



IN THE
BEGINNING
AN 8-WEEK STUDY OF GENESIS

SCRIPTURE SHARED

Week 1: Creation Stories, The Fall

Week 1, Day 1 - Genesis 1:1-2:4

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply

and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

*²⁷So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸God 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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ ²⁹God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, 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. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

²Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

⁴These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Understanding the Passage:

The first creation story of Genesis (there is another one, Genesis 2:4b-3:24) raises more questions than answers, but we can be confident in these five interpretations:

1. **The universe is a work of creation.** That means the universe is not an accident. The galaxies with their stars and planets did not come into existence by chance. Human beings are not here by chance. Something, or someone, wanted us to be here and designed the universe so that we could be here. The word “create” in Hebrew, *bara*, implies careful thought, planning, and skill. It’s what an artist does. God is the artist of Genesis and the universe is God’s masterpiece.
2. **God brings order out of chaos.** The scene in Genesis 1 isn’t of God creating out of absolutely nothing. Rather, something was already in existence but without form or pattern. It was primordial soup. It was chaos to the ultimate extreme. So God decides to make a universe that makes sense. Therefore, Genesis doesn’t answer the

question, “Where does the material world come from?” but instead, “How did the world come to be so ordered and predictable?”

Even the process of creation follows an order. Each of the first six days is paired with another day, based on what God is creating on those days. Days 1 and 4 have to do with **the heavens**: light, stars, sun, and moon were supposed to come from heaven. Days 2 and 5 have to do with **the waters**: the sky was supposed to hold back the waters above the earth (in answer to the question, Why is the sky blue?), the fish went in the waters below the sky, and the birds flew along the bottom of the sky, close to the waters above. Days 3 and 6 have to do with **the earth**: God makes the dry land and everything that grows and lives on dry land, including people.

3. **Nothing is complete without rest.** Even God takes a day off. The fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8) isn’t a polite suggestion to take a break once in a while for self-care. It’s an imperative of the created order. All creation is supposed to rest and allow for an environment where other living things can rest without fear of harm or want.
4. There is unextinguishable goodness in all of creation. Nothing and no one can snuff out the words, *And it was very good.*
5. Humans are God’s self-portrait. We’re not the artist, but we are the artist’s self-expression. That means every human being has infinite sacred worth. We are, individually, reflections of God’s character and goodness.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why does it matter that the universe isn’t an accident?
2. Name three characteristics of the God portrayed in Genesis 1.
3. Why would God make Sabbath the capstone of creation? What does that mean for us today?

Week 1, Day 2 - Genesis 2:4b-7, 18-25

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ ¹⁹So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

*'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.'*

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Understanding the Passage:

Today and for the rest of the week, we'll cover the second creation story in Genesis (the other is Genesis 1-2:4a). Here we consider the creation of the first people.

Whereas the first creation story asks the question, "How did the world come to be so ordered and predictable?" the second one asks, "Where did people come from and why do I get the feeling there's something wrong with humanity?"

The Hebrew word for "man" until verse 23 is the Hebrew word *adam*, where we get the name Adam. It comes from the word for "earth" or "ground," *adamah*. A more literal translation of *adam* would be Earthling or Groundling. This is important for why God created Adam in the first place: to till the earth and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Adam wasn't created because God was bored or lonely; Adam fulfilled an essential need for God, that is, God needed someone to take care of the Garden of Eden, so God fashioned a personal assistant.

Herein lies a crucial lesson in **why people exist**: we're here to be useful to God and God's purposes in the world. Everyone has a purpose in creation. Everyone has essential work to do. We only find that purpose when we appreciate the essential work that only we as individuals can do. God wants to make the world a little bit more like Eden every day, a little bit more like the Paradise from which we came; we find our purpose when we take our place in that collective project.

God breathes the **breath of life** into Adam. Before the breath of life, Adam was a lump of garden clay. With the breath of life, he's a living person. It's the Bible's answer to what distinguishes the living from the dead. The living have God's own breath within them, and when we die, that breath returns to God.

But there's a problem. It's loneliness. The first problem in creation isn't sin. It's loneliness. Loneliness is the first sign that there's something wrong with creation. So after Adam goes through all the possible animal candidates in his search for a friend, God makes another human being, this time, Woman. Note that she's not called Eve yet. Starting in verse 23, the man is called the Hebrew word for man, *ish*, then comes the Hebrew word for woman, *ishah*.

The lesson, however, isn't that woman comes from man. It's that **loneliness is our original problem, and community is the solution**. Adam and Eve are the first example of marriage in the Bible, yes, but what makes Adam so happy isn't that he's found a wife; it's that he's found community.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. In what ways are you living out your God-given purpose these days?
2. When have you experienced real, authentic community?
3. Name three characteristics of the God portrayed so far in Genesis 2.

Week 1, Day 3 - Genesis 2:8-17, 3:1-7

⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

³Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ²The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Understanding the Passage:

Here it is, what church history calls The Fall. But what did Adam and Eve fall from?

Innocence. What happened in the Garden of Eden is a loss of innocence that remains with humanity to this day. Innocence isn't the lack of wrongdoing; it's the lack of awareness that there is such a thing as a good-doing and a wrong-doing. People simple existed without a need to distinguish between what was right and what was wrong. It's the way of children. Children are free from having to judge what they "should" and "shouldn't" do, at least until they reach a certain age when they feel like they have to "fit in" or are told that some things are permissible, and some aren't.

God created Adam and Eve simply to enjoy their existence without the concern for good and evil. The word Eden means paradise. It's a place of bliss. It's a garden, not a farm, and gardens exist primarily for enjoyment. Eden was supposed to be "pleasant to the sight and

good for food” (2:9). The order there is important. First and foremost, Eden was a place to be enjoyed, and then a means of sustenance.

All of this means that **God designed us to enjoy life**. To delight in creation and this life we’re given, that is our first purpose. Innocence means we could stay there and only there, free from having to decide what is right and what is wrong, free from the temptation to choose wrong over right, and free from judging other people and ourselves for making the wrong choices in our weaker moments.

The snake is a liar. Adam and Eve did die that day. They never made it out of Eden. They were replaced by a new Adam and Eve, now burdened with God-like understanding of good and evil, and the responsibilities that come with it.

The Fall isn’t someone else’s story. **It’s our story**. We all cease being innocent and must take responsibility for our actions and place in the world. It’s a burden, but not a burden that must exclude joy.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does the last sentence above mean, that the burden of losing our innocence doesn’t have to exclude joy?
2. Why do you think God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden in the first place?
3. Imagine the Fall hadn’t happened. What would life be like? How would you be different?

Week 1, Day 4 - Genesis 3:8-13

⁸They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ ¹¹He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ ¹²The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’ ¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate.’

Understanding the Passage:

It’s like the authors of Genesis were going for dramatic effect, the details and emotions of the story are so rich and painful. Let’s examine the story in three movements.

1. **The Shame:** Shame is the immediate effect of sin. Whereas guilt says, I made a mistake, shame says, I am the mistake. Adam and Eve feel there is something wrong with them, something that must be hidden from God’s eyes, so they put distance between themselves and God. To this day, sin has the effect of making the sinner feel ashamed and the one who was sinned against feel ashamed. An abusive parent, for example, will leave deep scars of shame on their children (“There must have been something wrong with me for them to do this to me.”), and the parent will feel that shame, too, perhaps so deeply they feel they can never change or repair what they’ve done.

2. **The Pursuit:** How does God respond to the first sin? God goes looking for the sinner, not to punish, but to help. Sin has the effect of putting more distance between us and God, yet sin is also an opportunity for God to move closer to us. As United Methodists, we understand this as prevenient grace, or the grace that goes before us: it's the presence of God pursuing us before we ever respond to God or know about God, even before we recognize that we've done wrong. God is always on the search for us.

3. **The Blame:** Adam and Eve do not take responsibility for their actions. They heap blame on others, Adam onto Eve, and Eve onto the snake. Blame is another trace of sin. The consequences of our sin can be so harmful and embarrassing that we'll place the blame on as many causes outside of ourselves as we can. Blame is a form of denial. It's a way of saying, "This didn't have anything to do with me. This isn't really happening." For Adam and Eve to heal, and us to heal, we must make acceptance the first step: acceptance of our responsibility *and* acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Imagine what would have happened had Adam and Eve accepted responsibility for their actions. How would the story end?
2. Imagine Adam and Eve's internal thoughts. What must they be thinking when God confronts them?
3. Imagine God's internal thoughts. What must God be thinking when God confronts them?

Week 1, Day 5 - Genesis 3:14-24

¹⁴*The Lord God said to the serpent,*

*'Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.*

¹⁵*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.'*

¹⁶*To the woman he said,*

*'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'*

¹⁷*And to the man he said,*

*'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree*

*about which I commanded you,
“You shall not eat of it”,
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.’*

²⁰The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live. ²¹And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

²²Then the Lord God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever’— ²³therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Understanding the Passage:

So concludes the second creation narrative of Genesis. The story asks, “Where did people come from and why do I get the feeling there’s something wrong with humanity?” Now we know why. Let’s consider three parts.

1. **The Problem of Mortality.** God intended for Adam and Eve to live forever. They would have feasted from the tree of life and the fruit would have kept their bodies alive. Yet after they become like God, knowing good from evil, God denies them access to the tree of life. The entire reason that God banishes Adam and Eve from Eden is to keep them away from the tree of life. Why?

It must have something to do with the incompatibility of wisdom and immortality. They could be completely innocent of knowing right from wrong and live in a kind of ignorant bliss forever; *or* they could know that good and evil exist, it’s in their power to choose good or evil, and they’ll know they can never rid the world of all evil and its consequences, and they’ll be sad because of it, but they can’t know all that and live forever. Therefore, God keeps Adam and Eve, and us, from immortality for our own good. God knows it would be cruel to ask us to live forever while seeing all the evil and suffering of the world, and see it hurt our loved ones, and not be able to save everyone. It would be a slow torture. We could live forever and be sad, or we could live for a while and be happy. God lets us have the latter.

2. **The Problems of Childbirth and Work.** The ancient Hebrews who originally heard this story would have had questions like: Why does childbirth have to hurt so much if it’s essential for the human race? And why does it have to be so hard to feed my family? This story provides an answer, albeit an answer for a pre-modern, pre-science culture. Childbirth is painful and work is hard because Adam and Eve ate

that fruit. The hope here is, because childbirth wasn't intended to be painful and work wasn't intended to be grueling, these things will not last forever, for they are not eternal. These things will have an end one day when God makes all things new.

3. **The Problem of Nakedness.** Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden, but they have no clothes. What will protect them from the elements? How will they stay warm? How will they protect their skin from the desert sun? God knows this, so God makes clothes. God's last act in Eden is to give Adam and Eve a gift, the gift of the very first clothes. It's a wonderful thought and true to the character of God, that God's response to sin isn't cruelty, it's a gift. All God wants is to help.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why doesn't God give access to the tree of life forever? Answer in your own words.
2. Why is it hopeful that painful childbirth and grueling work were not God's original intent?
3. How are the first clothes an image of God's goodness?

Video Questions:

1. What are you most excited to learn about in Genesis?
2. What is the "big idea" from the beginning of this lesson?
3. Why does God rest on the seventh day of creation?
4. How did eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil make Adam and Evil "accountable" for their actions?
5. Where do you see the relentless love of God in the Eden story?
6. Dr. Pace calls God the "first tailor." How is that an example of prevenient grace?

Prayer requests and other notes.