



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Creation, New Creation

LEADERS GUIDE

From the study:

God's highest creation on the earth is man and woman. They are created for fellowship with God. As God's representatives over creation, they are to cultivate the earth's resources and, with the attitude of mutual respect, care and provide for those different than themselves. Moreover, man and woman, as husband and wife, are to be faithful and of mutual service to each other as they reflect the love of God, who in Jesus Christ is shown to be self-giving. Through constant dependence upon the God of creative love and constant fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ, each person's life reaches its fullest meaning.



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 8.) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 53.) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 57**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business

may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

The God of Creation

Genesis 1:1–25; Acts 14:8–17

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The universe and all that is in it is the result of the creative act of the triune God. The universe is not of the same essence of God, nor is anything in the universe to be given the fear, love, and trust that belongs only to God. The power, wisdom, goodness, and generosity of God seen in creation is meant to lead us to seek out the Creator so that we enter into a right relationship with the one God, who is the source of all existence.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. recognize that creation comes from the hand of a wise and generous Creator;
2. be alert to the temptation of fearing, loving, and trusting in things more than in God, their giver; and
3. share the good news that the greatest gift to creation is the triune God's redemption of it through the Son of God, who brings freedom from slavery to man-made idols, which cannot fulfill human need.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O divine Creator, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, grant us the ability to listen to Your revelation in the Scriptures so that we might see Your goodness, generosity, and power all around us in Creation. Guard us against the idolatry of fearing, loving, or trusting in any part of creation rather than in You. May we offer to You alone the trust, obedience, gratitude, and honor due Your name because of Your multiple gifts in creation to us. We thank You especially for the fullness of life and the light to the way of salvation given in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Visitors to the Grand Canyon are told that the magnificent vista is the result of a slow dripping of water from the Colorado River over millions of years. A Christian visitor looking upon that same vista will see much more. He will recognize the living God's handiwork behind the "dripping" of the water. Such an origin of the canyon—indeed, the origin of the entire universe—is known only by "special revelation," which is given by the Creator Himself and recorded in the inspired Scriptures.

Despite all the probing of science, the origin of creation remains a mystery. Scripture comments, (Ecclesiastes 11:5) "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything" (see also Job 38:4–41). Knowledge of why there is a creation and who it is who brought creation into existence lies outside the analysis of modern science.

Scripture does not explain scientifically how God created the world. Unlike scientists, who have the God-given right to examine such things as *how* things presently are, the ancient biblical writers concentrated on *who* gave creation its existence and for what purpose creation exists. Therefore, the Bible presents creation in a nonscientific way. Of course, that is not the same thing as saying that the biblical texts are unscientific. Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul accepted the Genesis account of creation as historically accurate. When Jesus speaks of the creation of male and female and the institution of

marriage in the Garden of Eden (Matthew 19:4–5), He quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Likewise, the apostle Paul, according to 2 Corinthians 4:6, refers to God's creation of light. In Romans 5:12–21, Paul describes the significance of Jesus' ministry as His ability to undo the havoc Adam brought down upon creation.

1 Creation Exists Because There Is One Creator (Genesis 1:1–2)

The Book of Genesis opens with the simple yet majestic and profound declaration, (1:1) "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." "The heavens and the earth" refers to the universe. St. Augustine, a great fifth-century Church leader, pointed out that God did not create "in time," but with God's act of creation, time and space came into existence. Scripture does not specify when the universe, including the earth, was brought into existence. Scripture's record of *human* history on earth goes back only several thousand years.

Because only God is eternal, the great "I AM" (Exodus 3:14), and source and sustainer of all that presently exists (Acts 17:28), only He could create the universe out of nothing but His Word (Hebrews 11:3). There were no preexistent substances, nothing to hinder His power. In a moment when there was nothing, all things both visible and invisible came into existence through a free act of the personal Creator.

In a theological sense, only God creates, brings into existence from nothing. Human builders and artisans simply rearrange materials already in existence. Moses, Jesus, and St. Paul affirm that there is only one Creator, God, who is the source of all reality (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29). The Hebrew word used for "create" (*bara'*) is never used with a subject other than *God* in the Old Testament.

The prophet Isaiah records this warning from God to people of various cultures, with their so-called competing deities: (Isaiah 44:24) "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by Myself."

Some people may be surprised to learn that Genesis does not attempt to prove God's existence. Hebrews 3:4 takes it as a logical conclusion that the existence of the universe points to a Creator when it says, "Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." Scripture declares that a person is a "fool," acting irrationally, who says there is no God (Psalm 14:1).

Romans 1:19–21 testifies that God has surrounded all people with the evidence of a Creator simply by being surrounded by creation's grandeur, complexity, and power. Additionally, the internal testimony of each person's conscience, which is our built-in sense of "oughtness" ("I ought to do this" or "I ought to avoid that") (Romans 2:14–15), should lead them to seek to learn more about who or what gives everything its value (Acts 17:27) and who eventually judges all actions.

Nevertheless, atheists (from the Greek *a*, "not," and *theos*, "god") strongly deny the existence of any Supreme Being. Some atheists argue that religion is a psychological crutch that emotionally weak persons use to get through life. Certainly, those who believe in God's existence acknowledge that the belief fulfills their emotional need. But the atheists' argument can be turned against them. It can be said that atheists find the existence of God threatening. Therefore, their rejection of a God to whom they are accountable is an emotionally comfortable crutch, a psychic pathology, and even worse, a willful suppression of the truth of God's existence that will condemn them (Romans 1:18).

Scripture reveals that the universe was created by God the Father (1 Corinthians 8:6), through the Son (John 1:10; Colossians 1:16), and in the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2).

2 Genesis's Description of God and Creation (Genesis 1:3–25)

At the very beginning of God's seven creation days, the earth was unorganized, "without form and void" (Genesis 1:2). But then the Spirit of God began "hovering" over the face of the waters. Later rabbis would say that such action of the Spirit was like that of the dove. Many years later, the Holy Spirit objectively confirmed His presence at the Son of God's Baptism by the appearance of a dove (Matthew 3:16).

Verse 3—God spoke light into existence. Light was present before the creation of the light-bearing bodies, the sun and stars. Genesis 1 does not use the terms "sun" and "moon" because they were associated with the names of pagan deities. The Genesis narrative clearly maintains that the planets are only planets, and not gods. This opened the way for science in the Western world, since it no longer needs to fear investigating the planets. It also helps followers of Scripture to avoid seeking guidance of day-to-day activities through astrology.

Verses 4–5—With the light came the evening-morning cycle. The earth began its rotation on its axis. This ended God’s creative activity on the first day.

Verses 6–8—These verses do not focus on the cosmos (ordered universe) generally, but on planet Earth specifically. They present Creation Day 2. That is the day when the earth’s atmosphere came into existence. God parted the waters below the earth from those above. These two sets of water were separated from one another by the expanse (firmament) of the earth’s atmosphere. The “Heaven,” mentioned in verse 8 refers collectively to the sky and space.

Verses 9–13—Now we come to Creation Day 3, when the continents, oceans, and land vegetation appeared. God gave the vegetation the mechanisms for self-reproduction (the meaning of “kind”; v. 11). This mechanism was one of the instruments of God’s continuing involvement in creation, His Divine Providence (discussed in Lesson 4).

On Creation Day 3, God caused the earth to rise out of the waters to be inhabitable by man (Job 38:10–11). Afterward, it brought forth plants at God’s command. Plants are more closely related to the earth than are either animals or humans. Plants take root in the earth, from which minerals are taken for their construction.

Verses 14–19—On Creation Day 4, the light-bearing bodies were “turned on.” The words describing the fourth day emphasize the light more than the sun and stars. The night-day cycle set in motion on Day 1, however, continued without interruption.

Verses 20–23—On Creation Day 5, fish and birds were created. Genesis emphasizes the huge quantities of water-living creatures that God created. Among these water-living creatures were (v. 21) “sea creatures,” literally, “long, stretched beings.” Various types of winged birds were also created. These creatures also were blessed with mechanisms for reproduction (v. 22).

Verses 24–25—On Creation Day 6, God first created land animals. God’s activity was more pronounced in their creation. There is variety in the animal world. Verse 24 categorizes them as either cattle (all animals that can be domesticated), creepers (smaller land animals such as worms, insects, and rabbits), or beasts (animals not easily or casually tamed, such as lions). The land animals did not receive a blessing from God, as did the water animals, the fowl, and (later) man. Perhaps if the land animals multiplied without restraint, this would be unhealthy to human existence. However,

both the birds and the land animals were authorized to eat from every green plant on the earth (Genesis 1:30). Because sin had not yet entered into life on earth, the animal, fish, and insect world were no threat to human existence.

Thus, God methodically and progressively established the universe. God is a God of order and purpose (1 Corinthians 14:40). When God saw His creations, He called them “good” (Genesis 1:25; see also 1 Timothy 4:4). Science today owes much to the nature of God the Creator. Science affirms the reality of the physical world and science assumes that nature possesses a traceable, understandable order. From that original goodness of creation, the applied sciences take their origin.

3 Creation Is Distinct from and Dependent upon the Creator

Some contemporary people in the Western world are now flirting with ideas that have their origin in ancient Eastern religions. These religions teach that all that exists is simply an unfolding of an impersonal world force. Philosophically, this “may the force be with you!” belief is called *Monism*. According to Monism, “God” is neither a “he,” a “she,” nor anything “objective” or “personal.” No personal supreme Creator exists. Monism’s position is that the universe is closed to any intervention from an outside power. “Mother Nature” is the only so-called god to focus upon. “Salvation” is knowledge and the feeling of oneness with the impersonal “spirit” of the universe. Monism finds formal religious expression in Hinduism, Taoism, and “New Age” guru-led movements, which believe in one supreme all-encompassing impersonal being.

But Scripture is clear that the universe is not an emanation of God or His essence. As the Self-Existent One, God is the “Most High God,” meaning that God is separate from and independent of everything that has been created (Psalm 113:4–6). The Creator is not bound by any of the universe’s limitations. Nature minus God equals nothing. God, however, does have status independent of nature. God alone is eternal, without beginning or end (Isaiah 57:15; Malachi 3:6). Nature is simply nature and not deity.

Because God transcends all that He has created, we must be warned that God cannot be manipulated or “boxed” in by science and its assumptions, nor by the limited vision of those who worship at the altar of the latest technological products. The Genesis 11 story of the tow-

er of Babel is a warning to all societies that think their ability to construct things to reach the “heavens” makes the seeking of and serving God’s will obsolete. Towers of human pride and covetousness will crumble under divine judgment. Regardless how inventive or powerful a person and culture become, they are not God (Isaiah 31:3; Ezekiel 28:2). Material things given by God are important to human survival, but material things cannot nourish the human spirit meant to spend an eternity with God (Luke 12:15).

Christians appreciate technological advances both in medicine and in inventions that make daily activities less drudgery. But there is more to reality than what machines can create. According to 1 Timothy 4:4, everything God created is good. However, 1 Timothy goes on to say (v. 5) that turning to God in prayer and thanksgiving are necessary to the right use of the Creator’s gifts. Scientific advances must be undertaken in light of God’s will that they benefit all humanity.

Those people who have come to trust in the God of Scripture find confidence and comfort in knowing that God is capable of accomplishing deeds of rescue that would be impossible for any mere human being or any so-called “law of nature” to perform (Luke 1:37). To Him alone goes all glory, for He alone is Creation’s life-source and its redemption from sin’s bondage (Revelation 4:11).

4 Looking beyond Creation to the Creator (Acts 14:8–17)

As a great missionary and master communicator, St. Paul knew how to meet the needs of his various audiences. This was evident when Paul visited Lystra, a Roman settlement in the province of Galatia with ethnically distinct people who spoke their own language.

Verses 8–11—One day when Lystra was crowded, either because the harvest was completed or it was a festival day, Paul healed a man crippled from birth. Paul’s preaching also produced faith in the man’s heart. But the pagan crowd, who were also listening to Paul, became emotionally charged from witnessing the healing power flowing from Paul’s preaching. The crowd began to jabber in their local dialect that “the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”

Verses 12–13—The crowd began to address Barnabas as Zeus, the chief of the Greek family of gods. The excited crowd also thought Paul was Hermes, the Greek god of oratory, “because he [Paul] was the chief speaker.”

Someone must have sent word to the local priest of Zeus to begin elaborate preparations to welcome these thought-to-be-divine visitors. Because the arrangements were being made in a language unknown to Paul and Barnabas, they did not know about the blasphemous honor—the sacrifice of an animal at the town gate—that was about to be done in their honor.

Verse 14—When Barnabas and Paul realized what was about to be offered to them, the two missionaries were horrified. They did not want to be the center of such a display of idolatry that failed to distinguish the difference between God and things merely mortal. As a sign of their extreme distress over such blasphemous idolatry, the missionaries tore their garments—a typical response of protest by pious Jews. They also rushed into the crowd to stop the offering of the sacrifice.

Verse 15a—Paul asked his pagan audience why they were doing these things for them, who were mere mortals. He told them that he was simply a messenger of the good tidings that God offers to all who turn “from these vain things,” to the “living God.” Scripture points out that the “gods” of non-Christian religions are actually nonexistent (1 Corinthians 8:4). The followers of such religions unknowingly are serving deceiving demons rather than the good, gracious, giving God of life (1 Corinthians 10:20).

Verses 15b–17—Paul speaks about God as Creator, “who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” Believing in the existence of God as the Creator is essential to true faith (Hebrews 11:1, 6). Any belief that thinks humans evolved purely by chance strikes at the very foundation of the “creatorship” of God and is a futile attempt to rob God the Creator of the honor due Him, for He is the rightful creator-owner who is active in all things involving our survival. He is the God of generosity who provides the human race with vast resources of stimulating sunshine, productive soil, and life-giving rain. These blessings make the earth bountiful. Therefore, Psalm 147:8 speaks of them as a special sign of divine favor.

God’s goodness in directing the seasons and elements to produce the earth’s fruit to fulfill our physical needs should cause us to pause and contemplate the Giver of such goodness (Joel 2:23).

5 To the One God of Creation Are Fear, Love, and Trust Due

Every person has a “god” of one kind or another that

he or she is worshiping. No one is really godless, in a certain sense. We read in Psalm 31:14, "But I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.'" Whatever a person ultimately puts his or her fear, love, and trust in, that has become that person's god. Luther wrote of this in his explanation of the First Commandment in his Large Catechism (I 2–3):

A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. . . . The confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true.

In their quest for happiness or security, people follow competing "gods." There are the educational gods: progress, relativism, and scientism. There are the national gods: security, world power, and materialism. These gods are, however, idols, that is, "no-nothings"; they are not fundamental reality. They will let humans down. They are too small for humanity's great questions and universal needs. At times, the children of earth may get a passing thought that maybe their inventions, such as the unleashing of atoms in nuclear bombs, cannot compare to the power of Creation, as when a volcano erupts or a tsunami's waves swamp land masses. In such moments, they see that human inventions are like matches that appear bright in a dark room but are barely seen in the light of the blazing sun.

People of the earth need to hear this message from God the Creator. He says, (Isaiah 40:25–26) "To whom then will you compare Me, that I should be like him? . . . Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host [stars] by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power not one is missing."

God is angry at sin. He says, (Exodus 20:5–6) "You shall not bow down to them [any material thing we 'idolize'] or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God." God's jealousy is His zeal to protect from destruction what He has created. For this reason, God has a firm displeasure with wickedness, especially against those who worship that which is not the only living God who is worthy to worship (Psalm 78:58).

Isaiah writes (40:21–22) that God "sits above the circle of the earth" and sees the rulers of the earth to be like mere "grasshoppers" that He can easily blow away. To God's people, the Psalmist has these comforting words: (33:18–19) "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those

who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love, that He may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine."

Conclusion

Creation is essentially good because it comes from the hand of the Creator, who is good. Moreover, creation is so important to the triune God that, at a certain point in history, the Son of God personally acted within creation to redeem it and its fallen people.

God as the caring Creator is seen in the Son of God become fully man, Jesus Christ. At His Baptism, He identified with the ungodly to fulfill their righteousness (Matthew 3:13–15). He then paid for that identification with His outpoured blood upon Golgotha's Good Friday Cross (Romans 5:6). At that unique event, divine wrath, faithfulness, love, and mercy "kiss," to the benefit of all creation (Psalm 85:4, 10, 11)—and creation itself responded (Matthew 27:45, 51).

Concluding Activities

Pray aloud: Blessed are You, O God, King of Creation; blessed are You! We thank You for Your generosity in the magnitude of Your earthly gifts to us through creation. Forgive us for those times we have been guilty of subtle idolatry, when we have forgotten to look up and beyond created things to You the powerful, good, wise, and generous Giver. Above all, we praise You for entering into creation by becoming Jesus Christ, full man yet fully God, who redeems us, mercifully recreates us by the Holy Spirit, and previews an even more glorious creation yet to be. Amen.

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

Creation of Man and Woman

Genesis 1:26; 2:18–25; Mark 10:1–9; Acts 17:16–31

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God's highest creation on the earth is man and woman. They are created for fellowship with God. As God's representatives over creation, they are to cultivate the earth's resources and, with the attitude of mutual respect, care and provide for those different than themselves. Moreover, man and woman, as husband and wife, are to be faithful and of mutual service to each other as they reflect the love of God, who in Jesus Christ is shown to be self-giving. Through constant dependence upon the God of creative love and constant fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ, each person's life reaches its fullest meaning.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. appreciate the value each person has as a unique creation of God;
2. work toward giving respect and support to all members of the human family; and
3. cherish the cultural diversity on earth but not accept the plurality of religions that do not confess Jesus Christ as the only path to a blessed eternity as equal with Christianity.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 60.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*.

All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, pour down upon us the gift of Your Holy Spirit so that we may ever remain conscious of the unique dignity You have bestowed upon us by giving to us Your divine image. Because Your image was given to all human beings, help us to treat others with the respect that is theirs because You created and redeemed them. Call to our remembrance the significance of Your coming to earth to become the man Jesus Christ. May we as husband or wife learn how to daily and concretely exhibit Your self-giving love to each other. We pray this on the basis of Jesus' intercession. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Are human beings merely small energy pockets in the vast field of all energy? Can human behavior be analyzed simply on the basis of pure material processes? Psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, neurosurgeons, philosophers, and theologians seek to answer the question each human also needs to know: "What is man?" (See Psalm 8:4 and Job 7:17.)

Does the answer start with the Genesis narrative of the creation of the first humans? Is Scripture true when it speaks of the creation of Adam as the first man? Jesus certainly thought so. He based His position on marriage on the Genesis account of God bringing Adam to Eve (Mark 10:7). In Romans 5:12–17, the apostle Paul draws a contrast between the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Jesus. If Adam and Eve did not really exist, then Adam's act of disobedience would not be a historical event. And if Adam's act of disobedience did not really occur, then Paul's analogy about Jesus' act of obedience that benefits all humanity (2 Corinthians 5:19) would be meaningless.

1 The Creation of Adam (Genesis 1:26)

Scripture expresses in two ways the special place that humans have in creation. First, by the use of the word “then,” and second, by the record of God taking counsel, saying, “Let Us make man.” God did not say these words when creating earlier things. The Hebrew text records that the triune God said (literally), “Let Us make Adam.” Scripture uses the word “Adam” in the plural. “Adam” is the generic name for the human race. Linguists think that the word “Adam” is derived from the verb *adam*, which means “to be red.” The Hebrew word for “ground,” *adamah*, also may be derived from the word for “red.”

A human being is a unity of the physical and the spiritual. Genesis 2:7 states that the first man was constructed from soil (Hebrew *aphar*). While the ESV translation speaks of it as “dust,” Luther calls it *Erdenkloss*, “lump of earth.” Thus man has a definite connection to the earth, and the human body is dependent upon various elements in the earth for its health.

The human body is very valuable because it serves as the visible form of a person. Moreover, it is through a physical body that a believer can do the will of God on earth, as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), because the Holy Spirit enables the new spiritual life given to that body (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). However, Satan, in his attempt to dethrone God, wants humans to use God’s gift of the human body as a demonic vehicle for doing evil in the world (Galatians 5:13).

The physical part of human nature was given additional dignity by the Son of God’s incarnation as Jesus Christ, as well as by His bodily resurrection and His taking His glorified body into heaven. Jesus will finally affirm how valuable the body is when He gives all people a resurrection body that will remain with them throughout eternity (1 Corinthians 15:52).

However, God has given every person not only a material, visible body but also a spirit-soul (Matthew 27:50; Hebrews 12:23). Though theologians continue to debate whether the human spirit is different from the human soul, it can be said that either refers to the invisible side of what a person is. According to Genesis 2:7, when God breathed life into the clay He had shaped, the result was a living soul. When the spirit-soul inhabits a body, the material becomes a living human person.

The spirit-soul side of a human being continues to exist even at the time when the physical body becomes

simply a corpse to be put in a grave. The person’s life continues apart from the body and is with God until the Last Day, when Jesus will bring in the new creation and will clothe the believer’s spirit-soul with a resurrected and glorious body (Matthew 10:28).

2 The Creation of Eve (Genesis 2:18–25)

Verse 18—Having created Adam, God said, “I will make him a helper fit for him.” God created people to be social, to be in relationship both to other humans and to God. Man is to live in community, not in a self-centered solitude.

Verse 19—Then God brought all the animals before Adam and had him name them. This was an expression of Adam’s lordship over the animals and showed Adam concretely that they were not suitable as equal companions for him.

Verses 21–23—After the naming, in a way that Adam was not allowed to see, a special work of divine creation took place. God willed that the sexes would become differentiated. God created Eve, a woman. Her creation was indeed special. She, like Adam, was created in the image of God. But as to the manner of her creation, she was made neither out of nothing (like the universe), nor directly out of “dust from the ground” (like Adam; Genesis 2:7), but out of Adam.

With the creation of Eve, Adam saw a reflection of himself, a complement to himself. God made for Adam a woman fully his equal. In this way, his loneliness was to be lessened. Woman was not created to be Adam’s mere assistant (“helper”; v. 20). Some speak of woman as a “help meet” (KJV), which has the sense of the archaic English word *meet*, meaning the woman “fit to” or “corresponded to” the man. As an expression of his joy at God’s creation of woman, Adam said, (v. 23) “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” “Bone of my bones” is a Hebrew idiom meaning a “very close relative,” “one of us,” or in effect, “my equal.”

God has given distinctive functions to a man and to a woman. Equality of worth is not equivalent to identity of role. Although men and women are equal, they are not the same. Their equality is complementary, for Adam said of Eve, (v. 23) “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Ephesians 5:23 speaks of man as the “head” of his wife. Adam was chosen to represent the human race, even as

Jesus represents the new creation (Romans 5:19). First Corinthians 11:3 compares the “headship” of man in relation to his wife to that of the Son of God to His heavenly Father. St. Paul writes, “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”

In John 4:34, Jesus said that His “food” was to do the will of Him who sent Him and to accomplish His heavenly Father’s work. That work involved suffering upon a cross. The heavenly Father afterward exalted the Son as Lord over all because of His self-sacrifice (Philippians 2:4–11). In an analogous way, when the husband’s “headship” is that of voluntary, responsible, self-sacrificing love toward his wife, she in turn renders respect and support to her husband’s leadership.

Verse 25—Adam and Eve were naked but not ashamed. This means that they accepted each other’s difference and each other’s dependence on the other. Thus it is that to be a human person, one willingly lives in interdependence, not independence. This is similar to the relationship within the triune Godhead.

3 A Marriage Made in Heaven (Genesis 2:24)

Marriage is a holy estate that was instituted by God; it is not just a result of human social experimentation. Marriage is the God-created union of one man and one woman that is valued so highly that the apostle Paul compared it to Christ’s intimate relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:21–33). Scripture says that marriage is to be honored by all, and that those who forbid people to marry are false teachers misled by demonic spirits (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Timothy 4:1–3). Through marriage, God provides man and woman with companionship, love, and the gift of sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:4–5) that becomes also God’s method for the continuation of the human family (Genesis 1:28).

Immediately after He created Eve, God brought her to Adam, who recognized her as his God-given spouse. Scripture then comments, (Genesis 2:24) “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

This verse outlines three important actions that go into the creation of a marriage in God’s sight. A marriage exists in God’s sight when a man *leaves* his parents, with a view not merely to living apart from them but with the intent to “*hold fast*” to his wife and become *one flesh*

with her. The leaving and the holding fast belong together and are to take place in that order. The two words certify the replacement of one human relationship, that of child and parent, by another, namely, that of becoming husband and wife.

Theologians point out that there are some similarities between these relationships and that they contain physical, emotional, and social elements. The physical in one case is conception, birth, and nurture; in the other sexual intercourse. The emotional involves “growing up,” the process of growing out of the dependence of childhood into the maturity of partnership. The social is children inheriting an already existent family unit, couples creating a new one.

However, at the same time, there is an essential dissimilarity between them. The biblical notion of becoming one “flesh” encompasses not merely the soft tissues of a person’s body but also the entire person as “enfleshed,” that is, the whole person as a physical being. Husband and wife are so completely joined in marriage that two lives have entered into a common life. The result is that the unity of husband and wife is deeper than the relationship of children to their parents. Not to be overlooked is that when a later biblical text, Deuteronomy 6:4, says that God is “one,” it uses the Hebrew word *Echad*, which is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 to say that the husband and wife become “one” flesh. The husband-wife interconnection is so deep that New Testament epistles base many exhortations upon it. Both St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:12–13, and St. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:1–2, encourage a Christian to stay with a presently unbelieving spouse because the Christian’s lifestyle within the marriage can influence the spouse’s spirituality.

The Genesis 2:24 words “a man . . . his wife” underscore that the marriage union is an exclusive *man-woman* relationship. This includes making that relationship public at a social event (“leave his father and his mother”). Additionally, the marriage is entered into as one that is to be permanent (“hold fast to his wife”), and is consummated by sexual intercourse (“they shall become one flesh”). Any sexual relationship that deviates from God’s revealed intention comes under divine judgment. Such deviations include polygamy (which contradicts the one man–one woman principle), cohabitation and clandestine unions (which involve no decisive public leaving of parents), casual encounters and temporary liaisons, and adultery. Homosexual partnerships violate the Bible’s statement that “a man” shall be united to

“his wife.” Moreover, many divorces contradict God’s word about “hold fast” and violate Jesus’ prohibition “let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

4 “What Therefore God Has Joined Together, Let Not Man Separate” (Mark 10:1–9)

To God, marriage has the binding nature of a contract that demands faithfulness. While human laws establish the legal basis both for marriage and its breakdown (divorce), God is also involved in this intimate relationship between a man and a woman. As God incarnate upon earth, Jesus asserts this truth.

Verse 1—As Jesus headed toward His crucifixion, He left Galilee “and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan.” This region was under the jurisdiction of the ruler Herod Antipas. He was the one who beheaded John the Baptizer because he condemned Herod’s adulterous relationship with his stepbrother’s wife (Matthew 14:1–12). “Beyond the Jordan” is also the region where Moses gave the law that permitted divorce and remarriage because of the stubborn hearts of the people (Deuteronomy 24:1–4).

Verses 2–9—Some Pharisees then approached Jesus with a “test” question on divorce, a topic about which they themselves were in disagreement. It would be as controversial as if you asked an American politician, “Where do you stand on abortion?” Jesus’ critics want to trick Him into saying something that would get Him in trouble with the ruler, Herod Antipas, who would hear about and maybe respond to Jesus as violently as he had to John the Baptizer. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

If Jesus answered yes, He would have discredited Himself for a lax interpretation of the Law (Deuteronomy 24:1–4). On the other hand, if Jesus answered no, He would have insulted Herod Antipas, who had divorced his wife.

But always in control of every situation, Jesus presented a counter-question. He asked the Pharisees if they had not read what God, speaking through Moses, said about marriage originally.

Thinking they knew Scripture better than Jesus, the Pharisees immediately pointed out that Moses permitted a husband to write “a certificate of divorce” and thereby divorce her (Mark 10:4).

Jesus pointed out (v. 5) that Moses allowed divorce simply as a concession to the “hardness” of the human

heart. Actually, the purpose of the “certificate of divorce” was not to authorize divorce but merely to limit its consequences for the woman. Without that document, she could later have been charged with adultery if she remarried—and then be punished by being stoned to death.

Jesus then referred back to God’s real commandment on the subject. As the Son of God is faithful to His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25), likewise husband and wife are to be faithful to each other. The union of husband and wife is no mere human convention, but it is a bond that God Himself made (Malachi 2:14–16) and which no one is authorized to dissolve. Hence Jesus’ solemn declaration, (Mark 10:9) “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Jesus is well aware of the conflicts that two persons, both infected with sin, have in living together in the intimacy of marriage. For sinful humans, commitment to fidelity in marriage is not easy. Mutual forgiveness is vital to the maintenance of a good marriage. Jesus leaves no “loop holes” in His expectation that the Christian life is to be governed by the giving and receiving of forgiveness (Matthew 18:35). The Bride of Christ, the Church, lives daily under His forgiveness (Ephesians 5:26), and the “first” church, the Christian home, is to do so as well. As St. Paul wrote, (Ephesians 5:32–33) “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Thus, Jesus brings His teachings on suffering, self-denial, humility, and service into its most concrete and intimate sphere of human life: marriage. Within its intimacy, those trusting in Christ will also experience within their home the coming of His kingdom with power (Mark 9:1).

5 One Race and One Savior (Acts 17:16–31)

Verses 16–17—When the apostle Paul visited the multicultural city of Athens, its many pagan temples and statues provoked a great indignation in him. Each Sabbath, Paul preached in the synagogue, but the rest of the week he directly evangelized any pagan willing to listen to him in the marketplace.

Verse 18—In Paul’s audience were some philosophers who considered Paul to be a mere “babbler,” a speaker without a well-developed system of thought. Some oth-

er hearers considered Paul to be a propagandist for an unknown cult of “Jesus and the resurrection.”

Verses 22–28—Paul responded with a reminder that all nations have their origin in “one,” that is, Adam (v. 26). In God’s sight, there is only one race. Even biological anthropology now recognizes that there isn’t one gene, characteristic, or trait that distinguishes race. Even before Paul’s message, Scripture testified that God made all people equal from the womb and that He will judge us if we treat any person unjustly (Job 31:13–15). Jesus was not “swayed by appearances” (Mark 12:14). He defended the worth of all, especially women, the disabled, and the elderly. Moreover, God reminded Peter that he “should not call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

No particular group of people can claim a superior origin over that of any other group. Scripture condemns any type of conduct or words that puts a person either at a disadvantage or advantage because of his or her color, culture, or ethnic origin. Such ethnocentrism (better word than *racism* because there is only one “race,” the human race) is unacceptable because it attacks the unique dignity God has given to all human persons in having created them and, above all, having offered them reconciliation with Him through Christ.

Verses 26–27a—Nevertheless, while Christians acknowledge cultural diversity and appreciate whatever is good in the various cultures on the planet, Scripture forbids the acceptance of religious pluralism. This is what Paul points out to the Athenians. (V. 26) The God of creation is the Lord of history, who controls the rise and fall of nations. (V. 27a) God’s governance of all nations is that people may seek Him and “might feel their way toward Him.” Seeking God means relinquishing trust in mere human beings and in all that is not God (Isaiah 31:1), and turning to the only righteous, living God (Isaiah 55:7).

Verses 27b–31—God is “not far from each one of us.” (V. 28) He is as close as the breath of life within us. (V. 30) Though God did not, in His providential goodness, destroy Athens for its idolatry, He commanded all people to a total reorientation regarding the Creator. (V. 31) He did this because a unique person has appeared on earth to begin a new era for all people. The turning point of history is Jesus. Salvation for all people is connected to only one name: “Jesus” (Acts 4:12).

Conclusion

The Sacred Scripture reveals that humans are created beings, dependent upon the triune God and interdependent upon one another.

In biblical thought, a person’s self-worth is not based on his “net worth.” The dignity of a person is what he or she is intrinsically, a human created by God. Psalm 8:5 notes that each human person is “a little lower than the heavenly beings” (some ancient text has “a little lower than God”). For this reason, human persons are to be protected as the highest life form on earth (Genesis 9:6).

At the same time, the Christian Church, and its most basic unit, the family, is to mentor to its culture the self-sacrificing love that a Christian husband and wife have toward each other. In such marital love, Christians give concrete witness to the saving love that the triune God intends to bring to all cultures through their trust in the only one who benefits humanity eternally, Jesus Christ.

Concluding Activities

Pray aloud: Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for the dignity You have bestowed upon us by creating us in Your image. Send upon us the gift of Your Holy Spirit that He may enable us to exhibit Your reconciling love in Jesus Christ in our homes, our marriages, and the way that we treat those who are different from us. Keep us all in faith in Jesus Christ as we look forward with hope and expectation to when many more of the human race are brought into the one family of Your redeemed children. Amen.

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.