these would have been a very common feature in the pagan religions of the day. Now for those of you familiar with the 10 Commandments, before you get all up in arms, there is a reason why God prohibits His people in Exodus from making idol statues in the image of things in heaven above or the earth below: the reason is that God already made them. Most statues fashioned are representative of someone. *Elohim* “created humankind in our image, in our likeness” so that they could represent God. To be clear, in no way is the Bible saying that human beings were created to be worshiped like pagan idols. But every ancient Israelite knew that an idol statue stood in a temple and represented someone important: namely a god or a king who behaved like a god. The only people in an ancient society who would have been called *tselem* were kings, never ordinary people. The idea that ordinary people could somehow represent God would have been stunning. (More on this in a couple weeks.)

3. If God made human beings “in our *tselem*,” what do you think might be God’s purpose in doing so? How might human beings represent God?

4. There is one remaining “ingredient” that we have not yet discussed in the creation of humankind. Using verse 7, fill in the blanks:

“the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and
“_____ into his _____ the
_____ of _____.”

5. Where did man’s first breath come from? What was the result of this action?

Hebrew key word: nephesh (pron. NEH’-FE-HSH). The Hebrew word *nephesh* is translated into English as “creature” or “soul” or “being.” Here it is accompanied by the Hebrew word *hay* (pron. KHAH’-EE), meaning “living.” Therefore we have a “living being,” or “living creature.”

RESPOND

6. Genesis 2:7 is not the first occurrence of *nephesh* in Genesis. Look back at Genesis 1:20-21, 24, and 30. What else is referred to in this way? Based on everything you have learned this far, what distinguishes human beings/creatures from all other living beings/creatures?

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:27 again.

MEDITATE

2. God makes it clear that humankind has two distinct parts.

What are they? _____ and _____. Do you think either part can adequately represent God alone? Why or why not?

3. Does Genesis 1:26-27 indicate that either part is better than or superior to the other? Why or why not?

Cultural key: Middle Eastern culture was, and still is, much more collective-focused than Western culture, especially modern Western culture. It is not uncommon to hear the question among Western Christians, “How can I be more like Jesus?” It’s not a bad question, but it’s a very individualistic way of thinking. What is reflected in Genesis is a different question, “How can human beings (as a whole) image and represent God?” That was always God’s design, and humanity in two distinct parts reflects that.

RESPOND

4. Since each and every human being is made in God's image, and each human being is unique, what does that say about each human being's value? How should you treat people, even people you may not always like or agree with? (Think about distinctions we make such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, financial situation, place of birth, etc.)

5. Do you hold any attitude or exhibit any behavior that contradicts that value? How do we project superiority toward other human beings?

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Luke 10:25-37.

MEDITATE

2. What do you think Jesus is saying in this parable that relates to Genesis 1:26-27?

3. Now read 1 John 4:7-8. Why does John say that we cannot say we love God if we do not love others?

RESPOND

4. How might you show love to a fellow image-bearer and “neighbor” this week?

DAY FIVE

Begin this day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. This week we have learned that God created humans in God's own image, as His representatives. We have discussed how everyone we encounter is made in God's image and how that should inform how we see and treat one another. How do you think human beings in general are doing as God's representatives? How are Christians in general doing as God's representatives, do you think? How are you doing as God's representative?

2. Read Hebrews 1:3a. Who is the "exact representation" of God?

3. In what ways did Jesus succeed where humans have failed?

4. What are some ways you try to find identity outside of Christ?

5. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me

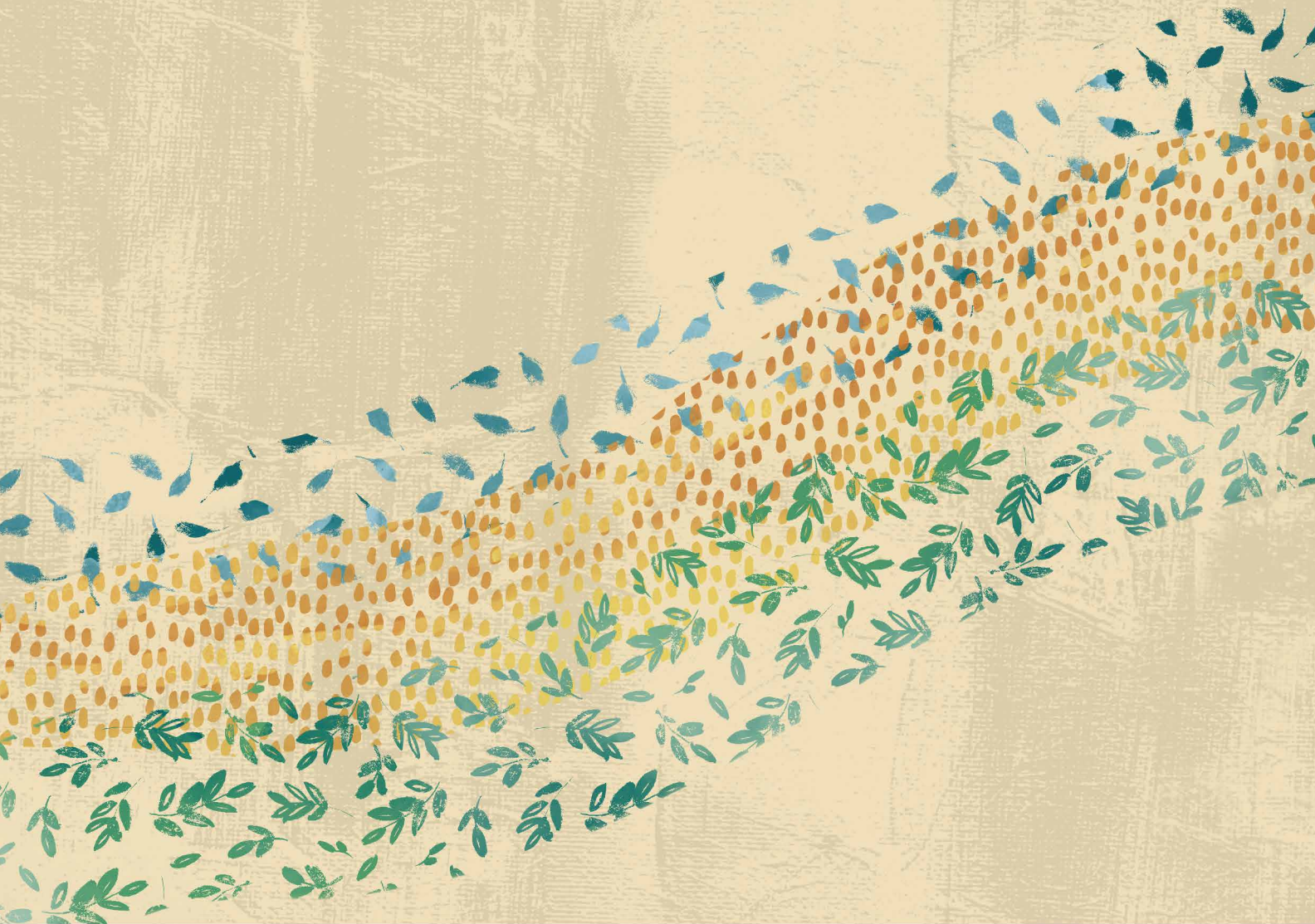
understand that I am _____.

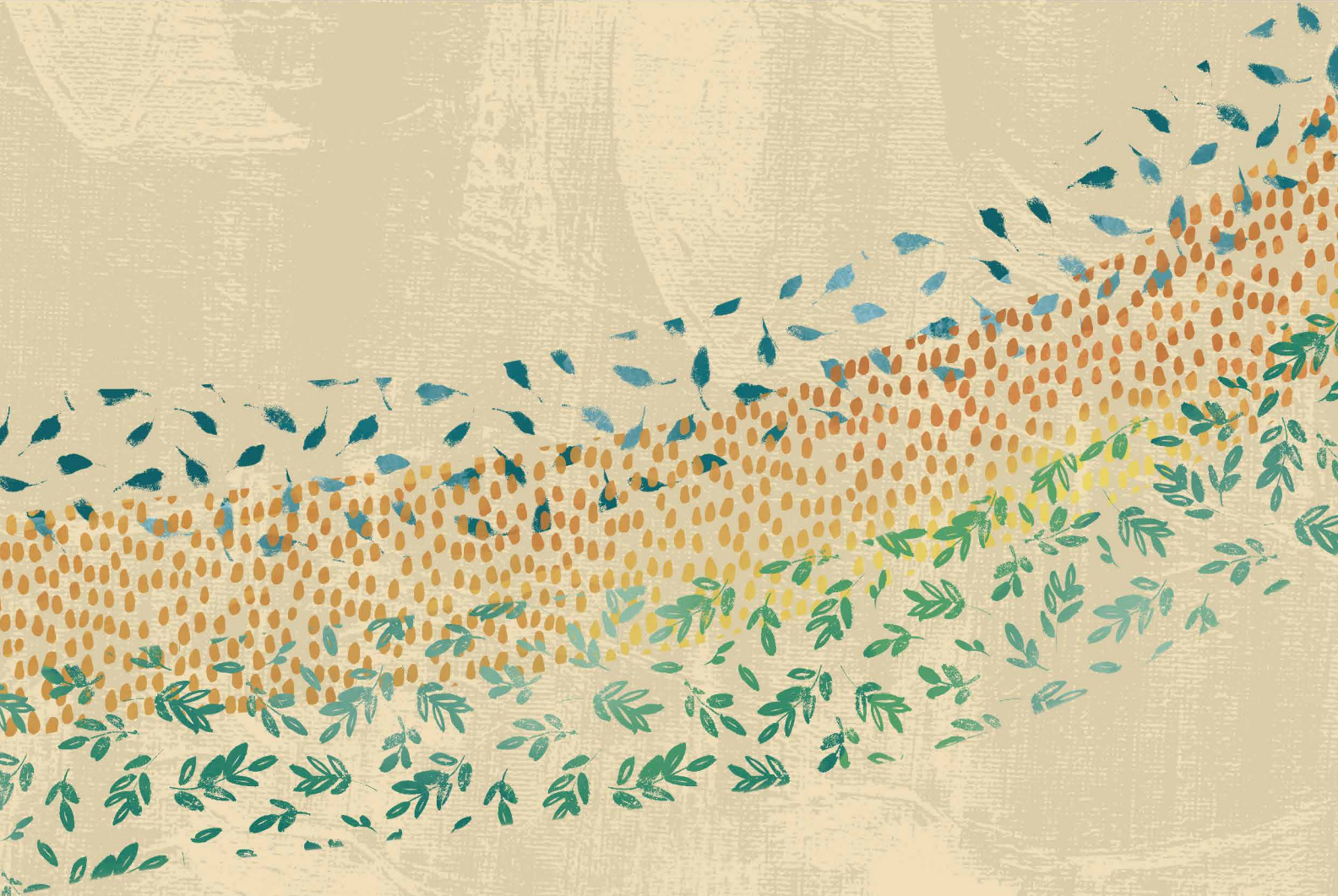
LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it means for humans to be made “in God’s image?”
2. What might be God’s purpose in making humans that way?
3. Can a human being image God alone? Why or why not?
4. Since each and every human being is made in God’s image, and each human being is unique, what does that say about each human being’s value? How should you treat people, even people you may not always like or agree with? (Think about distinctions we make such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, financial situation, place of birth, etc.) Why is this sometimes difficult?
5. Can you recount a time where you noticed feeling or treating someone as though their value, dignity, etc., was different from your own?
6. In what ways do you try to find identity outside of Christ?

LIFE GROUP NOTES

WEEK THREE





THE ORIGIN OF BELONGING & RELATIONSHIPS

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Recall what we have read so far in Genesis 1.

MEDITATE

2. Why do you think God created human beings? You can name more than one reason.

3. Read the following passages and note what each says about the relationship of God with humans.

Isaiah 43:1-12

Romans 8:15-16

Galatians 3:26

1 John 3:1a

RESPOND

4. After reading all these verses, how does the Bible say God sees you? Do you believe it? Why or why not?

5. Read Matthew 6:9. Notice how Jesus says, “Our Father,” and not “My Father”? Since Jesus says God is your Father, will you believe Him? For some of you this may be difficult, it may even feel impossible because of life circumstances, but how can you take a step toward seeing God as your Father today? Write it down here. If you already do see Him that way, write a prayer of thanks to Him for being your Father and wanting a relationship with you.

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. As we have already mentioned, 2:4 begins a second creation account, this one zooming in on the details of the origin of humankind. Read 2:4-25 and note any differences between this account and the first.

2. One difference you may have noted is that there is a change in how God is referred to between the first and second creation accounts. In the first account, God is designated by the title, *Elohim*. Look back at 2:4 and write here how God is referred to now. Can you think of any reasons for this change?

MEDITATE

Hebrew key word: God's name, YHWH (pron. YAH'-WAY). God has a name which He has revealed to humans in the Bible. In English translations of the Old Testament, God's name is written as the LORD, using small capital letters. But that is not really His name. The written form of the ancient Hebrew language only used consonants; no vowels were written down, but rather were filled in when the words were spoken. Because of this, God's name in Hebrew is written as four consonant characters or letters; in English, those letters are transliterated as YHWH. Because the Jewish people took very seriously the commandment in Exodus 20:7, "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God," they adopted out of reverence the practice of referring to God with a more generic title, *Adonai* (pron. AH'-DOH-NAHEE), which means "Lord." Later on, English versions adopted "LORD" when translating the Divine name, likely as a way to show respect. Every time you see "LORD" in your English Bible, God's proper name, YHWH is meant. A likely pronunciation for God's name is YAH'-WAY, sometimes written Yahweh. Beginning in Genesis 2:4, God is referred to in our English Bibles as "the LORD God," or "YHWH *Elohim*," using both the title from Ch. 1 and God's personal name.

3. The break in pattern here is intentional and meant to draw special attention to the man's situation. Just like *tohu va-bohu* was the problem presented in the first account, we now have a problem presented in this second account. How does God describe the man's problem? Why do you think God wants to highlight this?

4. Look back through Genesis 1:1-25 and count how many times you see the phrase, "And God saw that it was good." _____ Now read Genesis 2:18 again and note what God said for the first time.

Hebrew key word: bad (pron. BAD) Ironically the Hebrew word used for "alone" here is *bad*. (No, I am not making this up!) According to Strong's Concordance, the possible meanings of this word are as follows: "alone, by itself, besides, apart, separation."

RESPOND

5. There is another break in pattern here: up to this point, separation has been good and necessary for creation to flourish. Not here. The man is alone, separate, by himself. Something or someone, as it were, is missing, and it is not good. Do you like to be alone? Are there times in life where it is good to be alone? Describe one time in your life when you were alone or felt alone and it was difficult.

6. Now read Matthew 28:20b and write out the joyful and reassuring promise found there.

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 2:20b in the NIV. Whose name is mentioned for the first time?

MEDITATE

Hebrew key word: *adam* (pron. AH-DAHM'). The NIV uses the man's personal name Adam, beginning in 2:20. But other English translations don't begin using the moniker until chapter 3. A possible reason for the differences is that the man's Hebrew name, Adam, is the same Hebrew word for "man" or "mankind" or "humankind." To find the first use of the word, we have to look back to 1:26, "So God created *adam* in His own image." But why does God call humankind *adam*? As we learned last week in 2:7, God made humans out of the dust, and in Hebrew, the word for "dust" is *adamah*. Adam was made from the *adamah*, hence the name. So Adam the person bears the name of all humankind, and his name is a reminder of where he and all humans came from.

2. Read Genesis 2:18-20 and paraphrase what happens in these verses. Why do you think *Yahweh* takes the man through this process?

3. How do you think Adam felt at the realization that he is the only one of his kind? Now, with this in mind, can you think of a reason that the NIV begins to use Adam as a proper name in 2:20b?

RESPOND

4. Have you ever been in a situation or season of life when you were not technically alone, but you felt like you were “the only one of your kind” in some way? Maybe you are in a class or grade at school with no close friends; maybe you are the only one you know who has a particular interest or hobby; maybe you are going through a difficult time or illness and you feel like no one can understand; maybe you have a particular struggle or sin that you feel no one else does.

For the man, this is a defining moment, and perhaps right in the middle of it, he is reminded that just as he gave the animals a name, God had given him a name, an identity. God knew him and called him by name, and though he was alone, God was not finished with humankind yet. Maybe your circumstance that seems “not good” in the present, is “not good” because God isn’t finished yet. If you feel you are currently in the middle of a situation or season where you feel like the “only one of your kind,” what good news might God have for you?

5. Look up Isaiah 43:1 and write out the second half of the verse here.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, God says to you, “_____ (fill in your name here),

I have called you by name; you are _____.”

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 2:18 and 21-22. How did God address the problem of the man being alone, i.e., “the only one of his kind?” He says He will make “a _____ suitable for him.”

MEDITATE

Hebrew key word: ezer (pron. AY'-ZER). The Hebrew word translated in many Bibles as “helper” is the Hebrew word, *ezer*. When God said that He would make an *ezer* for Adam, we need to understand what that word would have meant in its original context. When we think of a “helper” in a more modern context, we might think of an assistant, a subordinate, someone lesser in position or authority. This is NOT the original idea of *ezer* in these verses. Jen Wilkin, in her Bible study God of Creation: A Study of Genesis 1-11, says in her Week 4 video teaching, “Created in the Image of God,” that the word helper means “necessary ally” or “indispensable ally.”

2. To help us understand, we need to look at where else in the Bible this word occurs and whom it describes. Look up the following passages and note to whom *ezer* is referring in each.

Exodus 18:4

Psalm 33:20

Hosea 13:9

RESPOND

3. The majority of the instances of *ezer* in the Hebrew Bible (16 out of 19) refer to God Himself as *ezer*. Does this surprise you at all? Why or why not?

4. Now let's look in the New Testament. Read John 14:16 and 26. Who does Jesus refer to as “the Helper” here?

Greek key word: parakletos (pron. PAR-AK'-LAY-TOS). In John 14:16 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit an “*allos parakletos*” According to Strong's Concordance, Gr. 6561 and 6562, the word *parakletos* refers to someone who is called to stand alongside you as a helper, like a defense attorney. The word just preceding it is the word “another,” which is the Greek word, *allos*, meaning one just like. So in the Holy Spirit, we have an *allos parakletos*, a Helper just like Jesus.

5. Does *ezer* in the OT or *parakletos* in the NT seem to denote someone of lesser value, status, or ability? Do these verses change your idea of *ezer* and its common English translation “helper” in Genesis 2:18 and 20. If so, how? Is this different from what you may have been taught or believe?

6. Have you ever felt lesser-than or like a second-class citizen because you serve or work in a behind-the-scenes or support-type position? Have you ever felt that way at home or in a family situation because of your gender or age? Briefly describe here.

7. What good news might the LORD have for you today?

DAY FIVE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 2:21-23 and write it in your own words here.

MEDITATE

2. What was Adam's response to God's creation of woman? How does he describe her? Does he focus on their differences or their similarities?

Imagine Adam going through the process of naming the animals as they pass before him: "This one is called giraffe. This one is called butterfly. This one is called sheep." Now, look at verse 23. A more literal translation of the Hebrew here might be,

"Adam said, "This one is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called woman, for this one was taken out of man,"

To sum up, Adam, after examining each of the animals and recognizing that none of those ones correspond to him or were of his own kind, when presented with this new creation of God, recognizes "This one is like me. This one is my own kind." As Jen Wilkin puts it, "Not like me, not like me, not like me...like me!"

RESPOND

3. Has there ever been a time in your life where you were feeling alone and God provided another person or people to come alongside you? What was that like?

4. Do you have anyone in your life currently who is “like you,” a companion or friend that you can thank Him for? Write out a prayer of thanks to Him for that person or people here. If you don’t have someone, write out a prayer here asking God to provide someone and thanking Him for hearing your prayer. He knows what you need.

5. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me

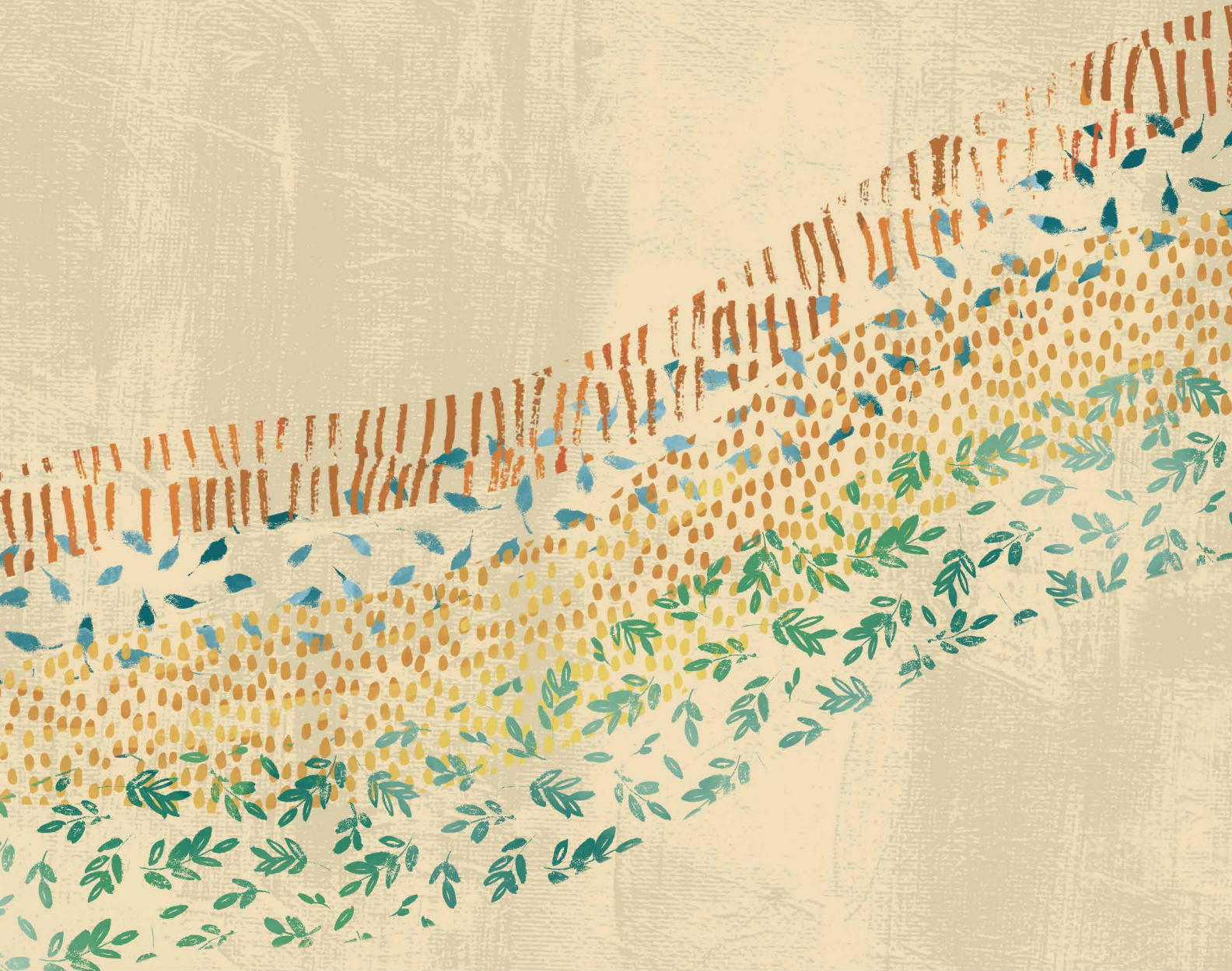
understand that I am _____.

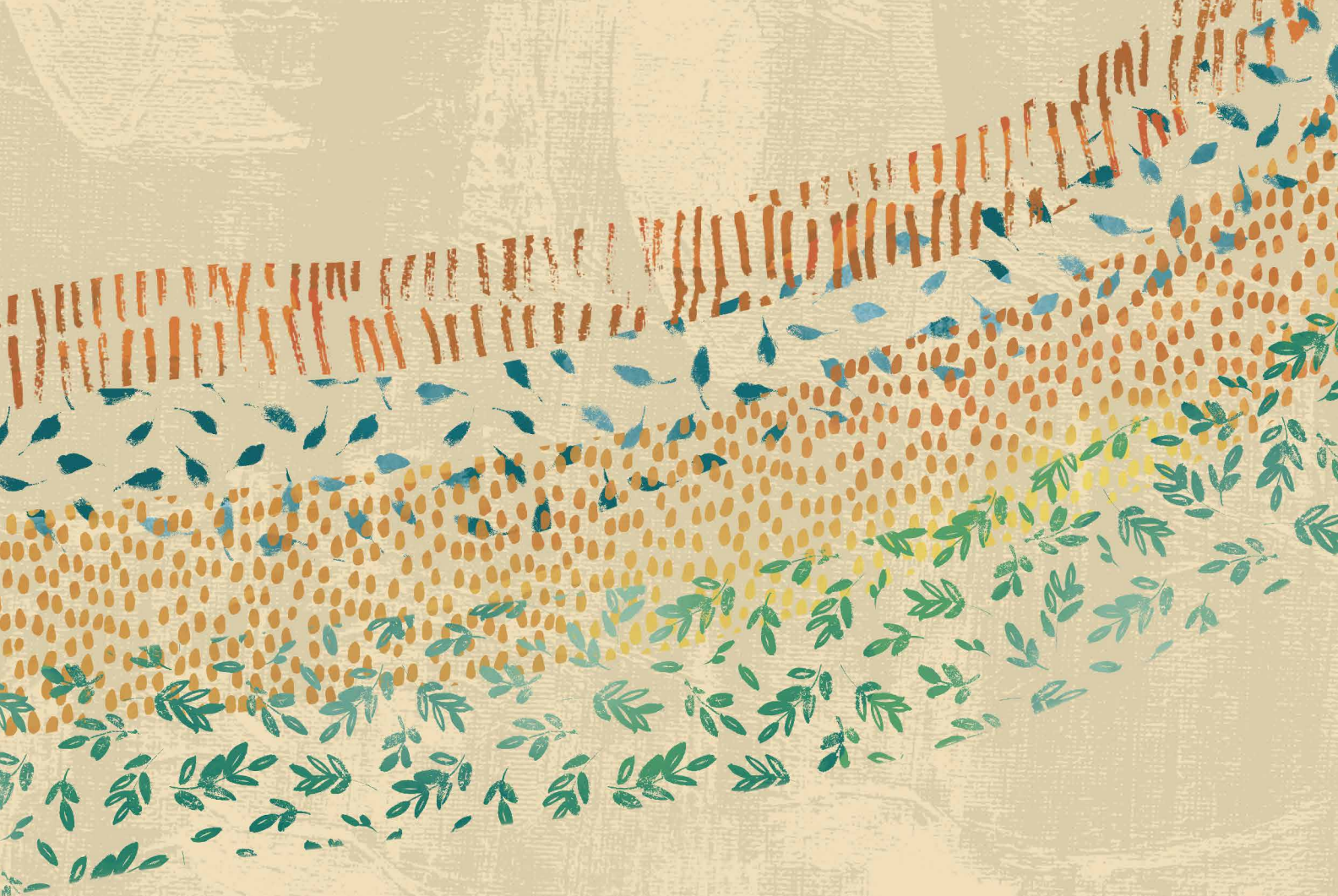
LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think God created human beings? You can name more than one reason.
2. Naming in the ancient world was very important, as it conveyed identity and purpose. In Genesis 1, “God called” is a way of saying that God gave identity and purpose to the things in His creation. When God gave the man the task of naming the animals, God was allowing the man to share His creative authority. Look up Ephesians 3:14-15 together. What do you think it means that “every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” from the Father?
3. Is it easy or difficult for you to think of God as Father? Why or why not?
4. What about relationships is easy for you? What is difficult? In what ways do you try to find belonging outside of Christ?
5. Who in your life currently is “like you,” a companion or friend that you can thank Him for? If you can’t think of anyone, what is one step you could take toward seeking relationships and doing “life together” with other Christ followers?
6. Can you think of someone who enriches your life on account of their difference from you?

LIFE GROUP NOTES

WEEK FOUR





THE ORIGIN OF SEXUALITY & MARRIAGE

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:4-25 again.

MEDITATE

2. God made humankind in two parts. What are they, according to Genesis 1:27?

3. Is there any indication in the text that one part is better than or superior to the other? Do you think that the Church historically in general has done a good job or bad job of making this clear? Why do you think so?

As we have already noted, when presented with the woman, Adam himself focuses on how he and the woman are alike. Adam also introduces a new word for “man” in Genesis 2:23, the Hebrew word *ish* (pron. EESH’). We might translate this verse as follows:

“Adam said, ‘This one is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called *‘ishshah*’ because this one was taken out of *‘ish*.’”

Note the similarities between the Hebrew words *ish* and *ishshah*. *Ish* may be translated as “man,” “male,” or “husband,” while *ishshah* may be translated “woman,” “female,” or “wife.” Just like the English words man and woman, the two Hebrew words are very closely related.

RESPOND

Now look closely at verse 21. Upon casual reading, you might get the idea that God made a little incision in Adam's side, plucked out one rib and closed him back up like he had an appendectomy, except that is not necessarily what the author of Genesis had in mind.

According to Shara Drimalla and The Bible Project team in their online article, "3 Love Stories in the Bible That Help Us Rethink Romance," the original Hebrew conveys something markedly different. Here is what they say:

"We often talk about this as though God took a rib from Adam and created Eve with it, but the Hebrew word *tsela* (often translated as "rib") is never used as an anatomical term in any other passage of Scripture. Outside of Genesis 2, the word is mainly used to describe the architecture of the tabernacle or temple (e.g., Exod. 25-38; 1 Kgs. 6-7; Ezek. 41). The Biblical authors use *tsela* to refer to the two halves of the ark of the covenant, the two halves of the temple, and the two halves of the new Jerusalem. So God's creation of Eve is a process of dividing Adam in half and then building Eve from one side of him. We get a portrait of two humans, each one half of a united whole...."

4. Does this idea as presented make more sense to you than the "rib" scenario as traditionally translated and interpreted? Why or why not?

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. Yesterday, we introduced the idea that the LORD God created human beings, male and female, as two halves of a whole: *ish* and *ishshah*; man and woman; husband and wife. Now read Genesis 2:21-24. After God cuts Adam in two and makes the woman, his wife, the Bible goes on to describe their specific relationship to each other. Write out verse 24 below. What word comes to mind when you read this verse? (Hint, think of a wedding ceremony.)

2. Last week, we discussed *ezer* in the context of general human relationships, and also in the relationship between God and humans. Since the word is used by God here to specifically describe the second half of the human, the woman, as she relates to the man, let's talk about what *ezer* might be in the context of marriage. The phrase used in both these verses is *ezer kenegdo* (pron. AY'-ZER KEH-NEHG'-DOH), which the NIV translates as "helper suitable for him." Look up this verse in the following translations and write out the wording used for this phrase.

NLT:

ESV:

NASB:

NKJV:

As you can see, there are a wide range of wordings that have been used to translate this phrase from Hebrew. Let's look more closely.

Hebrew key word: neged (pron. NEH'-GEHD). According to the Blue Letter Bible Hebrew Interlinear, the word's possible usages include "in front of," "before your face," "corresponding to," "parallel to," "in the sight of." Shara Drimalla of Bible Project writes, "A helpful paraphrase of Genesis 2:18 might be: 'It is not good for the human to be solitary. I will make one who can deliver him from his inability to fulfill the divine commission alone, one who mirrors him.'" What Adam needed was an equal partner he could look in the eye and converse with face-to-face so that they could obey God and carry out His commission together.

RESPOND

3. Does this add any meaning for you to the phrase God uses? Do you think this meaning has been conveyed adequately in any English translation you have read thus far? Why or why not?

4. Sadly, throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity, women and wives have not always been seen or treated as necessary allies and equal partners in keeping with this verse. Why do you think that might be?

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. Today we introduce a concept that may be unfamiliar, but is central to how God relates to people. The concept is covenant. Look up the word in a standard dictionary, like Merriam-Webster's or dictionary.com and write the definition you find here.

2. The definition you found probably had something to do with a formal agreement or promise between two or more people or groups. We don't typically make or enter into many covenants in our modern lives. We have contracts and legal releases and such. But covenant was a standard and indispensable feature of ancient cultures, including the Jewish people. In a time with few written law codes, transient governments, nomadic lifestyles, and the unpredictable potential for spontaneous violence, covenants were how people related to each other on a formal basis. Kings, rulers, chiefs, clans, families, and individuals entered into a variety of covenants regularly. And covenant is crucial to our understanding of relationships in the Bible. What, if anything, do you know about covenant? Can you think of a modern example of a covenant?

Hebrew key word: berith (pron. BER-EETH'). The Hebrew word *berith* means "covenant," and occurs at least 270 times in the Old Testament. It is first used in Scripture in Genesis 6:18, where God tells Noah that a flood is coming that will wipe out the whole earth's population, but that Noah and his family will be spared because God is making a covenant with them. But what is a covenant? A covenant is a formal, legal, and binding agreement between two or more parties that establishes a permanent relationship between them according to specific stated stipulations. A covenant was entered into voluntarily and usually only dissolvable by death. Even though this is the first time the word *berith* is used in Genesis, it is not the first time it is described, because the first human covenant mentioned is the one we've been studying this week: marriage.

3. Some of the most famous and prominent covenants in the Bible are the covenants God made with Abraham (See Genesis 12 and 17), Moses and the Israelite people (Exodus 19-24) and David (2 Samuel 7). In fact our English word testament, as in “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” is synonymous with the word covenant. Let’s complete a short checklist to see how marriage is a covenant. Look at the following list and check all that apply to a marriage.

- Formal
- Legal
- Binding
- Agreement between 2 parties
- Establishes a relationship
- Permanent
- Specific, stated stipulations (think vows)
- Voluntary
- Dissolvable by death

RESPOND

4. Does it make sense that a marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, two “indispensable allies who correspond to each other and see eye-to-eye?” Why or why not?

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 2:24 again.

MEDITATE

2. This verse is quoted numerous times in the New Testament. Look up the following passages and note anything additional you learn about marriage:

Matthew 19:3-6

Mark 10:6-9

Ephesians 5:28-31

3. In what ways do you think a husband and wife become one flesh? How does the one flesh idea fit with what we have already learned?

4. Marriage is the foundational human relationship that God created, and with marriage, God intended to build flourishing, healthy societies. It is the how of the very first commandment God gave to humans. Look at Genesis 1:28 again and write the first command here.

RESPOND

5. No wonder it is “not good” for man to be alone. There was no way for Adam to be fruitful and multiply without Eve, or vice versa. None. In fact, to this day, even with all our modern science, there is no way for human beings to reproduce—to make more of our kind and carry out the first command—without part of a man and part of a woman. And the best, most secure, nurturing, and stable environment in which to “be fruitful and multiply” is in a marriage relationship. It is God’s ideal. The marriage relationship between one man and one woman is the very first human relationship created and instituted by God, and it is His Plan A for them to accomplish the first mandate He gave them. Why is it wise to structure human relationships around covenant in this way?

6. Marriage was not just God’s original plan for fruitfulness and multiplication. Jesus affirmed its importance and centrality to healthy society. We have already looked at Matthew 19:3-6 and Mark 10:6-9. Knowing that Jesus Himself was not married when He walked the earth as a human being, why do you think He emphasizes and protects the marriage relationship?

7. Marriage was inextricably linked with “being fruitful and multiplying” in Genesis, and Jesus affirmed its sacredness. Now that Christ has come, are there any new ways of carrying out that command? Look at the following verses and note what you find:

Matthew 3:8

Matthew 28:18-20

John 15:1-17

Galatians 5:22-23

DAY FIVE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. The apostle Paul elaborates further on the importance of marriage in Ephesians 5:32. Look it up and write it here:

MEDITATE

2. On the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul (who was unmarried his whole life), that marriage is meant to be a picture of Christ's relationship with the Church. He calls marriage "a profound mystery" that reflects the beautiful relationship of Jesus Christ with His people, the Church. In fact, Jesus came to institute a brand new covenant with people, which is why the New Testament is named that way. In the death and resurrection of Christ, the old covenant (Old Testament) was fulfilled (see Matthew 5:17) and the new covenant was instituted (see Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). This new covenant in Jesus' own blood unites Him with His people into "one flesh" or "one body," just like a marriage does.

How does the Covenant relationship of Jesus Christ to His Church inform human marriage relationships? What does Paul say about it in Ephesians 5:22- 30?

3. Do we often see this level of commitment, love, respect, and sacrifice in today's marriages, even "Christian" ones? Even if you are not married, how might you protect marriage out of respect for it and to honor Christ? If you are married?

4. Since Jesus and the Church are in a mysterious and wonderful covenant that is compared to a marriage, they are now, as it were, “one flesh,” just like a husband and wife. Because of this, the Church is often referred to as the Body of Christ. Look at the following passages and note what each says on the subject:

1 Corinthians 12:12; 27

Ephesians 5:23

Ephesians 1:22

Colossians 1:24

Ephesians 4:12; 15-16

RESPOND

5. What does it mean to you that you are in a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ and now a part of His Body?

6. Now, read Galatians 3:26-28. What do you think Pauls means in these verses? How may we harmonize what Paul says with what we have learned about men, women, relationships, and marriage?

7. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me understand that I am _____.

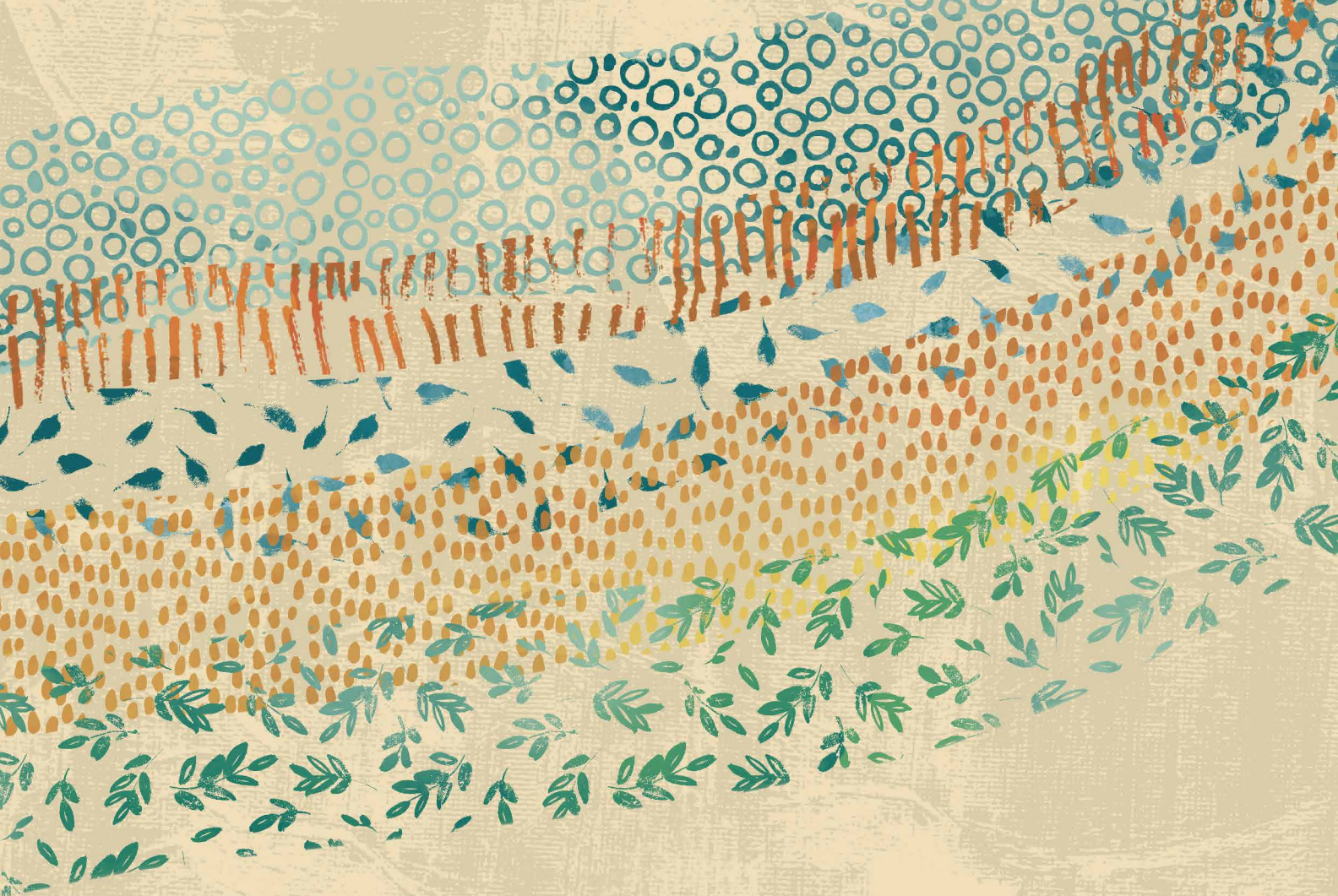
LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Is there any indication in this week's text that one part of humankind (male or female) is better than or superior to the other because of their difference? Do you think that the Church historically in general has done a good job or bad job of making this clear? Why or why not?
2. After cataloging and naming the animals and finding no suitable partner for himself in Genesis 2:19-20, what is the first and most significant thing the man observes about the woman in 2:23?
3. What is a covenant? Define it in your own words. Give any Biblical examples you can think of.
4. Why did God make marriage the foundational relationship for flourishing? How can we honor marriage, whether we are married or not?
5. What does it mean to you that you are in a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ and now a part of His Body? Name some privileges and responsibilities that are part of that relationship.

LIFE GROUP NOTES

WEEK FIVE





THE ORIGIN OF PURPOSE & THE KINGDOM

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:1.

MEDITATE

Cultural key: Kingdom. As we have already seen, Genesis is a series of related stories. What is not clear to us, but would have been abundantly clear to the early recipients, is that this is the story of a king and a kingdom. Ancient peoples, including the Israelites, were very well-acquainted with kings and kingdoms. They were integral to the ordering and governance of early societies. Kings were often considered gods or represented the gods, and as such, they were both seen as blessed and as having the ability to bless. They were considered completely separate from common people, and were often worshiped in some way. In addition, it was very common for royal rulers of ancient cultures to commission building projects, usually temples or palaces, on a grand scale to bring glory to the gods, themselves and their kingdoms. Stories of these accomplishments would be recorded and disseminated to those ends. The first audience for the book of Genesis had just been delivered by God from a corrupt king (pharaoh) and kingdom (Egypt), having been slaves employed in making bricks for that corrupt king's building project. Literarily and linguistically, the very first Genesis story has the elements of one of these accounts, but with very important and notable differences.

2. Read Exodus 1:8-10. How would you describe pharaoh, king of Egypt?
3. Now, contrast pharaoh with the LORD God as He is depicted in Genesis 1 and 2. Write down a few differences.

RESPOND

4. Have you ever thought of Genesis as a Kingdom story with God as its King? Why or why not?

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:28-2:17.

MEDITATE

2. We have already talked about how God provided everything humans needed for life, and how He created them in His image for relationship with Himself and other people and to represent Him. We will now examine the good purpose He gives them in the context of His Kingdom.

Verse 28 records the first thing God did after making humans.

“God _____ them.”

What do you think it means that God blessed them? What do you think blessing means?

Hebrew key word: barak (pron. BUH-ROCK'). The Hebrew word *barak* is translated as “blessing” and carries with it here the connotation of a divine gift of grace. In this sense, we very much see the idea of a Superior granting some undeserved benefit or favor to an inferior. According to Tim Mackie of Bible Project, blessing in the Bible “refers to flourishing and multiplication of life.” The concept of blessing was integral to ancient cultures, and there was often a “god” for every aspect of life: sun, moon, fertility, harvest, war, death, etc. Much of a common person’s life was consumed with subsistence, and central to surviving was trying to determine how to gain the “blessing” of the gods and avoid being “cursed” by them. Those who were royal, especially kings, were often considered “blessed,” but even those people could lose that favor if they offended the gods in some way. Elaborate religious systems and rituals were devised by peoples and cultures around the pursuits of trying to learn how to please and placate these gods. What is depicted in Genesis is different, though. Before the first humans have done anything, the God of this story “blessed them.” Humans had God’s divine favor right from the beginning. Astounding! All human beings, not just kings, were recipients of God’s blessing. Not only that, but God’s favor toward people was immediately linked to the abilities and responsibilities He gave them.

3. Do you often think of blessing as something material, or does your concept include the idea of ability? Have you ever thought of responsibility as a blessing?

4. Notably, God first creates and blesses the living creatures (see Genesis 1:22) and then subsequently creates and blesses human beings. And though we will find that the blessing He gives humans includes physical provision for them and the animals, the blessing first and foremost has to do with the ability and responsibility to “image” God. Look back through the text for today. List all the things that God gives humans to DO in this passage. (8 instructions and 1 prohibition)

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9) “you must not _____”

5. Why do you think God gave humans all these tasks and responsibilities? If God wanted all these things done, why didn't He do them Himself? Does God need help? Write any thoughts below.

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:26-2:17.

MEDITATE

2. On Day 2 of this week's study, we listed all of the things that God gave the humans to do and saw how those tasks and responsibilities were blessings from God to humankind. Now let's see how these are also ways that God, as King of the cosmos, shared His royal authority with them. In the blank next to each task or responsibility, write whether God is sharing with humans the ability to create, order, or rule.

“be fruitful” (1:28)

“Increase in number” (1:28)

“fill the earth” (1:28)

“subdue it [the earth]” (1:28)

“Rule over the fish...the birds....and every living creature...”

work the Garden in Eden (2:15)

take care of the Garden in Eden (2:15)

“eat freely from any tree in the garden” (2:16)

“you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good

and bad” (2:17)

3. Last week we looked closely at the first two things that God gave humans to do: “Be fruitful and increase in number.” (Genesis 1:28a) The last half of this verse adds further responsibility: “fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves along the ground.” (Genesis 1:28b) Let's look at this verse in a few different translations ESV, NLT, GNT, The Message (paraphrase) and notice any differences in language.

4. According to these verses, what were human beings tasked with “subduing?” Over what were they commanded to “rule?” In your own words, what might these instructions to humans mean?

Hebrew key words: mala (pron. MAW-LAY’), “to fill,” “to satisfy,” “to complete.” See Gen. 21:19 and 24:16, where *mala* means to “make full.” See Gen. 25:24 and Gen. 29:21, where *mala* means “to complete” or “to fulfill.” See Exod. 28:3 and Exod. 28:41, where *mala* means “to endow” or “to ordain.” All of these have a positive sense, and connote filling or completing for a good purpose.

kabash (pron. KAW-BASH’), “to subject,” “to subdue,” “to tread down.” This one is a little trickier, but remember, humans are supposed to imitate God in how they subject and subdue, and they are supposed to subject and subdue the earth, not other humans. In this sense, we might think of exploring uncharted territory and taming it to a good purpose, as in sustainable farming or responsible harvesting of resources. There are many places in the Bible that condemn human subjection (see 2 Chron. 28:10; Neh. 5:5; Esther 7:8; Jer. 34:16), so we must not conclude that is what God intends.

rada (pron. RAW-DAW’), “to rule,” “have dominion,” “to tread down.” Frequently, it connotes having dominion or authority over (see 1 Kings 4:24, 5:16, 9:23; Psalm 68:27, 72:8, 110:2). Importantly, this command is regarding how humans are to relate to animals, not other people, and means taking charge of and ordering, as when Adam named the living creatures. God specifically prohibits and condemns the Israelites from “ruling over with severity” fellow humans (see Lev. 25:43, 46, 53; Ezek. 34:4).

5. How have these initial Divine commands to humankind been misunderstood and misused throughout history? Still today? Does today’s study help you think of them differently? Why or why not?

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. Let's look further at humankind's place in God's Kingdom. We already know that humans were made in God's image, set apart from the rest of creation, given special covenant relationships, and were especially blessed in their identity and purpose. Read Genesis 2:15 again. Where did God place the man? What was he supposed to do there?

Hebrew key word: gan (pron. GAN'), meaning "garden" or "enclosure." Remember our discussion of idols, *tselem*, from previous weeks? In ancient Middle Eastern cultures, this term referred either to a) kings as representatives or embodiments of a god/gods, or b) idol statues placed in a temple to physically represent a god or king. Here in Genesis, then, God is described as making *tselem* "in Our image" and then placing the *tselem* in a Garden enclosure in Eden. This garden is an especially sacred space: where the heavens and the earth overlap, right at the center of God's cosmic temple. Light bulbs of recognition were going off in the minds of the first listeners: God was making humankind as royal rulers and representatives, placing them in the heart of His temple, and giving them priestly duties. God was preparing a place where He could dwell with humans, and where they could serve and worship Him. Humankind collectively is a race of royal priests of *Yahweh*, the cosmic Creator and King.

2. The two responsibilities related to the garden-temple space are "to work it" and "to keep it," in Hebrew *abad* (pron. AW-BAHD') and *shamar* (pron. SHAW-MAHR'). First let's look at the meaning of *abad*, "to work." Look up these verses and note what you find:

Genesis 3:23; 4:12; 29:15 and 18

Deuteronomy 5:9; 7:4; 10:12; 11:13

Numbers 3:7-8; 8:19 and 22

3. Now let's look at *shamar*, “to keep.”

Genesis 3:24; 4:9; 17:9-10; 18:19

Exodus 19:5

Leviticus 18:4-5

Abad is a Hebrew word with rich meaning. Humans can *abad* or “cultivate” the ground, as in agriculture. They can *abad* or “serve/worship” God as priests in a sacred space, like the tabernacle. And they can *abad* by fearing, obeying, and loving God. *Shamar* likewise has layers of meaning in Hebrew, including “guard,” as in protecting a place or person, “keep,” as in following or adhering to a covenant, and “observe,” as in commands or laws.

RESPOND

4. How serious are these responsibilities, do you think? What might the first hearers of Genesis have thought at the revelation that everyone was intended to engage in these divinely appointed tasks, not just kings or priests?

5. Look up authority in a dictionary and write the definition here. How does it strike you to think of God as a King who shares His royal authority with human beings? Is it surprising in any way?

DAY FIVE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. Beyond Genesis, God still desired His people to serve and worship Him and to keep His covenant and follow His commands. Look up the following passages and note what you learn:

Exodus 19:6

Isaiah 61:6

2. Now, look in the New Testament to find out how that extends to us.

1 Peter 2:9

Revelation 1:6

3. As the ultimate King and Royal Representative, Jesus is our example to follow in fulfilling humankind's purposes. What do the following passages have to say about how Jesus served?

Mark 10:42-45

John 13:12-15

Philippians 2:3-8

4. In light of Jesus, how are we to serve? Note what you find.

Matthew 5:14-16

Matthew 25:35-40

Romans 12:1-13

1 Peter 4:10-11

Galatians 5:13-14

RESPOND

5. As the first humans found, the Israelites and we have found as well: serving God is a high and holy calling and cannot be accomplished apart from His help. To fulfill our purpose, we must depend on Him. In what ways do you try to find purpose apart from or without Christ? What part of God's purpose for you is He calling your attention to? How may you trust and obey Him more fully in that?

6. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me understand that I am _____.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought of Genesis as a Kingdom story? Why or why not? How does it strike you to think of God as a King who shares His authority with human beings? Is it surprising in any way?
2. Do you often think of blessing as something material, or does your concept include the idea of ability? Have you ever thought of responsibility as a blessing?
3. In what ways do you try to find purpose outside of Christ?
4. The Bible calls followers of Jesus “a royal priesthood.” Like the humans in the garden, we are called to “work” in His Kingdom and “keep/guard” His covenant. How do we do that today? Is there something specific God is calling you to do?
5. As the ultimate King and Royal Representative, Jesus used His power to serve. What do the following passages have to say about how Jesus served?

Mark 10:42-45

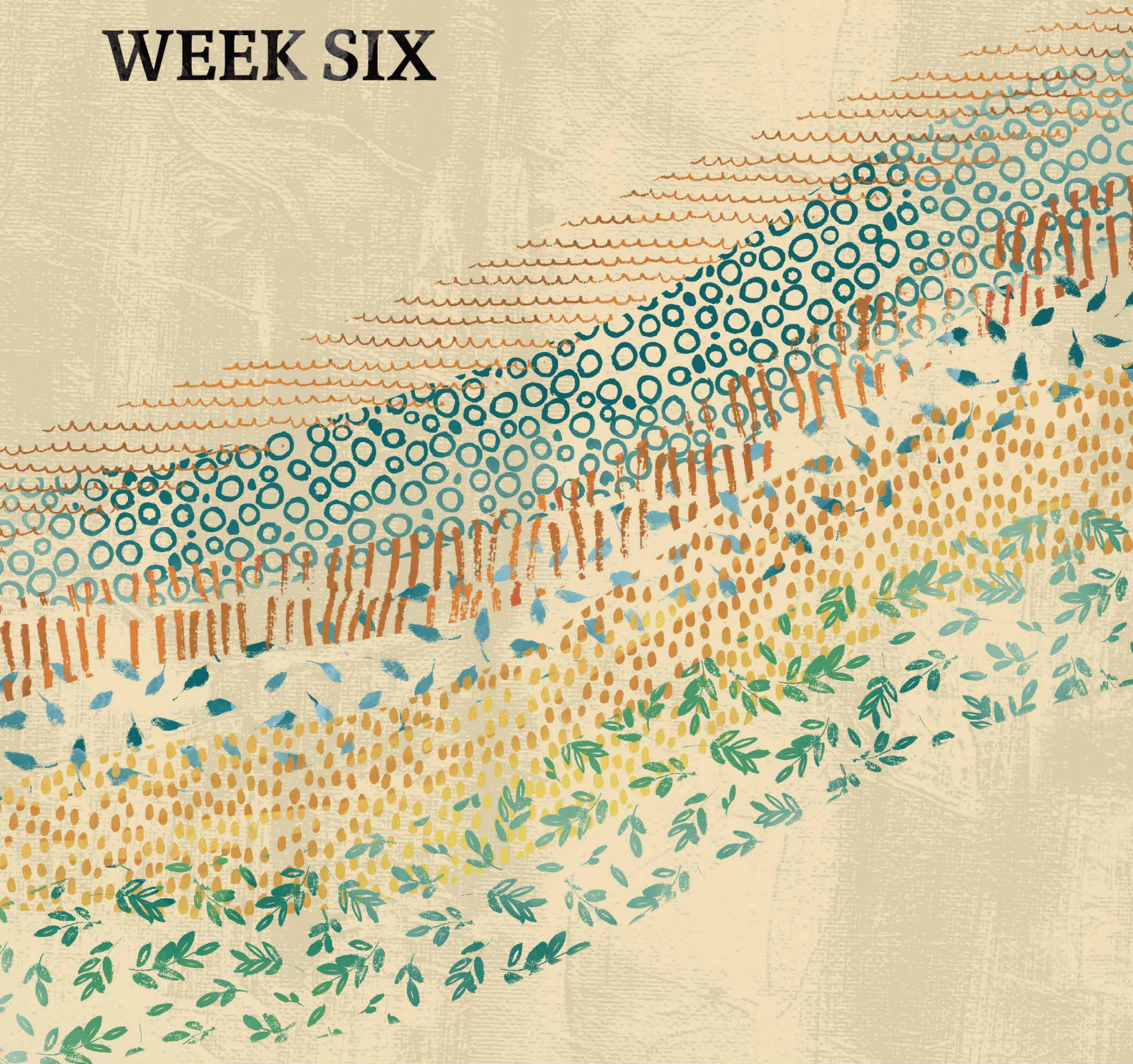
John 13:12-15

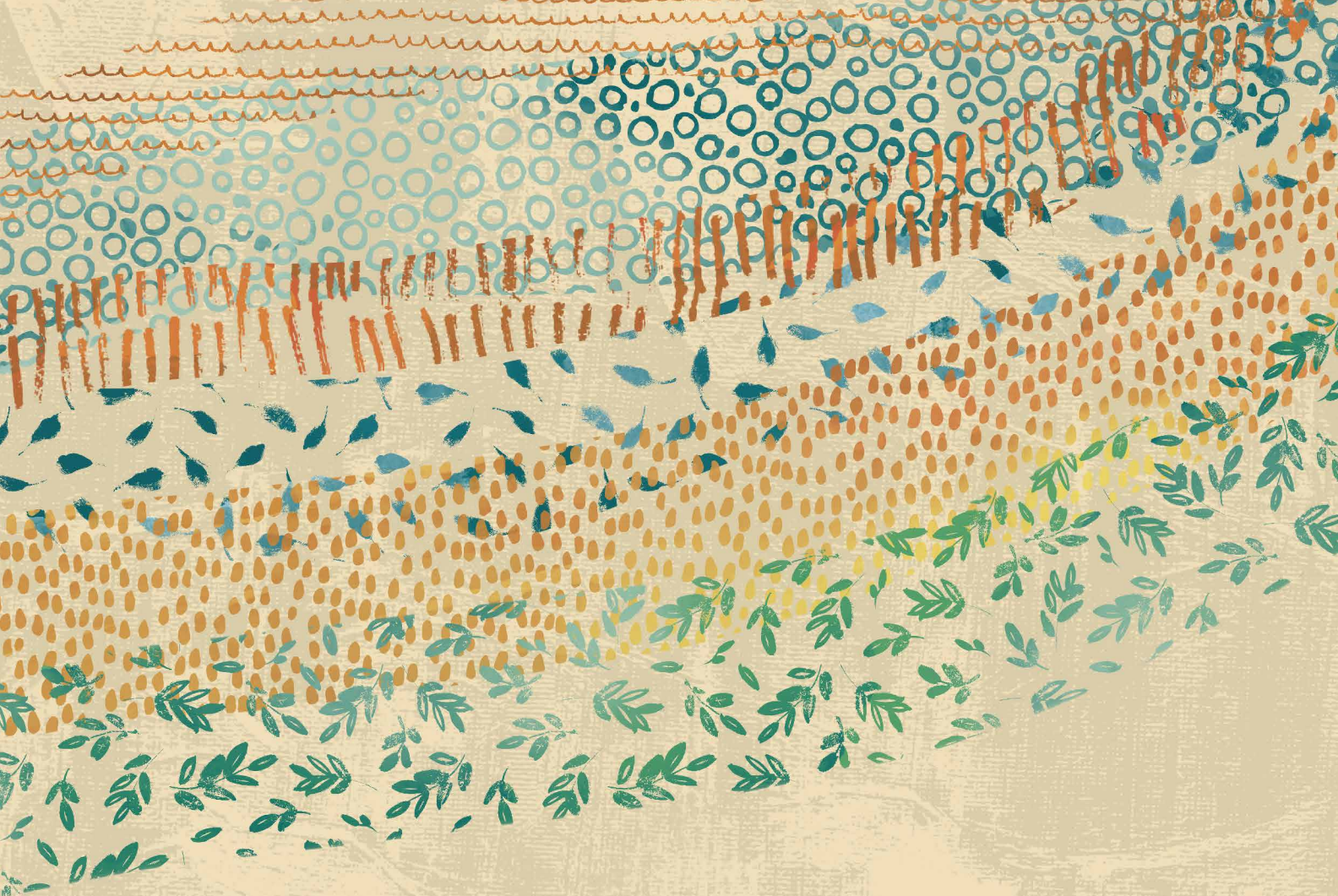
Philippians 2:3-8

6. How is the example of Jesus as Servant-King different than what the world has to say about kings and kingdoms?

LIFE GROUP NOTES

WEEK SIX





THE ORIGIN OF WORK & REST

DAY ONE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:31-2:4.

MEDITATE

2. Remember what we have learned so far: God is King, the heavens and the earth are His Kingdom and cosmic temple, and humans are His royal priestly representatives who share in serving and ruling His Kingdom. So far we have sacred space, sacred identity in covenant relationship with God and one another, sacred purpose, and now we will explore further the idea of sacred time. Look at 1:31 and recall how many days of creation were described. _____ Complete this verse: “God saw all that He had made and it was _____.”

3. This is the first and only time this phrase occurs in the Genesis 1 creation account. It feels like a final statement, a pronouncement of completion. And indeed, God has created in a symmetrical pattern of matching days (3 days of forming + 3 days of filling), as we have already seen. But as we know, there is one more day to come. We talked about the seventh day in Week 1 of this Study Guide. Briefly describe why you think the seventh day was set apart from the other six days. What does God do on this day? What does He not do?

4. Look at Genesis 1:31-2:4. List all the words that describe some type of “doing” in one column and all the words that have to do with “resting” in the second column. If a word is repeated, list it as many times as you see it in these verses.

DOING	RESTING

RESPOND

5. So far, what do you think it means for God to work? To rest?

DAY TWO

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Read Genesis 1:31-2:9, 15.

MEDITATE

2. Last week, we learned about the origin of humankind's purpose, and that God as King inexplicably, graciously, and voluntarily shares His authority with them. He blesses them with provision, identity, and responsibility, and installs them as His royal priestly representatives in the center of His cosmic temple. At this point, God has given humankind work to do, but does it seem like God has any work still to do?

Let's look a little closer at 2:2. There are two pairs of words that are of interest to us: "work" and "doing," and "finished" and "rested." We started to look at them on day 1 of this week.

Hebrew key words: melaka (pron. MEL-AW-KAW'), and *asa* (pron. AW-SAW'). According to Strong's Concordance, *melaka* means "occupation, work, business" and *asa* means "to do, fashion, accomplish, make, produce, prepare."

3. In what sense is God's initial creative work done?

Hebrew key words: kala (pron. KAW-LAW') and *sabat* (pron. SHAW-BATH'). *Kala* means "to accomplish, to complete, to finish" or "to cease;" *sabat* means "to cease" or "to desist from labor" or "to rest." Both words are used in Genesis 2:2 and can share a connotation, "to cease," but taken together with the words above, an important transition is described. John H. Walton, in his book *The Lost World of Genesis One*, argues that God completes (*kala*) the creative work (*melaka*) that He has been doing (*asa*) in six days, and on the seventh day moves into the cosmic temple He has constructed to rest (*sabat*) there. The sense is that one type of work is done, and another type of a different, but related nature, has begun. Think of building and moving into a new house: there is a frenzy of activity around the construction and moving in process, and then you actually begin dwelling there. You are at "rest" in a sense, having moved into a completed structure, but the "work" of daily living in the house has just commenced. This "work" will be the work that makes, and continues to make, your house a home. God's creative work is completed and His rest has begun: dwelling in and ruling His Kingdom.

4. To help us understand, let's look at another Biblical king, this time a human one, King David.

Look up 2 Samuel 7:1. What is described in this verse?

5. Now look up Exodus 40:33-35 and 2 Chronicles 5:1, 11-14. In what sense do these passages relate to Genesis 2:2?

RESPOND

6. Now look at Isaiah 6:3 and 66:1. How do these verses add to your understanding of God resting and ruling in His cosmic dwelling?

DAY THREE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

LISTEN

1. Review Genesis 1:31-2:3.

MEDITATE

1. Read Psalm 121:2-4 and note what these verses say about God.

2. Humankind, though made in God's image, does get tired and weary. Look up the following verses about people and rest and record what you learn.

Exodus 5:3-5

Exodus 20:8-11

Exodus 23:12

Exodus 31:17

Leviticus 23:32

RESPOND

4. What are some of the reasons the Bible gives for people to rest? Do these reasons still apply to us today? Why or why not?

DAY FOUR

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. On Day 3 we looked at several Scriptures giving Biblical reasons for people in the Old Testament to rest:

- To have time to worship God
- To keep the Sabbath day holy in obedience to God
- To imitate God because He rested on the seventh day and blessed it
- To refresh themselves, and also those in their care or employ
- As a sign of His covenant with them
- To humble themselves

How many of these reasons still apply to us today, do you think?

2. In Jesus' time, some Pharisees and teachers of the Law had taken the blessing of Sabbath and turned it into a burden of should-nots. Let's look at what Jesus said about the Sabbath. Look up these passages from the Gospels:

Mark 2:23-28

Luke 6:6-11

Luke 13:10-17

3. In what way did Jesus think of the Sabbath differently than the Pharisees?

RESPOND

4. When you think of practicing Sabbath today, does it seem like more of a gift or a burden? Why?

5. How might we see Sabbath as a day to “do good?” Toward God? Toward others? Toward ourselves?

DAY FIVE

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

MEDITATE

1. This week we have learned that God is the King who both rules and rests, and that Jesus, as God, is Lord of the Sabbath. Jen Wilkin teaches that practicing Sabbath is a way to acknowledge that we don't keep the earth spinning, so to speak. Have you ever thought of Sabbath this way, as a way to practice trust and dependence on God? If not, what barriers might be getting in the way?

2. In what ways do you try to find rest apart from Christ?

3. Read Hebrews 4:1-11. What is "God's rest?"

RESPOND

4. If you do not already do so, consider how you might practice Sabbath this week. Pray that the Holy Spirit will show you one small step you can take. In the Spiritual Formation Institute class, Chuck Bosworth provides a helpful list with tips to get started. Here are a few:

- Put it on the calendar and look forward to it as a family or community of friends.
- Although 24 hours is highly recommended, if you can't do that, start where you are, maybe with a couple of hours.
- Don't be legalistic, but make it a priority.
- Establish an official beginning and ending.
- Prep & plan ahead of time.
- Eat amazing food.
- Games.
- Make a plan for technology.
- Invite good friends.
- Incorporate worship in some way.

5. Complete the following in light of your time with God this week:

Realizing that God is _____, helps me
understand that I am _____.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. The Bible tells us in Psalm 121:3-4 that God doesn't slumber or sleep. So why does Genesis 2:2-3 describe God as resting? What does it mean for God to rest?
2. Why did God set aside the seventh day for humans to rest? As humans and followers of Jesus, what do you think it means for us to rest?
3. In Jesus' time, some Pharisees and teachers of the Law had taken the blessing of Sabbath and turned it into a burden of should-nots. Let's look at what Jesus said about the Sabbath. Do these passages focus on what we shouldn't do on the Sabbath or what we should do?

Mark 2:23-28

Luke 6:6-11

Luke 13:10-17

4. Following Jesus' example, how might Sabbath be a way to think about and practice justice and/or help someone else "rest" who might be overburdened in some way? How might we see Sabbath as a day to "do good?" Toward God? Toward others? Toward ourselves?
5. Is Sabbath still important for us today? Why or why not? How is practicing Sabbath an expression of trust?
6. In what ways do you try to find rest outside of Christ?
7. What is "God's rest?" Look up Hebrews 4:8-11 to help you answer.

LIFE GROUP NOTES

A FEW MORE RESOURCES FOR THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Being God's Image | Carmen Imes

Lost World of Genesis 1 | John Walton

BibleProject, especially the “Creation” video series and “Ancient Cosmology” podcast

Genesis: A Commentary | Bruce Waltke

BioLogos.org