

Gen. 1:1–5

Ps. 29

Acts 19:1–7

Mark 1:4–11

Order Out of Chaos

Goal for the Session Adults will reflect on God bringing order out of chaos both in the natural world and in their lives.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 1:1–5

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Richard Boyce

The writer most likely imagined this creative work of God during the days of Babylonian exile, when all the earlier order of Israel’s worship in Jerusalem had been brought to naught. This creation story is a way of holding onto hope when all signs of order have been destroyed. Set in this context, this story can only be heard as the first in a long series of stories about God creating order out of chaos: at the beginning of ordered time, through the waters of the Red Sea, in the muddy waters of the river Jordan, and down to the chaotic situation of God’s people today.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Joseph L. Price

During this season of celebrating the manifestation of God in Christ, the creation story can be examined to learn about its testimony to the initial manifestation of God. It introduces ideas about the character of God and purpose of creation. Each act or element of creation is generated by God’s word. Consequently God is understood as an active God, as the source of history. The opening text in Genesis affirms the character of God, rather than providing a historical account or a scientific proposition about creation. The text is an affirmation that all of life, all aspects of order, and all possibilities within reality are dependent upon the creative act of God.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Donna Schaper

“In the beginning, God.” That is the whole story in a nutshell. The first thing that happened to the formless earth is this: the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. When Jesus is later baptized, he has a significant connection back to the deep waters of creation. He goes from being without form to being someone with form. He goes back to the original. He has a heaven-opening event. He does what God did in the beginning: He reopens the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Lawrence Wood

These opening verses are not mere stage setting. They are the story proper—a story of God’s activity. The main actor is here. All the scenes to come will proceed from this action. The beginning is all water: watery deeps, dark and formless. At baptism we are asked to submit to the primordial waters and a figurative death. God’s creative power is made powerfully personal in this second birth. This first Sunday after Epiphany comes at the start of the new year, an evocative time to talk about beginnings. It lends itself to remembrance of baptism and the beginning of Christian life.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1–5

Focus on Your Teaching

Life in the twenty-first century often feels chaotic. Many adults have very hectic schedules and struggle to balance multiple responsibilities. A crisis in any area of their lives only adds to the chaos. Then, of course, there are the calamities and tragedies unfolding in the world, brought to us by news sources around the clock. All of this can be overwhelming and lead us to feel that the world is spinning out of control. Genesis 1:1–5 speaks to this anxiety, reminding us that the world is created by a good and loving God who brings order out of chaos.

Gracious God, as I open your Word, speak to all that is unsettled in my life, that I might trust in your loving purposes. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- photo of a favorite place in nature
- CD with water sounds
- CD player
- board or newsprint
- markers
- pens
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 14, 2018, unless it will be e-mailed to participants

For Responding

- option 1: board or newsprint and markers
- option 2: board or newsprint and markers
- option 3: small bowl of water

The word translated “wind from God” in Genesis 1:2 could also be translated “Spirit of God.” The same word in Hebrew (*ruah*) may be translated as wind, breath, or spirit.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome adults as they arrive. If there are newcomers present, allow time for introductions.

Show a photo of one of your favorite places in the natural world, a place where you feel especially close to God. Talk about the ways you experience God’s presence in this place. Invite everyone to sit quietly for a minute and think about a place in nature where they feel close to God. Invite volunteers to talk about the place and how they experience God’s presence there. Encourage those with photos of these places on their phones to show them.

Tell the group that today we will reflect on God’s creative work in the world and in our lives. Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Loving Creator of all, we give you thanks for the goodness of your creation. Guide and bless our time together today, and open our eyes to your ongoing creative work. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord, through whom all things were made. Amen.

EXPLORING

Play a CD with sounds of ocean waves or some form of water. Invite participants to close their eyes and breathe deeply, while you read Genesis 1:1–5 aloud slowly, three times. Ask:

- ✠ What did you hear in this passage? What words or phrases were meaningful to you?
- ✠ What does the phrase “formless void” mean to you?

Talk about the phrase “wind from God,” conveying the information given in the sidebar. Ask:

- ✠ What significance do you find in the fact that the same word can mean wind, breath, or spirit?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Genesis 1:1–5) and Resource Sheet 2 (Excerpts and Questions for Exploring), along with pens. Invite participants to form groups

of two or three and read the “What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1, followed by the quote from Richard Boyce on Resource Sheet 2, and then to discuss the questions that follow the quote.

After a few minutes, ask a spokesperson from each small group to talk about responses given in their group. Summarize key ideas on the board or newsprint.

Ask participants to continue working in their small groups, reading the “Where?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1, followed by the quote from Joseph Price on Resource Sheet 2, and then discussing the questions that follow the quote.

After a few minutes, ask a spokesperson from each small group to talk about responses given in their group. Summarize key ideas on the board or newsprint.

Say: “Many interpreters find connections between Genesis 1:1–5 and our Gospel reading for this Sunday, the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1.”

Ask a volunteer to read the account of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:9–11. Ask another volunteer to read the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1.

Invite discussion of the following:

- ✧ What common elements do you find between Genesis 1:1–5 and the story of Jesus’ baptism?
- ✧ What is the significance of the heavens being torn apart at Jesus’ baptism?
- ✧ What connection do you see between God’s evaluation of creation in Genesis 1 (“and God saw that it was good”) and God’s affirmation of Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:11)?

By way of summary and transition to Responding, ask the group to discuss together: What difference does faith in God as creator make in your life?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

1. **Testimony** Write the following on a board or newsprint for small groups to discuss. Invite participants to form groups of two or three and talk about a particularly chaotic or troubled time in their lives when they believe God brought order out of chaos.
 - ✧ Describe the situation and how you felt.
 - ✧ Talk about how the situation was resolved or worked out.
 - ✧ How did you see God at work in this situation?
 - ✧ What words of encouragement might you give to someone going through a similar situation today?

After about five or six minutes, invite anyone who wishes to give their testimony to the whole group.

EASY
PREP

2. **Finding Hope** Have participants form four groups. Assign to each group one of the following communities experiencing chaos:

- ✧ Refugees from war
- ✧ Community experiencing a disease epidemic
- ✧ Victims of a natural disaster (e.g., hurricane, tsunami, flood)
- ✧ Victims of a human-made disaster (e.g., oil spill or nuclear accident)

Ask each group to discuss among themselves what hope they might find in Genesis 1 for their situation. Ask them also to discuss how we can be a part of God's work of bringing hope and restoration to people in such circumstances. Ask a spokesperson from each group to give a summary of their discussion to the whole group. Identify common themes from the discussions and write them on the board or newsprint.

3. **Baptism: A New Creation** Read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:17. Ask a volunteer to read the "Now What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Note that baptism is often spoken of as a new birth or new creation. Ask:

- ✧ What does it mean to be a new creation through baptism in Christ?
- ✧ How does this shape your approach to a new year or to each new day?
- ✧ How does this help you deal with chaos or troubles in your life?

Bring out a small bowl filled with water. Ask participants to dip a finger into the water and trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads in remembrance of their baptisms. Or ask them to form pairs and trace the sign of the cross on one another's forehead, saying, "(Name), child of God, you are a new creation in Christ."

CLOSING

Invite participants to tell how they would respond, in one or two sentences, if a family member or friend asked them what they learned today. If some have family members participating in this curriculum at other age levels, encourage them to talk with those family members sometime during the coming week about what they are learning.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Good and gracious God, only you can bring order out of the chaos in our lives and in our world. We lift up to you all that is unsettled in our own lives, trusting that your purposes for us are good and life-giving. We lift up to you all who are suffering the effects of chaos in our world, especially . . . Bring them comfort, hope, and restoration. Move us to be your hands and feet in the world, bearing witness to your good and life-giving purposes for all creation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 14, 2018, or e-mail it to learners during the week. Encourage them to read the focus scripture and the resource sheet before the next session.

During the closing prayer, pause to allow opportunity for participants to name people or communities in need. If you used option 2 in Responding, encourage participants to offer petitions for the communities identified in that discussion.

Focus on Genesis 1:1–5

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Excerpts and Questions for Exploring

Where does one look in order to trust the ongoing ordering of the Lord when the temple is destroyed, one's power has been shattered, and one's captors follow a different calendar and worship different gods? The ongoing division between day and night may be your only sign that the Lord is yet creating order out of chaos, the wind or spirit of the Lord yet moving over "the waters." This is a story of creation for our weak days, when we are tempted to despair.

—Excerpted from *Richard Boyce, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 221.

Discuss the following questions:

- ✿ How does the historical context of this passage shed light on its meaning?
- ✿ How might reflecting on God as creator have brought hope to exiles?
- ✿ How might reflecting on God as creator bring hope to you in times of chaos or distress?



The passage is one of revelation and testimony, rather than history, because no human observed the process and no archaeological traces point to a reconstruction of this particular narrative. The text is not a scientific treatise, because science is concerned about the relation between finite causes and effects. In contrast, a question about the ultimate origin or first cause is essentially theological. . . . Consequently, when the creation story is heard as theological testimony, it permits consideration of all scientific theories about the process of creation.

—Excerpted from *Joseph Price, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 222.

Discuss the following questions:

- ✿ What is the significance of understanding Genesis 1 as theological testimony, rather than as a historical account or a scientific treatise?
- ✿ State in your own words what you understand to be the primary theological lesson of Genesis 1.