



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

First Quarter – Pentateuch 1

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Lesson One: Creation and the Fall

Primary Verses: “These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works.” Psalm 104:27-31 (ESV)

Teaching Text: Genesis 1-3

Supporting Text: Psalm 104

“What’s the first story in the Bible?” Ever ask that question to anyone? Try it sometime and see how many persons will say, “Adam and Eve” rather than “Creation.” Your unofficial research results may indicate that most of the unchurched and even many regular church-goers have something in common. Many in both camps see the Bible as the record of human history with abrupt and periodic interruptions by God rather than seeing the Bible as the record of God and His work to display His glory for the benefit of His creatures “interrupted” by sinful man’s rebellion. Perhaps a core evidence of man’s fall into sinful depravity is this: to be so enthralled with himself that the glorious Creator and His massive work of creation are, in his mortal eyes, overshadowed by his entrance on reality’s stage as the rebel.

If we fail to consider the beauty and order of Genesis 1-2, we will not fully appreciate the grave nature of sin in Genesis 3. Like our first parents in Eden, we suffer from the now-natural tendency to hide our faces from the truth *and* consequences of sin in our lives. We run away with fingers firmly plugged in our ears from the One and those He has commissioned to confront us with our sin. Ironically, the epitome of childish behavior is most clearly seen when we boast of being “grown enough” to do as we please. However, there lies an even greater danger.

The same *willfully* deaf ear that we apply to our sinfulness muffles the magnitude of grace in God’s awesome plan of redemption. We cannot understand the depth to which we have fallen unless we scale the heights of creation. Likewise, without full acceptance of the Bible’s condemnation of man’s helpless and hopeless state of constant sin, we will never fully appreciate the matchless mercy of God’s free offer of the gospel and the loving sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son at Calvary.

Questions to Consider: The form of God’s words with which He orchestrated creation is called the “Fiat” which is a Latin word for, “Let it be.” How does this word structure demonstrate God’s kingly rule in creation? How does this knowledge help illustrate the absurd and offensive nature of man’s rebellion? One interesting aspect of God’s creative work is the establishment of boundaries. How many ways can you count God’s divine order drawing lines and making distinctions? The creation account culminates in the creation of humanity and being entrusted to manage God’s world. Why is this idea necessary to understand for the daily life of every believer in Christ? Considering the New Testament teaching found in passages like Romans 5:12-21 and Acts 17:22-31, why is it essential that Christians believe Adam and Eve to be historical persons and not merely allegorical characters for the sake of illustration?

Challenging the Class: Immerse yourself in Psalm 104. Consider the power, care, wisdom, and orderliness of a God, Who is both transcendent and immanent. God is greater than all our troubles and, yet, more intimately involved in each of them on levels that we can hardly imagine. Put your trust in Him!

Lesson Two: Creation and Regeneration

Primary Verses: "...and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:14-18 (NKJV)

Teaching Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Supporting Text: Ephesians 1:15-22; 2 Corinthians 5:12-21

The earliest word imagery used to describe God's activity in creation, specifically the Holy Spirit's role, has intrigued Bible readers for centuries. Before any of God's divine fiat is spoken to direct the physical order of His mind's design, the Spirit of God is said to have been "moving" or "hovering" over the face of the waters. Scripture clearly indicates that while the Earth is present, it is dead and disordered; severely lacking the enrichment that can only come from God's creative activity. However, once God's Spirit is present, the only thing necessary for vitality, beauty, and blessedness to abound on Earth is God's Word. And we know that when God sends forth His Word, it accomplishes all He intends for it to accomplish. It will not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:8-11).

As it is in creation, so it is in the regeneration or re-creation of man. We observe the activity of the physical, intellectual, and social activity of the unsaved. But one prevailing biblical motif is the description of sin as a terminal disease (Psalm 32:1-5; Isaiah 53:5; Luke 5:27-32; 1 Peter 2:24-25) for which only Christ is the cure. For this reason, Paul, by the Holy Spirit, can declare that the unsaved and unrepentant are "dead in sins and transgressions (Ephesians 2:1), specifically because they are absent of Christ. But let us suppose the Holy Spirit should move on an unbeliever's heart, convicting him/her of sin, righteousness, and judgment. If that person should hear the word of the gospel, he/she will become a new creation in Christ by an act of God no less sovereign than His sovereign decision to create the world in the first place. Indeed, no man can boast (Ephesians 2:8), and no flesh shall glory before God (1 Corinthians 1:26-31) for it is written, "salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).

Concerning the doctrine of regeneration, the Reformation Study Bible states,

"Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead. The Spirit recreates the human heart, quickening it from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regenerate people are new creations. Where formerly they had no desire for the things of God, now they are disposed and inclined toward God. In regeneration, God plants a desire for Himself in the heart that otherwise would not have been there."

Questions to Consider: How does Paul's discussion of the power at work in us (Ephesians 1:18-20) help us to understand the activity of God in our regeneration described in Ephesians 2:4-6? If God's work in salvation is free and sovereign, what is the role of an individual sinner in salvation? What does man contribute to his own redemption? How does this inform your approach to evangelism?

Challenging the Class: God's sovereignty is no excuse for our inactivity. But since we know the Holy Spirit, through the Bible, reveals His heart and priorities, we ought to be energetic in pursuing those things we know please Him. May God grant us disciplined minds and passionate hearts to accomplish His holy will!

Lesson Three: Noah, the Flood, and Judgement

Primary Verses: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.’”
Genesis 6:11-13

Teaching Text: Genesis 6

Supporting Texts: Luke 17:20-27; 2 Peter 2:5; 2 Peter 3:10-12

Rain can be a sign of many things for many cultures during different times. In the Atacama Desert, which is considered the driest place on earth because they only get an average of .6 inches of rain a year, one can imagine how grateful anybody, brave enough to be there, is for rain coming down. Or consider most cities in the State of Washington where it rains more than it is sunny. In these places, rain is merely a reminder of why galoshes are on the list of necessary footwear. However, in the days of Noah, rain was the *universal* sign of God’s judgment on the earth.

The Scriptures include this stunning and historical exhibit of God’s power to teach us a) He is Righteous and b) He is obligated to punish sin. There are those who read this Genesis account and think, “How could God do something so radical against mankind?” However, Spirit-enabled reflection on our sin leads us to the better thought, “How could mankind dare sin so grievously against such a high and holy God?” The Scriptures record the people during Noah’s day were “corrupt” and “filled with violence.” In light of this, His judgment was fair and righteous.

Today, we have this dire warning of how the LORD will not allow our sins to go unpunished. The people of the ancient world failed to be holy by the time the flood came. We have no room nor time to think ourselves better for there is a question we ought to consider for ourselves: will we be found faithful and obedient to Christ before His Second Coming? Ultimately, Noah was rescued because He “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). Just like Noah, we need the grace of God to cover us, so that we are found righteous in Christ, before it is too late.

Questions to Consider: What does God’s stern actions against sin teach us about how severely we should be at war against our sin? In Genesis 6, why does God choose to save Noah? What about Noah’s character kept him safe? When reading the Luke passage, it is clear to see that judgment comes to those who do not anticipate the return of Christ. Do you live a life that anticipates Jesus’ arrival? Are others able to see evidence of your hope in Christ’s return and not merely that “things will work out” in this life? How many differences can you conceive of to mark the life of one who waits in joyful expectation of Christ’s return as opposed to one who lives in anxious fear of His return?

Challenging the Class: Hebrews 11:7 reveals Noah’s faith-filled obedience in constructing the ark condemned the world as it was an evidence of their unbelief in God. Noah’s faith was internal, but building the Ark could hardly have been a private activity! Is your life marked by private **and** public activity motivated by faith? What daily disciplines and routines do you engage in to testify to the world that you have placed all your trust in Jesus Christ?

Lesson Four: Calling the Fathers

Primary Verses: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” Hebrews 11:13-16 (KJV)

Teaching Texts: Genesis 12, Genesis 26:1-25, Genesis 28:10-22

Supporting Text: Hebrews 11:8-21

Abram/Abraham...the Aged Pioneer: The call of Abraham is a topic with no bottom. It is nearly incomprehensible to the modern mind, and almost impossible for any generation since his day, to fathom what it took for him to obey God. Called at age 75, he was ultimately challenged to wait another 25 years for the *first* of an innumerable amount of **promised** children, only to be asked to give him up as a test—no wonder he is called the “Father of the Faith!” To be sure, Abraham is not without his failings and faults. But it is just as sure that while he began with great faith, he continued to grow and continues to serve as a model believer and even a friend of God!

Isaac...the Silent Successor: In many ways, the second biological son of Abraham is the forgotten patriarch. For many who read Genesis, the story of Isaac’s adult life is a bit lackluster. His courtship is uneventful (Eliezer has all the excitement!), he struggles to have children, gives way to apparent favoritism as a parent, runs into some difficulty maintaining his inheritance due to the jealousy of others, and then he’s frequently frustrated with the daughter-in-law of his favorite son. He sees no angels, has no prophetic dreams, but digs a lot of wells and erects altars, like his dad. After an eventful and sometimes traumatic childhood, Isaac has a life like most believers—it’s normal. But he’s worthy of mention because he is called by the faithful God of his father Abraham and owns the faith that we share in common to this very day.

Jacob...the Reformed Scoundrel: Have you ever seen a movie where the plot was almost entirely given away in the first ten minutes? What can we say about a man who literally comes out of his mother’s womb “pulling” his brother’s leg? His name is Jacob, translated “one who supplants” or “deceiver.” Any reader who takes notice of “context clues” knows to expect strife with his brother and holds his/her breath in anticipation of the heist and intricately deceptive plots from such a person. God’s favor and call, however, throw us for a loop as we are shocked to discover the Lord’s grace in the form of protection and material abundance in his life that ultimately reforms him. Jacob’s struggles were numerous, but we call him a father of the faith because he struggled with God and overcame.

Questions to Consider: How many differences can you point out between the circumstances and characters of the patriarchs at the time of their calling? How do these distinctions among them help make these men from antiquity easy to relate to in any era? In each scenario, these men apparently had tangible, audible experiences of hearing God speak to them. How would you explain this phenomenon to someone today who complains that God hasn’t spoken to them and insists on God talking to them, so they might believe?

Challenging the Class: Does your life take on the pattern of one who longs for a “heavenly country” or do you leave public and private evidence that this world is satisfactory, even preferable for you?

Praying with the Patriarchs

By Derek Thomas

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/praying-patriarchs/>

Does God take risks? The question is not as silly as it sounds, and in present-day discussions regarding what is called “open theism,” it is the pertinent question to ask. But let’s ask the question again, from a different perspective. Is God’s knowledge of the future certain? Certain in the sense of being unchangeable, set down by an unalterable divine decree that cannot be changed?

The answer would seem, to orthodox Christians at least, obvious. But recently a flood of literature has emerged suggesting that the future is “open.” The so-called open theists take as one of their key texts Abraham’s prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:22–33. On the face of it, Abraham’s prayer seems to change God’s mind over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis that fifty, then forty-five and eventually ten “righteous people” are to be found there. More pertinently for Abraham, his nephew Lot and his family lived there. The prayer is bold, even audacious! Frankly, if it wasn’t right here, in the Bible, we would not even think that such haggling (for that is what it sounds like) would emerge from the one whom the Bible calls “the friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8).

The “God takes risks” proponents of providence have a field-day:

“The divine decision was yet open, and God invited Abraham into the decision-making process.... Because God desires a genuine relationship, he is open to his creatures, especially through prayer” (John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, IVP, 1998, p. 53). The author continues, “Through these prayers we see that God sovereignly chooses not to govern the world without our input. Whether it is wise for God to do so is another question” (p. 54).

The passage certainly looks and reads (and is intended to read) as though God changes His mind. But at least two things must be considered before drawing such a conclusion. A reasonable principle of interpretation of Scripture is that difficult passages ought to be interpreted in light of those that are clear. Additionally, historical narrative passages should be placed under the grid of didactic passages. If we engage these two ideas, what emerges is that the Bible is resolutely committed to a view of God’s omniscience (that he knows everything there is to know) and that he knows it (both in itself and in its relationship to other things) because he creates, sustains, and governs everything. The idea that God knows everything but doesn’t control everything is nonsensical. God’s plan is perfect and inviolable (Eph. 1:11).

Secondly, when the Bible employs “human” ways of speaking about God (anthropomorphisms), we must interpret these for what they are. If, as open theists suggest, God’s seeming change of heart is evidence that He does not totally know the future, then we must be consistent and interpret other features of this story in the same way. When it states that God must “go down” to Sodom and Gomorrah to discover the extent of its rebellion (18:21), it is not only God’s omniscience that is under question; His omnipresence is equally threatened. On this line of thought lies the denuding of God of many of His attributes — qualities that define for us the essential nature of God. Without them, God is no longer God in any meaningful sense of the term.

So what exactly is being taught in this passage? This: that God is condescending to our human weakness and frailty, allowing us to think for a minute or two that our tiny voices can move Him, impart Him some information that He otherwise does not know, or

hasn't taken sufficiently under consideration — in order to encourage us. But the truth is, God knows what He intends to do all along. As Augustine said long ago, "So, too, prayers are useful in obtaining those favours which He foresaw He would bestow on those who should pray for them" (*City of God*, 5.10). This way, intercessory prayer is not a way of settling the mind of God on what He, as yet, has not decided to do. Rather, they are ways of settling our mind to that which He has already decided to do. The reason, therefore, why God seems to answer some prayers and not others lies in His sovereign will.

Abraham, of course, hardly thought along these philosophical lines when he prayed, and neither should we. It is enough for us to know that God asks us to pray, and to pray with boldness and conviction believing that He will answer us when we pray according to His will and purpose. That should not limit our asking at all. It should rather make us bold knowing that a greater wisdom than ours will prevail and that we have not, somehow, pressured God into doing something that is less than wise simply because we have appealed to His benevolence. At the end of the day, Abraham's intercessory pleas on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah are an example to us of praying boldly. As the parable of the unmerciful judge teaches (Luke 18:1–8), Abraham's action teaches us that we may properly press God hard with fervent persistence when we bring our desires before Him. And He will always answer according to His sovereign will.

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