

ONE STORY CHURCH YEAR

Small Group Discussion Guide

In Genesis, God has a Word for creation: good. This word is given to human beings, too. In the fall, we see how we human beings get mixed up about this word. We forget that we are good! So when we hear a parable like the one in Mark, we wonder about who we are and in which category we might be judged. In our wondering, we find the only place we can find assurance is in God's Word, revealed in the waters of baptism for you. You are good.

Week One: Good

Genesis 1-15; Mark 1-5; Psalms 19, 104, 148

The Small Group: Its Purpose

Faith matures and deepens in community. Small groups are places to develop faith-based relationships, explore questions, and find support for the journey. Discussion guides contain elements that will help group members get to know each other, reflect on the ONE readings, and pray together. The covenant of the small group is to be encouraging, confidential, and open to the wonderings and assurances that arise from reading scripture.

This Week's Readings: Some Notes

Our One readings begin with Genesis and the Gospel of Mark. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, means “origin” or “beginning.” In the beginning . . . Genesis starts. Even if you have not spent much time in the Bible, the creation story in chapter one will likely sound familiar to you. The second version of creation found in chapter two may sound less familiar. In chapter one, God speaks and it is. God authors life. In chapter two, God gets God's hands a little dirty, fashioning humans out of dust. The words we hear on Ash Wednesday – *remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return* – bring us back to Genesis, chapter two.

As you continue reading through Genesis, it may seem like you are running through all the greatest hits of the Bible. You will read about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the tower of Babel, Noah's Ark, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and all his brothers. Genesis is a story about family relationships and God's relationship with humanity. Listen for themes of blessing and promise, human deception and struggle, chosenness/election, and the steadfast work of God.

Although it is not the first Gospel in the New Testament, scholars widely consider Mark to be the first Gospel written. It is the shortest Gospel. To read Mark is to sprint through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You will notice the word “immediately” is used often. There is an urgency to this Gospel and an emphasis on the identity of Jesus' being recognizable in his suffering. Mark is dated to right around 70 A.D., a time when the persecution of Christians was either happening or looming. Emphasis on the suffering of Jesus makes sense, in light of these conditions.

Keep tabs on Mark. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the synoptic Gospels, meaning they tell many of the same stories and follow the same timeline. It will be interesting to compare one part to another. For example, in Mark, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is described in two verses (Mark 1:12-13). Matthew and Luke will add more details to Mark's version.

Connecting: Take Time to Get to Know Each Other

Share introductions:

- Who you are and what your life looks like
- Your experience in reading the Bible
- Your plan for tackling the daily readings. Are you a morning or evening reader? Or will you listen on your commute, walk, or other? What's your reading approach?

Praying: Entrusting All Things to God

Designate someone in your group to open in prayer. If members have joys and concerns to share, include those things, too.

Discussing and Studying: Digging In

The Bible study portion for these small group studies focuses on Sunday's preaching texts, but feel free to dig into what you have been reading. What did you read in the last week that surprised you?

What challenged you? What bothered you?

What sounded like good news? What did you find out about God? About yourself?

You could spend your whole discussion time just on these questions. If you like more structure, use the questions below. Some groups may want to go more deeply into the Bible readings; refer to the resource section for more.

Invite someone to read out loud Genesis 1:26-31 and Mark 4:1-20. Use the questions below to assist your discussion and study.

1. What are some initial reactions you have to these readings?
2. If you heard this week's sermon, with what did you resonate? What did you wonder? How did it help or hinder your understanding of these texts?
3. Of all the verses included in this week's readings, the above verses are what were chosen for preaching texts. What connections do you see in these texts? What would you have chosen if you were the preacher?
4. *How did the world come to be?* Human beings have, from the beginning, wondered about creation. Every culture has a creation story in an attempt to explain the world and its existence. Genesis One gives us that story but it also provides insight into God as Creator. God creates through Word. God speaks and it is. Word will continue to be important in the Biblical story. Jesus is Word made Flesh. He brings Good News. Announces forgiveness. New life is given through declaration: God declares you forgiven, righteous, holy and, thus, you are. God's Word is authoring and declarative. Reflect on what happens in scripture when God speaks.
5. On the day that God creates human beings, God says not only that it is "good" but "very good." *You are good. Very good.* How do you know if you and/or your life is good? Does your life feel good? What blocks you from seeing it as so?
6. As Genesis continues, we find that we human beings have a tendency to doubt God's Word. In Genesis 3, the serpent makes Adam and Eve wonder, *Are we actually good? Couldn't our lives be better?* Mark 4 seems like it gets us to wonder, too. *What kind of soil, or ground, am I? Am I good soil or not?* How can we know?
7. Notice that the soil can do nothing but be what it is. What are you? We look to our baptisms to know who we are. In the waters of baptism, it is declared that you belong to God. You are a child of God. That is, you are *good*. Good soil. You cannot be but what you are! As Christians, we find assurance not in our life circumstances or our own works and accomplishments but God's promise. *You are mine!* How does it challenge you to rely on God's promise versus your own decisions and actions? How does it free you?
8. Any other thoughts on these texts? Tap into study Bibles and other resources to expand your discussion.

Wrapping up

Share closing thoughts and a prayer.

Additional Resources

The Bible Project. <https://bibleproject.com/>

This site has many videos and other resources that your group may find beneficial for book overviews and context.

These videos are short but comprehensive. Specific videos that pertain to this week's readings are:

Bible Project: Genesis 1-11 Bible Project: Creation Bible Project: Mark

Luther House of Study: The Bible: What to Look For

Luther Seminary Enter the Bible

Genesis Mark Psalms