

1. Week 1: In the Beginning

2. Recap & Preparing for CG

Daily Reading for Week

- Genesis 1-3, Psalm 1
- Genesis 4-7, Psalm 2
- Genesis 8-11, Psalm 3
- Genesis 12-15, Psalm 4
- Genesis 16-18, Psalm 5

Resources for this Week

- Video: What is Read Scripture?
- Video: Genesis Part 1, Genesis 1-11
- Read: Genesis 1-3
- Sermon: The Problem with the Bible

3. Focus of time together

To take a closer look at Genesis 1-11, reflect on our initial experiences with the Year of Biblical Literacy, and prepare for our journey together through the rest of the year.

4. Ground rule/goal/value for the week

Basic Discussion Ground Rules. Read aloud together.

- 1) Reality SF CGs are not meant to be only bible studies or places for theological debate (although these are part of CG at times). Mainly, CG is meant to be a safe space for people from every part of the faith spectrum to gather and practice living out 1 Peter 3:8 (take a moment to read it), learning what it is to be part of the family of God. This means learning to live together in unity, sympathy, love, empathy and compassion.
- 2) With this in mind, discussion should be open and without judgement. We never want to belittle or degrade another person's experience. We welcome people in

the love and grace of Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to move on each person's heart. If you feel strongly opinionated about a subject or statement, approach the conversation with humility and grace. Remember, it is His kindness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4), not strong-arming.

- 3) Regardless of how long you have been walking with Christ remember that none of us are an expert on God and His ways. Throughout scripture God is referred to, and even refers to himself, as a mystery. *So seek to understand before being understood.* Don't assume you have everything about God or scripture or miracles figured out. Avoid responding to one another by always giving advice. Allow room for learning and growing together. And above all have faith that the Holy Spirit is always and will always be at work in your community.

If we all take this approach we will provide everyone a safe place to be transparent and vulnerable while seeking Christ together, just like real families of God are meant to be.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation which is explained at the end of this material, 15 min)

Using the discussion practice of mutual invitation, share in one word how you are feeling about jumping into the Year of Biblical Literacy. (Use an emotional word such as anxious, joyful, exhausted, light, heavy, excited, scared, overwhelmed, encouraged, etc.) We'll elaborate on this question in a bit. For now, just share how you're feeling without further explanation.

6. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Open with a "unity prayer". The way this corporate prayer exercise works is one person opens the time by praying a simple, one-sentence prayer that begins with "Lord hear our...". Share a sentiment or feeling or longing that was expressed by a part of the group either directly or indirectly during your time together. For example, you may have heard someone express loneliness and you can pray "Lord hear our loneliness". After the first prayer, the rest of the group can voice similar one-sentence "Lord hear our..." prayers aloud. You can pray your own feelings or those of others. The hope of this prayer is to help us remember and intentionally think through what we have heard expressed today and entrust it all before God. We will close each meeting with this exercise, hoping that it bonds us through recognizing and holding one another's felt experiences and also teaches us to be better listeners during our time together.

7. Intro to Discussion

What we read and try to comprehend in Genesis is the beginning...of everything. 'Genesis' simply means 'beginning'. Of the universe, our own earth, time, plants, animals, mountains, oceans, humanity. Yet more specifically, it is the beginning of the story the Bible is telling, a story about God's plan to redeem the world through his people. Genesis is a kind of preface, an ultra-important introduction to the story about to be told. Rather than a scientific account of how God created the world, the function of Genesis 1-11 is to introduce the reader to the foundational themes and ideas that the rest of the Bible is based upon. It is similar to an overture in a musical or opera. An overture atunes our ear to what we are about to hear and introduces some of the main melodies that return later in the piece. Everything you will read from here on out builds upon this introduction. The rest of the Old Testament stands upon this Genesis preface and the New Testament stands upon both.

This is a week of beginnings. Beginnings are important. Just as Genesis, the book of beginnings, aims to draw the reader into a long, dramatic, emotional story, the beginning of our Year of Biblical Literacy poses a similar invitation. This will be a long, difficult, confusing journey. It's crucial that we start with a solid foundation. Use this week to consider the journey ahead of you. What will it take? Are you ready and willing to embark? What kinds of questions or struggles are you bringing into this year?

8. Large Group Discussion

Questions for Examining Ourselves (15 minutes)

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

Elaborate on your response in the unity exercise. Why do you think you've been feeling the way you are toward YOBL? What about your experience reading and watching videos so far has affected you either positively or negatively?

Questions for Basic Understanding (10 minutes)

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

If the opening chapters of Genesis, specifically ch 1-11, serve as a sort of narrative preface introducing key themes and ideas, what themes and ideas did you notice? Can you point out what passages you noticed these in?

Questions for Listening to Scripture (10 minutes)

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us.

Throughout the opening chapters in Genesis we see again and again humanity rebel against the God who desires to be in relationship with them and the good created world spirals further and further into evil and brokenness as a result. What do these chapters make you, the reader, long to see happen in the rest of the story? Are there any questions you want to see answered or conflicts you hope will be resolved?

9. Small Group Discussion

Questions for Examining Ourselves (15 minutes)

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

1. Based on your initial jump into YOBL and your experience tonight, what do you need to do to make the most of this upcoming year?
2. What specific invitations or challenges will this journey present to you? Do you need to make any changes in your habits, or would you like to make any new commitments? Is there any ways other members of the group could help you throughout this journey?
3. What are practical ways you can begin every day by opening your heart and mind to God?

10. Closing (5 minutes)

Finish your time by praying for one another in your small groups.

Mutual Invitation - A Discussion Technique

To practice humility and becoming aware of your tendencies in group discussions, we are going to utilize a special discussion technique. We've borrowed the exercise from Eric Law's book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. Law calls it "Mutual Invitation" and uses it to reveal and equalize the power dynamics that exist in groups. He finds it especially effective in multicultural communities because it helps reveal how often the white majority members perceive greater personal power within the community than do

many minority members. It is very helpful in making group members aware of how they interact within the group and then also assisting them to reflect on how this affects the community. It may be useful for your group to use this discussion format on a regular basis, or you may decide just to practice it a few times as a training of sorts. Here's how it works:

1. The discussion leader should let the group know approximately how much time will be allocated for this particular portion of discussion.
2. Then the leader will introduce the topic or question to be discussed. This will typically come from the CG material. It is often helpful if the CG has access to the material to refer back to the question during the discussion. The google doc can be either viewed on a phone or printed out beforehand.
3. Next, the leader introduces or reminds everyone of the discussion process which is as follows:

“The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say 'pass' and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.”

Note: The first time you practice this, it will likely be very awkward. The tendency will be to give up and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk approach. However, persist through this to at least try it a couple times. Also, do not allow people to interrupt or speak when it is not their turn. Gently remind them that it is not their turn to speak. Similarly, if someone “passes” and chooses not to speak, do not pressure them into doing so. If a person speaks very briefly or passes and then does not remember to invite the next person to speak, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person's verbal ability.