



What Kind of Creator?

GENESIS 1:1—2:4a

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion . . .”

Genesis 1:26

Quick prep

Session 1 concerns the account of creation in Genesis 1:1—2:4a. This is the famous story of God creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. For generations, Jews and Christians have read this text not as a literal description of creation, but as a poetic and liturgical mystery. Readers across the centuries have believed that beneath the plain sense of the words, treasured insights about the nature of God and of our world lay buried.

In the modern era, as humanity discovered more about the remarkable expanse and history of God’s creation and the powers of life within it, a considerable amount of popular-level Christian discourse on Genesis 1 turned either to refuting evidence-based theories for the origins of the universe or to attempting to harmonize the premodern accounts in scripture with modern science. For the most part, theological readings of Genesis 1 suffered for this perceived dichotomy between faith and reason.

In contrast, this Together by Grace Bible Conversation invites participants to consider the manifold ways we might read Genesis “after Darwin” that are theologically generative without being intellectually irresponsible.

SUPPLIES

- ♦ Study Bible for the facilitator (*Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition* is recommended)
- ♦ Bibles for the group
- ♦ Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* for every participant

Gather (15 to 30 minutes)

Some participants may feel embarrassed or ashamed because of their relative unfamiliarity with scripture. Even if no one expresses these feelings explicitly, be sure to reassure the group that this study is designed for everyone. In fact, someone with limited experience reading the Bible is likely to bring new insights to the text that others take for granted.

If you are conducting this session in either a hybrid or solely online format and decide to read this prayer in unison, it may be necessary for online participants to mute their microphones.

CHECK IN

This question will help participants begin thinking about a major theme in the reception of Genesis 1 today. Since this is the first session, invite them to share their names and then talk, as they feel comfortable, about their family of origin and their previous experiences with the Bible and science.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us coworkers in your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature so that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 80)

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Invite participants to turn to the group covenant (page 8 for you and page 9 in the participant guide). Consider asking different volunteers to read each bullet point. Pause after each to ask if there are any questions or observations from the group. Reaffirm for participants how fostering compassionate curiosity and protecting confidentiality will help the group trust one another and engage more deeply with scripture and with one another.

The community-building discussion prompt takes cues from the opening prayer. This prompt is relatively open-ended, and it may be helpful for you to answer first to set the tone. It is not necessary for everyone to answer this question.

If participants are slow to speak (this is normal, especially for early sessions), you might wait patiently in silence and let the group know you are doing so intentionally. You can also offer a follow-up prompt. For example, “What was a time and/or place you felt God’s presence in nature?”

Dwell (20 to 40 minutes)

DWELLING IN THE WORD

Read through the scripture text twice, pausing silently for reflection in between. For the first reading, have a confident voice (perhaps your own) read the entire scripture text aloud. In addition to giving everyone a chance to listen, this will establish how difficult words should be pronounced. After this, invite participants to read the scripture text silently to themselves.

Genesis 1:1—2:4a

^{1:1} When God began to create the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ So 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. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then 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. ¹² The 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. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

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

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky. ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves,

✿ Genesis contains at least two creation accounts (Genesis 1:1–2:4a and 2:4b–25). The scribes who compiled and edited the Bible decided to retain both accounts, and accordingly, Jews and Christians have read Genesis 1–2 as a theological unit for generations. This faithful approach to reading the “seams” in scripture has persisted, even though inconsistencies between the accounts have been identified since antiquity.

✿ In Hebrew, Genesis 1:1–2:4a reads more like poetry than prose. Not coincidentally, Jews and Christians alike have regularly assigned this text for use in worship over the centuries, often as a component of liturgy on a yearly holy day. You might share this information with participants and ask how our expectations of a text change when we know we are reading a poem versus when we are reading some type of prose, like history or a story.

✿ Christian readers sometimes interpret “let us” in verse 26 as a reference to the Trinity, but in its original context, this phrase most likely referred to the divine council, an “assembly of divine beings” (*Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition*, p. 11). Even so, Christian readers can still reflect on the mysteries of God’s complex unity in the Old Testament. We just need to remember that we do so through the particular lens of our faith.

✿ Despite being often referred to in scripture with male pronouns, God is neither male nor female. In fact, the image of God is both “male and female” according to verse 27, reflected in diversity and difference. We can choose to read this binary division as a *description* of how living creatures procreate (see “Be fruitful and multiply,” v. 28) and not as a *prescription* for two fixed molds into which every person who ever lived must fit.

✿ It is likely that many of the words or phrases that participants flag in question 1 are discussed either in the notes of your facilitator guide or in *Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition*. If time allows as you prepare for this session, consider creating your own list and doing some preliminary research.

✿ If the conversation ever takes a turn that is unhelpful, disordered, or hurtful, invite participants to recall the Group Covenant. Remind the group that it is not necessary to come to a consensus on every point of disagreement. Moreover, most of these themes will return in future sessions, so there will be opportunities for new insights and discussion.

of every kind, with which the waters swarm and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.²² God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And 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.²⁵ God 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.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humans 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.”

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

²⁸ God 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.”²⁹ God 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.”³⁰ And 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.³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude.
² On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

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

CONVERSATION

1. Keep track of the words or phrases that people notice. If these do not come up organically over the course of the conversation, return to them before moving on to the next section.
2. This question offers a challenging prompt about whether it is possible for God to create something that is “not good.” Consider inviting participants

to turn (briefly) to Genesis 2:18, where God recognizes a situation as “not good” and takes steps to rectify it. In these early chapters of Genesis at least, when God sees that something is not good, the answer is not to give up on it but to continue creating—usually by inviting creation into more intimate relationship with itself and with God.

3. Depending on your context, there may be disagreement around this question. Recall that disagreement over the interpretation of scripture is not necessarily a sign that the body of Christ is divided; sometimes the Holy Spirit reveals new truths to us when we discover what we are willing to argue about.
4. You can connect this question back to the Community-Building section or use it to anticipate point 3 of the Suggestions for Going Deeper section in the participant guide.

✦ Depending on their background and theology of scripture, some participants may struggle with question 3. Consider turning the conversation toward this issue’s local “stakes.” For example, some public voices today advocate for civil authorities and/or school curricula to dictate specific understandings of the Bible and science. How have you seen this play out in your community? What does this scripture text teach us about how to understand and treat creation and one another?

Engage (10 to 20 minutes)

WORD AND SERVICE

Orient participants to the Session Recap, Suggestions for Going Deeper, and Looking Ahead features in their participant guide. Share how you might be using them in the week ahead, and ask the group if they could invite someone to join you all at your next session.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Turn to page 328 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and follow the order for Responsive Prayer together. Consider beginning with a moment of silence. You or another experienced worship leader may need to lead these prayers at the first meeting, but for the remainder of the sessions, other participants should be able to take over. On page 330, the order directs that a prayer of the day be used. For this, you might want to select a prayer in advance from pages 64–87 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, but you can also share another appropriate prayer from another source as you see fit. After the prayer of the day, the leader should invite participants to share their prayer concerns and thanksgivings, using the following words:

I invite you to share your prayers of concern and thanksgiving at this time, either silently or aloud.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Looking Ahead section of the participant guide provides a preview of the theme for the next session. Be sure everyone is clear about the time, place, and format for your next meeting before adjourning.

✦ Some participants may be inexperienced at following an order for prayer of this kind, so explain some basics if necessary. For example: The leader says the regular type while the congregation says the bold.

✦ On page 329 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, you may follow either the prayers labeled “Morning” or the prayers labeled “At other times.”

✦ Remind participants to get permission before sharing another person’s name or concern out loud with the group.

✦ If you are running this session in an online or hybrid setting, you have a few options for adapting this section. If you have time, you can send a copy of the prayer responses to participants in advance or prepare a simple slide show to share as you pray. Participants can also obtain their own print or electronic copy of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

