

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT[®]
CHRONOLOGICAL



THE
STORY
begins

Volume 1

PREVIEW GUIDE

LifeWay | Adults

“Then beginning
with Moses and all the
Prophets, **He interpreted
for them** the things
concerning Himself in **all
the Scriptures.**”

Luke 24:27

Letter from the **Editors**

Ed Stetzer & Trevin Wax

As we've talked with church leaders across the world, we've heard a common concern: people in our churches know Bible stories, but they don't know the overarching Bible Story—the grand narrative that tells us about our creation, our fall into sin, God's work of redemption, and the future restoration that is coming. We share that concern, and that's why we're excited to present The Gospel Project, a curriculum that leads people to understand basic Bible doctrines, to see how all the Scriptures point to Jesus, and to join Him in His mission of seeking and saving the lost.

We study theology not because we want to know more about God, but because we want to know God better. It's not only about filling our minds with knowledge, but also about filling our hearts with passion for knowing God and making Him known.

Why should you consider The Gospel Project? Because the good news of Jesus is what empowers us—God's people—to live on mission, representing Christ to those around us and proclaiming His name to the world.



Ed Stetzer, General Editor



Trevin Wax, Managing Editor

Our Core Values

Christ-centered Study that helps people understand that all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, gives testimony to Jesus Christ.

Chronological Study that shows people that the Bible is not just a collection of stories, but one unified story—God's story of redemption.

Missional Application that helps participants understand how the gospel encourages and empowers us to be mission driven.

Age Alignment that gives churches the ability to build an age-aligned discipleship experience throughout the body and equip parents to lead spiritual conversations in the home.

Essential Doctrines that help participants grasp essential theological doctrines of the Christian faith.

How Will This Help?

Session **1**

In the Beginning, God...

1 **THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God created everything good through His Son.

I love beginnings. A good beginning sets the tone, gives the context, draws you in, and makes you want to know more. Take these beginnings, for example, from some of the most enduring works of literature:

- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." —Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
- "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." —C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
- "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." —Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

? What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

Voices from the Church

"Man does not have to wander around in darkness wondering what kind of God he serves or owes allegiance to. Yahweh has communicated, and the traits He communicates are worthy of worship."¹

—Timothy M. Pierce

But what if a book exists that hasn't just endured the test of a hundred years but of thousands? Countless are the books written by men and women, but what if we had a book authored by God Himself? What would be the beginning line of this book? Well, let me tell you: "In the beginning, God..."

8 | Date of My Bible Study: _____

Why do we need to know God created everything?

We are no different than the original audience of the Book of Genesis. Though perhaps not tempted to bow down to wooden statues, our hearts are just as prone to wander.

Obedience, at times, seems too costly, and our hearts wonder, *Is God real? Does He love me? Is He worth it?* When we have these questions and struggle to believe in the realness and goodness of God, He wants us to recount Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God..." When there was nothing but nothing, God was, and that ought to create in us a wonder about Him that trumps all our other wonderings.

? In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding God?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

26. Creation out of Nothing

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes said, "creation ex nihilo"). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is eternal; every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God's sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has meaning and purpose and points us to the Creator.

2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).

The next critical thing we need to see from the creation account is that not only did God create everything, but God created everything *good*. What does that mean? Why does God call each step of His creation good?

- *Is it morally good?* Yes. When God created everything, certainly there was no sin in it.
- *Is it beautiful and pleasant to the eyes?* Yes. You don't have to stare at the Grand Canyon or a sunset for long to realize that the work of creation is beautiful.
- *Is it usable?* Yes. It does well at performing its intended purpose and design.

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1. Theology

The Gospel Project will help ground people in the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

- The **Theological Theme** for each session helps to keep each story in Scripture in the context of the whole of Scripture
- The **99 Essential Christian Doctrines** serve to show how Christian theology is woven into God's big story and to teach the basics of the faith in simple summary statements

3. God created everything through His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many “gods” and many “lords” —

⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father.

All things are from Him, and we exist for Him.

And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ.

All things are through Him, and we exist through Him.

In light of this passage, you might reread the creation account and say, “I see the Holy Spirit hovering and God the Father speaking, but where is the Son?” Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there (John 1:1-3). All things are because of Him.

? In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?

Special Revelation

Why is it so important that God created everything through the Son? Because through the Son, God gives us special revelation. Special revelation is special, or specific, in content and scope. In content, it reveals not just general things about God’s power and nature but specifically reveals the God of the gospel with words. It reveals the redemption plan of God to save people through the cross and resurrection of His Son. In scope, it is given to specific people at specific times in specific places.

You see, the light of God’s general revelation, beginning in Genesis 1:3, as good as it is, it is suppressible (Rom. 1:18). We need a display of God’s light that is inexpressible—the light of God’s special revelation. And this inexpressible light isn’t merely electromagnetic radiation; this light is a person and His name is Jesus. “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

There is a place in which these two revelations, these two lights, collide and converge, a place God can reveal Himself not only generally but also specially—within the believer.

First, as a human being, a believer represents humanity, the apex of all of God’s creation (day 6 holds one more creation of God—the focus of session 2). We carry the greatest light of God’s general revelation, but even greater than that, we as believers also bear the light of God’s special revelation—the light of Jesus Christ. This is why the Bible not only says that Jesus is the light but that we are light (Matt. 5:14-16).

Voices from Church History

“Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature, O Thou of God and man the Son; Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor, Thou my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.”

—Anonymous German Hymn

? What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?

Conclusion

If we have been created by God and He has commanded the light of Jesus to shine in our hearts, then we are doubly His. Therefore, we must now seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world. We have to be a light to this world, and by nature, we are a light to this world. But we can’t just shine with our actions; we have to shine the light of God’s special revelation with words. No matter how much “good” we do in this world with our actions, simply by observing our actions, people will never come to a saving knowledge of God.

This is what God is telling us from the beginning, *God created everything*, so don’t worry about anything. It’s in His hands. *God also created everything good*. Everything surrounding you—the sun, moon, stars, and everything else in creation—is God saying He wants to know you and be known by you. And *God created everything through His Son*. Because God has revealed all that He is to us through His Son, we now live to reveal Jesus to the world.

CHRIST CONNECTION: By the Son and for the Son and through the Son, all things exist and hold together.

2

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Because we exist by God and for God, we must seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world.

1. What are some implications for our lives because of the truth that God made everything?

2. How should our perspective of God’s creation and our actions in His creation change since we know God made everything good?

3. Identify one person (write name below), and pray for God to give you boldness to reveal Jesus—the One through whom all things exist and hold together—to this person and for the Holy Spirit to open his or her eyes to the light of Christ.

2. Gospel

The Gospel Project shows how all of Scripture testifies to who Jesus Christ is and what He has done (Luke 24:44).

- The chronological storyline of Scripture reflected in The Gospel Project provides a framework for understanding all the parts of God’s grand story of redemption
- The **Christ Connection** in each session clarifies how the individual stories of Scripture either point forward or backward to the center point that gives them all meaning—the person and work of Jesus Christ

3. Mission

The Gospel Project will help God’s people follow in the steps of our missionary God (John 20:21).

- The **Missional Application** statement shows how the story of God’s redemptive work directly affects our missional mind-set
- **His Mission, Your Mission** helps individuals and groups consider what Spirit-empowered living looks like in their specific context

How It Works

1

Session Plan

In the Beginning, God...

Session 1

Introduction Option
As people arrive, ask them to go outside and share the beginnings of the stories of their lives. After a few minutes, ask a handful of members to share what they heard from someone in their group.

Follow up by pointing out that we all have a beginning and that there's something in common to all of us (parents). Our lives have a beginning, and so does the beginning of creation, which was preceded by God.

For Further Discussion
Why are beginnings of stories important?
What does an author hope to accomplish through the beginning of a story?

Introduction
Begin with the concept of beginnings in stories. Give a few from Genesis. Then ask the following questions, making sure you have an answer of your own so that you can encourage responses (Leader p. 10; personal study guide [PSG] p. 8).

What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

Note the origin title at the beginning of the Book authored by God Himself. Then summarize the session (Leader pp. 10-11; PSG pp. 8-9). *If helpful for your group, address the simple assumption of Scripture that God exists because He never in God alone is dependent on us ever (Leader p. 10).*

1. God created everything (Gen. 1:1-2).
Note the point of Genesis 1:1—Someone preexisted and created everything. Then read Genesis 1:1-2. *Remembering the context, discuss why the brevity and we need to know God created everything (Leader pp. 11-12; PSG pp. 9-10).*

For Further Discussion
Why are beginnings of stories important?
What does an author hope to accomplish through the beginning of a story?

2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).
Explain what it means that God created everything good—morally good, beautiful, and usable. God's creation fulfills its purpose of revealing things about God that we consider as we (Leader p. 12; PSG pp. 10-11).

In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God's creation even today?

What do these experiences tell you about God?

Introduce the two types of revelation from God—*general revelation* and *special revelation*. Then describe the *general revelation* content and scope, and note that creation is one of the main arenas of *general revelation* (Leader p. 13; PSG p. 11).

2

Additional Resources

In the Beginning, God...

For help on how to get started using *The Gospel Project*, ideas on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading a specific session, visit www.ministrygrid.com/askthegospelproject.

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Study Material

• *The Story Begins*—Episode 1, Act 1 from *Telling God's Story* by Paul Yong and Terry C. Carter.
• "Light of the World"—Article by JB Grimes. Find a link to this article at www.gospelproject.com/resources.
• *Devotional Bible Study* articles, including "In the Beginning: A Comparison of Genesis 1 and John 1," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.gospelproject.com/resources.
• Look for *Booklet: The Gospel Project*.

Video

D. A. Carson, "The God Who Made Everything"
Find a link to this at www.gospelproject.com/resources.

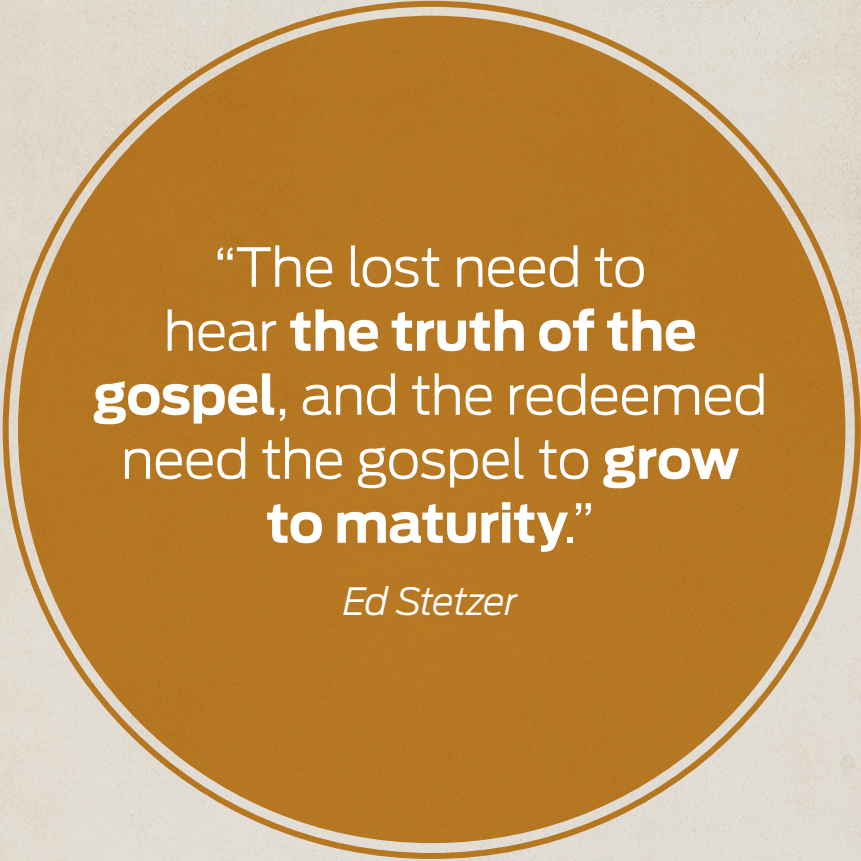
Tip of the Week

A Tool, Not a Taskmaster
"Creative teaching is a process in which [group members] are visually involved. Often in this process, ideas are developed and needs revealed that no writer can plan for, nor teacher predict. The teacher has to feel free in such cases to respond to the lead of his class and, where appropriate, modify his plan in order to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This means sharing new learning activities, adding optional ones, and eliminating ones that were planned. This kind of freedom just isn't possible for the teacher who relies completely on printed materials."¹⁴

1. Session Plan

The **Session Plan** provides a thorough, step-by-step way to lead the content of each session.

- Each step of the plan is linked to the **Expanded Session Content** in the *Leader Guide* and the content in the *Personal Study Guide* so everyone in the group can stay together
- Also includes instructions for using *Leader Pack* items in the group experience
- Suggested teaching options help address a variety of learning styles



“The lost need to
hear **the truth of the
gospel**, and the redeemed
need the gospel to **grow
to maturity.**”

Ed Stetzer

THE
GOSPEL
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Volume 1

FALL 2015: *Personal Study Guide HCSB*

Ed Stetzer GENERAL EDITOR

Trevin Wax MANAGING EDITOR

LifeWay | Adults

Personal
Study
Guide

Adults

(Sample shown at 87% of actual size)



In the Beginning, God...

1

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God created everything good through His Son.

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- “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” –Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
- “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”
–C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
- “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” –Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

2



What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

3

4



Voices from the Church

“Man does not have to wander around in darkness wondering what kind of God he serves or owes allegiance to; Yahweh has communicated, and the traits He communicates are worthy of worship.”¹

–Timothy M. Pierce

But what if a book exists that hasn't just endured the test of a hundred years but of thousands? Countless are the books written by men and women, but what if we had a book authored by God Himself? What would be the beginning line of this book? Well, let me tell you: “In the beginning, God...”

8

Date of My Bible Study: _____

As we dive into God’s story revealed through Scripture, we must recognize that the beginning of the story does what beginnings should—it sets the stage for all that follows. In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good. And vitally important for grasping the scope of the gospel, we will see that God created everything through His Son.

1. God created everything (Gen. 1:1-2).

How else could you describe the creation of everything unless you’re first introduced to Someone who preceded everything? That’s the whole point of Genesis 1:1. The God who simply is, who preceded everything and is not dependent on anything, He created everything.

¹ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

² *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

When you’re studying the Bible, one of the most basic and fundamental rules you have to follow to interpret Scripture properly is *remember the context*: Who was the intended audience? What was the purpose of the author? These are vital questions to answer so that we come to the text with the proper questions that it was intended to answer.

The original audience of the Book of Genesis was the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land (a story for a later time). They would not have been asking some of the questions that pique our interest, such as the age of the earth or the science behind the creation. So what, then, was the original purpose for the creation account in Genesis?

Why did the Israelites need to know God created everything?

The Israelites would have wrestled with questions such as “Is our God the real God?” “Is He the best God?” “Is He the most powerful God?” Having lived so long among the gods of the Egyptians and being introduced to the gods of the foreign nations that surrounded them, the Israelites struggled to believe that their God was *the* God.

To remedy such wandering hearts, God wrote Genesis 1:1 to help His people understand that the God of their bedtime stories—the God of their fathers—was the very same God who created the world. The God of Israel, not the gods of the Canaanites or the Philistines, was the Creator of everything (Ps. 96:4-5).

Features

1. Every session features a **Theological Theme**, a key component of The Gospel Project.
2. Discussion questions are designed to help the session flow in a group setting.
3. Response space to encourage deeper engagement in session.
4. **Voices from the Church** features poignant quotes from church leaders past and present, connecting participants with the gospel storyline of the church.

Why do we need to know God created everything?

We are no different than the original audience of the Book of Genesis. Though perhaps not tempted to bow down to wooden statues, our hearts are just as prone to wander.

Obedience, at times, seems too costly, and our hearts wonder, *Is God real? Does He love me? Is He worth it?* When we have these questions and struggle to believe in the realness and goodness of God, He wants us to recount Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God...” When there was nothing but nothing, God was, and that ought to create in us a wonder about Him that trumps all our other wonderings.

? In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding God?

1 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

26. Creation out of Nothing

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes said, “creation *ex nihilo*”). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is eternal; every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God’s sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has meaning and purpose and points us to the Creator.

2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).

The next critical thing we need to see from the creation account is that not only did God create everything, but God created everything *good*. What does that mean? Why does God call each step of His creation good?

- *Is it morally good?* Yes. When God created everything, certainly there was no sin in it.
- *Is it beautiful and pleasant to the eyes?* Yes. You don’t have to stare at the Grand Canyon or a sunset for long to realize that the work of creation is beautiful.
- *Is it usable?* Yes. It does well at performing its intended purpose and design.

So what is the purpose and design of creation? To declare God’s glory and proclaim the work of His hands (Ps. 19:1). To reveal things about God that are invisible to us (Rom. 1:20). Creation reveals God’s eternal power and divine nature in a way that we can clearly see and understand them.

? In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God’s creation even today?

? What do these experiences tell you about God?

Now, theologically speaking, there are two types of revelation from God—*general revelation* and *special revelation*. Let’s first look at God’s general revelation.

General Revelation

General revelation is the revealing of God that is general both in terms of its content and its scope. In content, it offers broad and common knowledge of God. General revelation can reveal truths such as “God is powerful,” but it can’t reveal specific things such as “God sent His Son, Jesus, to save the world.” And it is also general in scope, that is, it addresses *all* people. Its focus is not revealing something to a specific group of people but revealing something to everyone. *Creation is one of the main avenues of general revelation.*

The creation account in Genesis 1 is divided into two sets of three days. Before God speaks in verse 3, we see that the earth was formless, empty, and dark (v. 2). The first set of days (Gen. 1:3-13) addresses the creation’s *darkness* and *formlessness*.

Voices from the Church

“God is the Ruler of His mighty creation. There is no reason to despair, because He holds in His hands the whole world, while His Spirit is able to fill the void in man’s heart.”²

—Billy Graham

Features

1. 99 Essential Christian Doctrines examine the theological concepts found in the text and serves to show how Christian theology is woven into God’s big story of redemption through Jesus Christ.

³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and He called the darkness “night.” Evening came and then morning: the first day.

⁶ Then God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water.”⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse “sky.” Evening came and then morning: the second day.

⁹ Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land “earth,” and He called the gathering of the water “seas.” And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ Evening came and then morning: the third day.

Do you see God bringing light, form, and order to the chaos? And keep in mind why He’s doing it—He created day and night, sky, land, and sea to reveal Himself.



Why do you think these created spheres are good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created spheres reveal about God?

In the second set of days (Gen. 1:14-25), God addresses creation’s *emptiness*.

¹⁴ Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for festivals and for days and years. ¹⁵ They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to have dominion over the day and the lesser light to have dominion over the night—as well as the stars. ¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, ¹⁸ to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ Evening came and then morning: the fourth day.

²⁰ Then God said, “Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.”²¹ So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds. He also created every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²² So God blessed them, “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”²³ Evening came and then morning: the fifth day.

²⁴ Then God said, “Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

All the spheres that God created by bringing form to His creation He now fills. And again, all of these things He’s creating to display who He is to the world.



How are these created things good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created things reveal about God?

Ever since these first six days, creation has been fulfilling its purpose such that *everyone* knows God (Rom. 1:20-21). But even though everyone knows the truth about God, fallen humankind suppresses that truth in unrighteousness (v. 18). (We’ll speak more about the fall of humankind soon.)

Still, we can see the hope of evangelism and missions—we’re just trying to help people stop suppressing what they already know. God accomplishes this work through us with something greater than general revelation—special revelation through God’s Son, Jesus.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

27. The Goodness of Creation

In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God’s people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (2:15).

3. God created everything through His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

⁵ *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many “gods” and many “lords”—*

⁶ *yet for us there is one God, the Father.*

All things are from Him, and we exist for Him.

And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ.

All things are through Him, and we exist through Him.

In light of this passage, you might reread the creation account and say, “I see the Holy Spirit hovering and God the Father speaking, but where is the Son?” Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there (John 1:1-3). All things are because of Him.



In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?

Special Revelation

Why is it so important that God created everything through the Son? Because through the Son, God gives us special revelation. Special revelation is special, or specific, in content and scope. In content, it reveals not just general things about God’s power and nature but specifically reveals the God of the gospel with words. It reveals the redemption plan of God to save people through the cross and resurrection of His Son. In scope, it is given to specific people at specific times in specific places.

You see, the light of God’s general revelation, beginning in Genesis 1:3, as good as it is, it is suppressible (Rom. 1:18). We need a display of God’s light that is insuppressible—the light of God’s special revelation. And this insuppressible light isn’t merely electromagnetic radiation; this light is a person and His name is Jesus. “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

There is a place in which these two revelations, these two lights, collide and converge, a place God can reveal Himself not only generally but also specially—within the believer.

First, as a human being, a believer represents humanity, the apex of all of God’s creation (day 6 holds one more creation of God—the focus of session 2). We carry the greatest light of God’s general revelation, but even greater than that, we as believers also bear the light of God’s special revelation—the light of Jesus Christ. This is why the Bible not only says that Jesus is the light but that we are light (Matt. 5:14-16).



Voices from Church History

“Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature, O Thou of God and man the Son; Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor, Thou my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.”

—Anonymous German Hymn



What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?

Conclusion

If we have been created by God and He has commanded the light of Jesus to shine in our hearts, then we are doubly His. Therefore, we must now seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world. We have to be a light to this world, and by nature, we are a light to this world. But we can’t just shine with our actions; we have to shine the light of God’s special revelation with words. No matter how much “good” we do in this world with our actions, simply by observing our actions, people will never come to a saving knowledge of God.

This is what God is telling us from the beginning. *God created everything*, so don’t worry about anything. It’s in His hands. *God also created everything good*. Everything surrounding you—the sun, moon, stars, and everything else in creation—is God saying He wants to know you and be known by you. And *God created everything through His Son*. Because God has revealed all that He is to us through His Son, we now live to reveal Jesus to the world.

- 1 CHRIST CONNECTION:** By the Son and for the Son and through the Son, all things exist and hold together.

Features

1. Every session features a **Christ Connection** that summarizes key takeaways and points participants back to Jesus.

Features

- 1. His Mission, Your Mission** helps groups reflect on each session and consider how the truth studied might apply in their context.
- 2. Missional Application** is a key component of each session that reminds people how they can go on gospel mission in their daily lives.

1 HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

2 MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Because we exist by God and for God, we must seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world.

1. What are some implications for our lives because of the truth that God made everything?

2. How should our perspective of God's creation and our actions in His creation change since we know God made everything good?

3. Identify one person (write name below), and pray for God to give you boldness to reveal Jesus—the One through whom all things exist and hold together—to this person and for the Holy Spirit to open his or her eyes to the light of Christ.

Download three additional
sample sessions at
gospelproject.com.





“The gospel is **not just the diving board** off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity; the **gospel is the pool, itself.**”

J. D. Greear

THE GOSPEL PROJECT[®] CHRONOLOGICAL



Volume 1

FALL 2015: *Leader Guide HCSB*
Ed Stetzer GENERAL EDITOR
Trevin Wax MANAGING EDITOR

LifeWay | Adults

Leader Guide Adults

(Sample shown at 75% of actual size)



God's Word to You



A Summary of the Bible

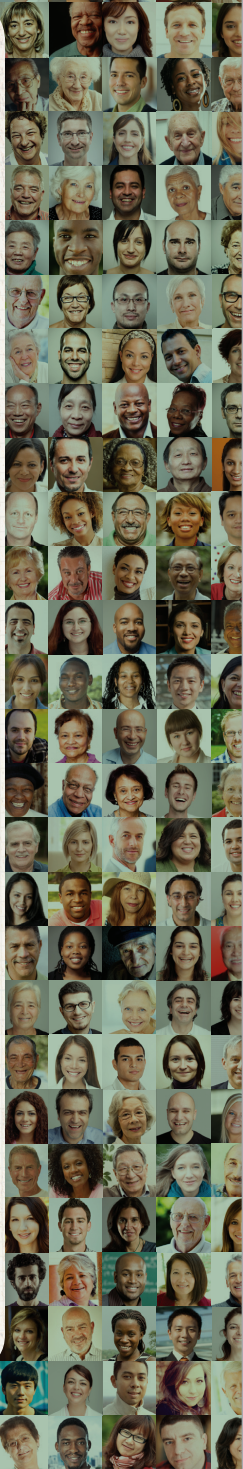
In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the Person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.



SESSION 1

In the Beginning, God...

1 Summary and Goal

The beginning of the story of Scripture does what beginnings should—it sets the stage for all that follows. In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good. And vitally important for grasping the scope of the gospel, we will see that God created everything through His Son.

Main Passages

Genesis 1:1-25
1 Corinthians 8:5-6

Session Outline

1. God created everything (Gen. 1:1-2).
2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).
3. God created everything through His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

2 **Theological Theme**

God created everything good through His Son.

Christ Connection

By the Son and for the Son and through the Son, all things exist and hold together.

Missional Application

Because we exist by God and for God, we must seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world.

Date of My Bible Study: _____

7

Features

1. The *Leader Guide* provides a clear summary and outline for each group session.
2. **Age Alignment:** each session—adults, students, and kids—has the same **Theological Theme, Christ Connection, and Missional Application.**

Session Plan ¹

In the Beginning, God...

Session 1

² Introduction Option

As people arrive, ask them to group up and share the beginnings of the stories of their lives. After a few minutes, ask a couple of members to share what they heard from someone in their group.

Follow up by pointing out that we all have a beginning and that others preceded us (parents). Our lives have a context, and so does the beginning of creation, which was preceded by God.

? For Further Discussion

Why are beginnings of stories important?

What does an author hope to accomplish through the beginning of a story?

Introduction

Begin with the concept of beginnings in stories. Cite a few from literature. Then ask the following question, making sure you have an answer of your own to share to encourage responses (leader p. 10; personal study guide [PSG] p. 8).

- ? What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

Point to the session title as the beginning of the Book authored by God Himself. Then summarize the session (leader pp. 10-11; PSG pp. 8-9).

If helpful for your group, address the simple assumption of Scripture that God exists because He wrote it—God alone is dependent on no one (leader p. 10).

1. God created everything (Gen. 1:1-2).

Note the point of Genesis 1:1—Someone preceded and created everything. Then read Genesis 1:1-2. *Remembering the context*, discuss why **the Israelites** and **we** need to know God created everything (leader pp. 11-12; PSG pp. 9-10).

- ? In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding God?

Summarize responses to the question as love for and wonder of God (leader p. 12). ³

2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).

Explain what it means that God created everything *good—morally good, beautiful, and usable*. God's creation fulfills its purpose of revealing things about God that are invisible to us (leader p. 12; PSG pp. 10-11).

- ? In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God's creation even today?
- ? What do these experiences tell you about God?

Introduce the two types of revelation from God—*general revelation* and *special revelation*. Then describe **general revelation's** content and scope, and note that *creation is one of the main avenues of general revelation* (leader p. 13; PSG p. 11). ⁴

Frame the creation account in Genesis 1 as divided into two sets of three days. The first set addresses the creation's *darkness* and *formlessness* (v. 2). Read Genesis 1:3-13, asking the group to circle the names God gives to the spheres He creates. These reveal some things about God (leader pp. 13-14; PSG pp. 11-12).

- Why do you think these created spheres are good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created spheres reveal about God?

The second set of days addresses creation's *emptiness*. Read Genesis 1:14-25, asking the group to mark the bodies and beings God creates to fill the spheres. These also reveal things about God (leader pp. 14-15; PSG pp. 12-13).

- How are these created things good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created things reveal about God?

- Use **Pack Item 1: Matter Matters** to help members wrestle with the theological implications of God creating everything and creating everything good (see sidebar).

Transition to point 3 by showing how we all suppress the knowledge from creation and choose not to glorify God. We need something greater than general revelation—special revelation through God's Son, Jesus (leader p. 15; PSG p. 13).

3. God created everything through His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 8:5-6. Then explain that every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there (leader pp. 15-16; PSG p. 14).

- In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?

Distinguish between the content and scope of general and **special revelation**. Show how God creating everything through the Son means the Son is greater than creation (leader p. 16; PSG p. 14). *Note that this special revelation involves words* (leader p. 16). Demonstrate how the believer is a convergence of the two lights of general and special revelation (leader pp. 16-17; PSG pp. 14-15).

- What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?

Conclusion

Use the *tree illustration* (leader p. 17) to show that our "good" actions function like general revelation in pointing to God, but we must use words to point people to the special revelation of the Son (leader p. 17; PSG p. 15). *Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission"* (PSG p. 16).

Pack Item 1: Matter Matters

Display this poster before the group meeting.

Ask groups of 3-4 to read the two "Essential Christian Doctrines" in this session and discuss how they relate to the statement on the poster:

- *Creation out of Nothing* (leader p. 12; PSG p. 10)
- *The Goodness of Creation* (leader p. 15; PSG p. 13)

Then ask groups to discuss how we should respond if the statement is false and if the statement is true.

Allow 3-5 minutes; then call for groups to share their reflections and responses.

2

Conclusion Option

Consider concluding this session by singing "Fairest Lord Jesus" as a group.

(A printable PDF of this hymn is available on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults Leader Pack*. Make as many copies as needed.)

Christ Connection: By the Son and for the Son and through the Son, all things exist and hold together.

Missional Application: Because we exist by God and for God, we must seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world.

Features

- 1. Session Plan** two-page summary outlines the entire session on a single spread.
- 2. Introduction and Conclusion Options** provide extra front and end session material, if desired.
- 3. Occasional highlights** of content exclusive to leader guide that leader may wish to communicate to the group.
- 4. Reference notes** to help keep leader and participants on the same page.
- 5. Tips on how to use** The Gospel Project *Leader Pack* items.

Expanded Session Content ¹

In the Beginning, God...

Session 1

4

Voices from the Church

"Man does not have to wander around in darkness wondering what kind of God he serves or owes allegiance to; Yahweh has communicated, and the traits He communicates are worthy of worship."¹

—Timothy M. Pierce

Voices from the Church

"God is the Ruler of His mighty creation. There is no reason to despair, because He holds in His hands the whole world, while His Spirit is able to fill the void in man's heart."²


—Billy Graham

Introduction

I love beginnings. A good beginning sets the tone, gives the context, draws you in, and makes you want to know more. Take these beginnings, for example, from some of the most enduring works of literature:

- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."
—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
- "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." —C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
- "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." —Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

2

 What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

But what if a book exists that hasn't just endured the test of a hundred years but of thousands? Countless are the books written by men and women, but what if we had a book authored by God Himself? What would be the beginning line of this book? Well, let me tell you: "In the beginning, God..."

The Bible opens simply yet dramatically as we're introduced to the greatest reality ever to exist—God. In Genesis 1:1, we meet a God who is simply there. The Bible doesn't open up with a long list of arguments for God's existence because the Bible is God's revelation of Himself. It simply assumes His existence because He wrote it. He is not dependent on anything or anyone else. And the rest of Genesis 1 describes this God creating everything else, showing the nature of His holiness, His set-apartness. While everything that exists owes its existence to God alone, God alone owes His existence to no one.

Consider this: If someone were to ask you the question "Who are you?" what would you say? We always describe ourselves in relation to some other person or thing that exists, right? But later in the story line of Scripture, when God was asked for His name, He answered, "I AM WHO I AM." You see, while everything in creation has to be described in relation to another, only of God can it properly be said that He simply is.

3

Session Summary

As we dive into God's story revealed through Scripture, we must recognize that the beginning of the story does what beginnings should—it sets the stage for all that follows. In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good. And vitally important for grasping the scope of the gospel, we will see that God created everything through His Son.

1. God created everything (Gen. 1:1-2).

How else could you describe the creation of everything unless you're first introduced to Someone who preceded everything? That's the whole point of Genesis 1:1. The God who simply is, who preceded everything and is not dependent on anything, He created everything.

¹ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

² *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

When you're studying the Bible, one of the most basic and fundamental rules you have to follow to interpret Scripture properly is *remember the context*: Who was the intended audience? What was the purpose of the author? These are vital questions to answer so that we come to the text with the proper questions that it was intended to answer.

The original audience of the Book of Genesis was the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land (a story for a later time). They would not have been asking some of the questions that pique our interest, such as the age of the earth or the science behind the creation. So what, then, was the original purpose for the creation account in Genesis?

Why did the Israelites need to know God created everything?

The Israelites would have wrestled with questions such as "Is our God the real God?" "Is He the best God?" "Is He the most powerful God?" Having lived so long among the gods of the Egyptians and being introduced to the gods of the foreign nations that surrounded them, the Israelites struggled to believe that their God was *the* God.

To remedy such wandering hearts, God wrote Genesis 1:1 to help His people understand that the God of their bedtime stories—the God of their fathers—was the very same God who created the world. The God of Israel, not the gods of the Canaanites or the Philistines, was the Creator of everything. "For the LORD is great and is highly praised; He is feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens" (Ps. 96:4-5).

5

Further Commentary

"This opening verse of the Bible, seven words in the Hebrew, establishes seven key truths upon which the rest of the Bible is based. First, God exists. The essential first step in pleasing God is recognizing His existence (Heb. 11:6). Second, God existed before there was a universe and will exist after the universe perishes (Heb. 1:10-12). Third, God is the main character in the Bible. He is the subject of the first verb in the Bible (in fact, He is the subject of more verbs than any other character) and performs a wider variety of activities than any other being in the Bible. Fourth, as Creator God has done what no human being could ever do; in its active form the Hebrew verb *bara'*, meaning 'to create,' never has a human subject. Thus *bara'* signifies a work that is uniquely God's. Fifth, God is mysterious; though the Hebrew word for God is plural, the verb form of which 'God' is the subject is singular. This is perhaps a subtle allusion to God's Trinitarian nature: He is three divine persons in one divine essence. Sixth, God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He doesn't just modify pre-existing matter but calls matter into being out of nothing (Ps. 33:6,9; Heb. 11:3). Seventh, God is not dependent on the universe, but the universe is totally dependent on God (Heb. 1:3)."³

—Robert D. Bergen,
HCSB Study Bible

Features

- 1. Expanded Session Content** provides a detailed view of the session plan.
- Questions designed to open up discussion and help the session flow.
- This bracket highlights content exclusive to the *Leader Guide* that the leader may share, if helpful.
- 4. Voices from the Church** features poignant quotes from church leaders past and present, connecting participants with the gospel storyline of the church. Also found in *Personal Study Guide*.
- 5. Further Commentary** helps the leader better understand and explain Scripture passages and discussion points.

Voices from Church History

"Why does it proceed, first heaven then earth? The temple's roof made before its pavement? God is not subject to nature's demands nor to the rules of technique. God is the creator and master technician of nature, and art, and everything made or imagined."⁶

—John Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

26. Creation out of Nothing

The Bible teaches that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes said, "creation *ex nihilo*"). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. God alone is eternal; every created thing has a beginning. Therefore, the eternal God rules over all of His creation and He alone is worthy of worship. Denial of this doctrine has implications for God's sovereignty over and providence in creation. Because God created out of nothing, creation has meaning and purpose and points us to the Creator.

[Note to the Leader: The "99 Essential Christian Doctrines" sidebars serve to show how Christian theology is woven into God's big story of redemption. You can find the full numbered list at GospelProject.com/Doctrines.]

Why do we need to know God created everything?

We are no different than the original audience of the Book of Genesis. Though perhaps not tempted to bow down to wooden statues, our hearts are just as prone to wander. Lazy Sundays instead of early Sunday worship sure sound nice. You dream about all the things you could've bought with your tithe money by the end of the year. There's an ever-present guilt each time your eyes steal a glimpse of your attractive coworker.

Obedience, at times, seems too costly, and our hearts wonder, *Is God real? Does He love me? Is He worth it?* When we have these questions and struggle to believe in the realness and goodness of God, He wants us to recount Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God..." When there was nothing but nothing, God was, and that ought to create in us a wonder about Him that trumps all our other wonderings.

? In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding God?

This God who owes His existence to no one and is in need of nothing decided to create everything, including you. This truth ought to overwhelm you with a feeling of love to such an extent that you're able to reject any other suitors coming after your heart. *God created everything.* Guard this truth and cherish it because every threat against it is trying to rob you of your wonder of God and the love of God for you.

2. God created everything good (Gen. 1:3-25).

The next critical thing we need to see from the creation account is that not only did God create everything, but God created everything *good*.

What does that mean? Why does God call each step of His creation good?

- *Is it morally good?* Yes. When God created everything, certainly there was no sin in it.
- *Is it beautiful and pleasant to the eyes?* Yes. You don't have to stare at the Grand Canyon or a sunset for long to realize that the work of creation is beautiful.
- *Is it usable?* Yes. When we say a knife is good, we're saying something about its ability to perform its intended purpose and design. A knife that doesn't cut is not a good knife. When God created something and called it good, He was saying it was doing well at performing its intended purpose and design.

So what is the purpose and design of creation? To declare God's glory and proclaim the work of His hands (Ps. 19:1). To reveal things about God that are invisible to us (Rom. 1:20). Creation reveals God's eternal power and divine nature in a way that we can clearly see and understand them.

? In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God's creation even today?

? What do these experiences tell you about God?

In Genesis 1:3, when God said, “Let there be light,” what we’re seeing is God beginning the good work of revealing Himself. He didn’t have to speak or make Himself known, but He did, and He still does. The creation of the world and much more are fully dependent upon God’s willingness to reveal Himself. One of God’s greatest acts of kindness toward the world and humankind is that He spoke.

Now, theologically speaking, there are two types of revelation from God—*general revelation* and *special revelation*. Let’s first look at God’s general revelation.

General Revelation

General revelation is the revealing of God that is general both in terms of its content and its scope. In content, it offers broad and common knowledge of God rather than very specific, very finely tuned truths about God. General revelation can reveal truths such as “God is powerful,” but it can’t reveal specific things such as “God sent His Son, Jesus, to save the world.” And it is also general in scope, that is, it addresses *all* people. Its focus is not revealing something to a specific group of people but revealing something to everyone. *Creation is one of the main avenues of general revelation.*

The creation account in Genesis 1 is divided into two sets of three days. Before God speaks in verse 3, we see that the earth was formless, empty, and dark (v. 2). The first set of days (Gen. 1:3-13) addresses the creation’s *darkness* and *formlessness*.

2 ³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and He called the darkness “night.” Evening came and then morning: the first day.

⁶ Then God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water.” ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse “sky.” Evening came and then morning: the second day.

⁹ Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land “earth,” and He called the gathering of the water “seas.” And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ Evening came and then morning: the third day.

Voices from Church History

“While men, indeed, cannot make anything out of nothing, but only out of matter already existing, yet God is in this point preeminently superior to men, that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, when previously it had no existence.”⁵

—Irenaeus (circa 125-202)

Further Commentary

“Water plays a crucial role in ancient Near Eastern creation literature. In Egypt, for example, the creator-god Ptah uses the preexistent waters (personified as the god Nun) to create the universe. The same is true in Mesopotamian belief: it is out of the gods of watery chaos—Apsu, Tiamat, and Mummu—that creation comes...In the biblical account, water at creation is no deity; it is simply something God created, and it serves as material in the hands of the sole sovereign Creator...[I]t is difficult to find a single English word that accurately conveys the precise sense of the Hebrew term *shamayim*, ‘heaven/heavens.’ In this context, it refers to what humans see above them, i.e., the region that contains both celestial lights (vv. 14-17) and birds (v. 20).”⁶

—T. Desmond Alexander, *ESV Study Bible*

Features

- 1. 99 Essential Christian Doctrines** examine the theological concepts found in the text and serves to show how Christian theology is woven into God’s big story of redemption through Jesus Christ.
- 2.** Scripture text is included in the guide for the leader’s convenience.

Voices from the Church

“Matter matters because God made it; it is ‘good.’ He is interested not just in our souls but also in our bodies and the world we live in.”⁷

—Vaughan Roberts


Further Commentary

“Three days reveal the filling of creation with the potentiality of life. The sun, moon, and constellations are created. They are not objects of worship but function to maintain God’s order and to provide light for the world, above all for humanity. Light on planet Earth is distinctive as it enables vegetation to grow, and through vegetation all life forms, from the smallest to the largest, have the potential of vitality. Light also marks the rhythms of nature and the cycles of time. Nature has its own calendar apart from humans. The order of nature (days 1-3) regulates the potentiality of life for animals and humans. By creating all this, God demonstrates his fatherly care for his creation.”⁸

—Willem VanGemenen, *Gospel Transformation Bible*

- God created light in the midst of darkness, separated the two, and gave them names: the light “day” and the darkness “night.”
- God created the expanse in the midst of the waters, separated the two, and gave a name to the expanse: “sky.”
- God created boundaries for the waters beneath the sky, caused dry land to appear, and gave them names: the dry land “earth” and the water “seas.”

Do you see God bringing light, form, and order to the chaos? And keep in mind why He’s doing it—He created day and night, sky, land, and sea to reveal Himself.

-  Why do you think these created spheres are good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created spheres reveal about God?

In the second set of days (Gen. 1:14-25), God addresses creation’s *emptiness*.

¹⁴ *Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for festivals and for days and years. ¹⁵ They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to have dominion over the day and the lesser light to have dominion over the night—as well as the stars. ¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, ¹⁸ to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ Evening came and then morning: the fourth day.*

²⁰ *Then God said, “Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds. He also created every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² So God blessed them, “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ Evening came and then morning: the fifth day.*

²⁴ *Then God said, “Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*

All the spheres that God created by bringing form to His creation—the spheres of the heavens, the sky, sea, and land—He now fills.

- God fills the heavens with lights—the sun, moon, and stars.
- God fills the seas with fish and the sky with birds.
- God fills the land with living creatures.

And again, all of these things He's creating to display who He is to the world.

? How are these created things good (moral, beautiful, usable)? What do these created things reveal about God?

The purpose and design of creation is to tell the glory of God, to plainly display His power and His divine nature. When God created the heavens, the stars, the trees, the mountains, the birds, and the animals, they did their job well, and God called them good. They're still doing their job well.

Ever since these first six days, creation has been fulfilling its purpose such that *everyone* knows God. Did you know that? Romans 1 says there is not a single person out there who doesn't know God (vv. 20-21). That's good news, but there is also bad news.

Romans 1:18 says that even though everyone knows the truth about God, fallen humankind suppresses that truth in unrighteousness. No matter how good the mountains and the heavens are, no matter how plainly they display the truth about God's glory, humanity will always suppress this knowledge and choose not to glorify God. (We'll speak more about the fall of humankind soon.)

It is a disheartening reality to face that all people suppress the knowledge of God, but we can also see in this the hope of evangelism and missions. There is a profound common ground between you and everyone you will ever meet because the truth about God is in them. It may be suppressed, buried, and distorted, but it's there. You're not trying to convince people that God exists; they already know! You're just trying to help them stop suppressing what they already know. God accomplishes this work through us with something greater than just general revelation; this work calls for special revelation through God's Son, Jesus.

3. God created everything through His Son (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

First Corinthians 8:5-6 tells us that God not only created everything but that He created everything through His Son:

⁵ *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth— as there are many “gods” and many “lords”—*

⁶ *yet for us there is one God, the Father.*

All things are from Him,

and we exist for Him.

And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ.

All things are through Him,

and we exist through Him.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

27. The Goodness of Creation

In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God's judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God's people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God's creation (2:15).

Further Commentary

“Paul's point is that over against the many gods and the many lords of the heathen world stands the Christian acclamation of one God and one Lord (8:6). Further the language of ‘gods’ and ‘lords’ paves the way for 8:6, which takes up the terms ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ in a remarkable reformulation of the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4...[T]he assertion distinguishes between the one God, who is the Father, and the one Lord, who is Jesus Christ. The end result is a strong monotheism that incorporates Christ into the definition of God...Jesus, the one Lord, is the agent of creation and the means by which believers exist in new creation.”⁹

—Mark Taylor

Voices from Church History

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"¹⁰

—Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

Voices from Church History

"Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature, O Thou of God and man the Son; Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor, Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown."

—Anonymous German Hymn

In light of this passage, you might reread the creation account and say, "I see the Holy Spirit hovering and God the Father speaking, but where is the Son?" John 1:1-3 answers: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created." Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there. All things exist and hold together because of Him.



In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?

Special Revelation

Why is it so important that God created everything through the Son? Because through the Son, God gives us special revelation. Special revelation is special, or specific, in content and scope. In content, it reveals not just general things about God's power and nature but specifically reveals the God of the gospel with words. It reveals the redemption plan of God to save people through the cross and resurrection of His Son. In scope, it is given to specific people at specific times in specific places.

You see, the light of God's general revelation, beginning in Genesis 1:3, as good as it is, it is suppressible (Rom. 1:18). We need a display of God's light that is incompressible—the light of God's special revelation. And this incompressible light isn't merely electromagnetic radiation; this light is a person and His name is Jesus. "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

God revealed Himself "out there"—and it was good—but it isn't enough. So God also reveals Himself "in here." God created everything (general revelation) through His Son, but He later did a greater work of special revelation in His Son. This Light, through whom all other lights exist, not only casts out physical darkness but can cast out the spiritual darkness in people's hearts. This revelation isn't simply the general display of creation, this revelation involves *words*—the very Word of God in the person of Jesus and the Word of God as written in the Bible.

There is a place in which these two revelations, these two lights, collide and converge, a place in which God can reveal Himself to the world not only generally but also specially. That place is within the believer.

First, a believer is a representative of humanity, the apex of all of God's creation (day 6 holds one more creation of God—the focus of session 2). No other creation of God can tell the glory of God like a human being because no other creation bears the image of God. The heavens, the mountains, and the oceans are proclaiming the glory of God, but every single person we see and encounter is, by nature, showing us something of God Himself.

We carry the greatest light of God's general revelation, but even greater than that, we as believers also bear the light of God's special revelation. God has commanded to shine in our hearts the light of Jesus Christ. So we are stewards of the light of God's special revelation. This is why the Bible not only says that Jesus is the light but that we are light:

You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:14-16)

? What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?

Conclusion

If we have been created by God and He has commanded the light of Jesus to shine in our hearts, then we are doubly His. Therefore, we must now seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world. We have to be a light to this world, and by nature, we are a light to this world.

But we can't just shine with our actions; we have to shine the light of God's special revelation with words. No matter how much "good" we do in this world with our actions, simply by observing our actions, people will never come to a saving knowledge of God.

Trees are good. But no matter how long you stare at a tree, observe its beauty, and even come to the conclusion that there must be a God who designed such a beautiful thing, the tree will never be able to tell you the gospel. God is absolutely holy and righteous, and you are His enemy because of your disobedience, but God sent His Son to die on your behalf on the cross and to rise again on the third day so that you too may rise with Him. No matter how much we seek to love our neighbors with our actions, if we don't speak the gospel to them with words, we're no better than trees.

This is what God is telling us from the beginning. *God created everything*, so don't worry about anything. It's in His hands. *God also created everything good*. Everything surrounding you—the sun, moon, stars, and everything else in creation—is God saying He wants to know you and be known by you. And *God created everything through His Son*. Because God has revealed all that He is to us through His Son, we now live to reveal Jesus to the world.

1 **CHRIST CONNECTION:** By the Son and for the Son and through the Son, all things exist and hold together.

2 A Word on Creation vs. Evolution

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Imagine all the different ways God could've opened the first book of the Bible. Out of anything and everything that He could've written, the first and foremost thing He wanted His people to know was that He created everything. And so it's no wonder that this is one of the truths most debated and attacked in our world today. If you can attack and disprove the first line of the Bible, you can discount the whole thing, right?

The creation account can raise many disputed issues: from young-earth theory to old-earth theory, from theistic evolution to the denial of intelligent design altogether. If interested, here are some books that address these issues:

- *Three Views of Creation and Evolution* by J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds
- *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* by Michael J. Behe
- *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe* by Michael J. Denton
- *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance Through Small Probabilities* by William A. Dembski
- *Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?* by C. John Collins
- *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* by Stephen C. Meyer
- *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* by Vern S. Poythress

Features

1. Every session features a **Christ Connection** that summarizes key takeaways and points participants back to Jesus.
2. Additional articles and commentaries give added depth and context to group discussion.

Features

1. Additional Resources

for each session to help the leader prepare further.

2. Tip of the Week to help the leader grow in his or her skills for the task of teaching God's Word.

1

Additional Resources

In the Beginning, God...

For helps on how to get started using *The Gospel Project*, ideas on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading a specific session, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

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2. Billy Graham, in *Billy Graham in Quotes*, eds. Franklin Graham with Donna Lee Toney (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 89.
3. Robert D. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 7, n. 1:1.
4. John Chrysostom, Sermon 1.3, quoted in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, vol. 1 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 4.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.10.4, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1885, reprinted 2004), 370.
6. T. Desmond Alexander, *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 50, n. 1:6–8.
7. Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 28.
8. Willem VanGemeren, *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 5, n. 1:14–31.
9. Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 205–206.
10. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.
11. Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 207.

Study Material

- "The Story Begins"—Episode 1, Act 1 from *Telling God's Story* by Preben Vang and Terry G. Carter
- "Light of the World"—Article by Jill Carattini; find a link to this article at gospelproject.com/additionalresources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "In the Beginning: A Comparison of Genesis 1 and John 1," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Video

D. A. Carson: "The God Who Made Everything"

Find a link to this at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

2

Tip of the Week

A Tool, Not a Taskmaster

"Creative teaching is a process in which [group members] are vitally involved. Often in this process, ideas are developed and needs revealed that no writer can plan for, nor teacher predict. The teacher has to feel free in such cases to respond to the lead of his class and, when appropriate, modify his plan in order to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This may mean shortening some learning activities, adding unplanned ones, and eliminating some that were planned. This kind of freedom just isn't possible for the teacher who relies completely on printed materials."¹¹

Download three additional
sample sessions at
gospelproject.com.



99 Essential Christian Doctrines

These examine the theological concepts found in the text and serve to show how Christian theology is woven into God's big story of redemption through Jesus Christ.

God's Revelation

1. General Revelation
2. Special Revelation
3. Inspiration of Scripture
4. Inerrancy of Scripture
5. Authority of Scripture
6. Clarity of Scripture
7. Illumination of Scripture
8. Preservation of Scripture

God

9. God is omniscient
10. God is unchanging
11. God is infinite
12. God is omnipotent
13. God is transcendent
14. God is immanent
15. God is holy
16. God is faithful
17. God is just
18. God is truthful
19. God is love
20. God is gracious
21. God is merciful
22. God is One
23. God is One in Three Persons

Creation

24. God's Glory
25. God's Plan and Human Action
26. Creation out of nothing
27. The goodness of creation
28. God's providence
29. Prayer and providence
30. Miracles
31. The problem of evil
32. Angels
33. Demons
34. Image of God in humanity

Fall

35. Sin as Missing the Mark
36. Sin as Transgression
37. Sin as Rebellion
38. Sin as Selfishness
39. Sin as Idolatry
40. Temptation and sin
41. Guilt and Shame
42. Sin and death
43. Enslaved to sin
44. Sin's effects in the world
45. The world opposed to God

Redemption

46. Jesus' deity
47. Jesus' humanity
48. Sinlessness of Jesus
49. Virgin Birth
50. Christ as Prophet
51. Christ as Priest
52. Christ as King
53. Christ's humiliation
54. Christ's exaltation
55. Moral influence theory of atonement
56. Governmental theory of atonement
57. Ransom theory of atonement
58. Satisfaction theory of atonement
59. Christ as Sacrifice
60. Christ as Propitiation
61. Christ as Substitute
62. Christ as Reconciliation
63. Deity of Holy Spirit
64. Personality of Holy Spirit
65. Work of Holy Spirit in Life of the Christian
66. Election
67. Calling
68. Repentance
69. Faith

70. Regeneration
71. Union with Christ
72. Justification by faith
73. Justification and works
74. Imputation
75. Adoption
76. Sanctification
77. Glorification

The Church

78. People of God
79. Body of Christ
80. Temple of the Holy Spirit
81. Priesthood of the believer
82. New identity of the believer
83. Bride of Christ
84. Church and Kingdom
85. Mission of the Church
86. Discipleship
87. Evangelism
88. Edification
89. Worship
90. Social Concern
91. Family Relationships
92. Baptism
93. Lord's Supper

Restoration

94. Life after death
95. Second Coming
96. Resurrection
97. Millennial Views
98. Nature of hell
99. New heaven & new earth

Study Plan

Chronological

Year 1

Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)
God the Covenant-Maker
(Genesis 12-50)

Winter 2016

God the Redeemer (Exodus)
God the Lawgiver
(Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016

God the Savior
(Numbers, Joshua)
God the Judge (Judges, Ruth,
1 Samuel)

Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

Year 2

Fall 2016

God the Revealer (1-2 Kings, Isaiah)
God the Pursuer (Major and Minor
Prophets, 1-2 Chronicles)

Winter 2017

God the Sustainer (Daniel, Ezra)
God the Provider (Esther,
Nehemiah, Malachi)

Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)
God Among Us (Gospels)

Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller
(Synoptic Gospels)
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

Year 3

Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels, Acts)

Winter 2018

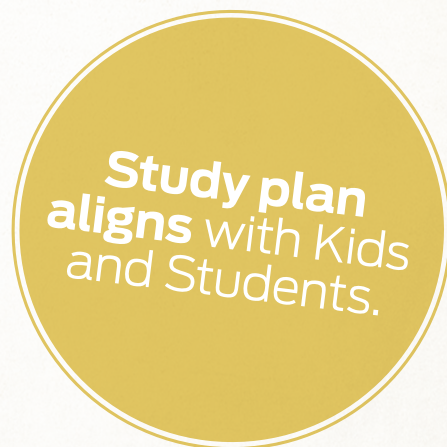
The Spirit Who Empowers (Acts)
The God Who Sends (Acts)

Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His People
(Epistles)
The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)

Summer 2018

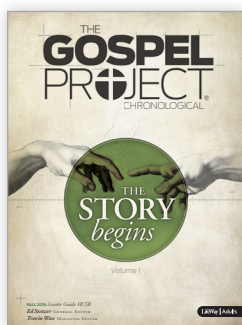
God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)
The God Who Makes All Things
New (Epistles, Revelation)



Adult Resources

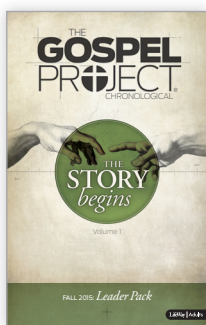
The Gospel Project for Adults is available in a wide variety of print and digital resources for both leaders and participants. Learn more about each available option at gospelproject.com.

Print



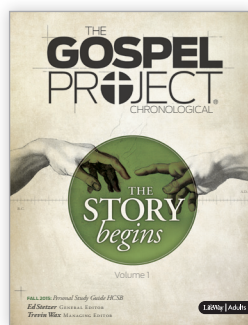
Leader Guide

A resource designed to help leaders prepare for each session, giving them the essential tools they need to lead adults through the biblical timeline of Scripture.



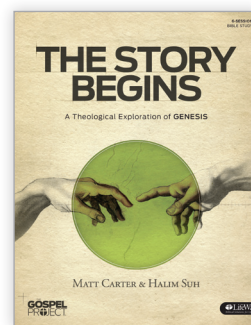
Leader Pack

A collection of useful tools to help leaders prepare, present, and support the group study for each session. Details on how each item enhances the group experience are included in the *Leader Guide*. Use with any translation.



Personal Study Guide

A resource designed to help participants walk through each session of the material individually and as a group, exposing them to the chronological timeline of God's story of redemptive history.



6-Session Bible Study

Select studies will be available as a six-session Bible study. Includes group discussion questions.

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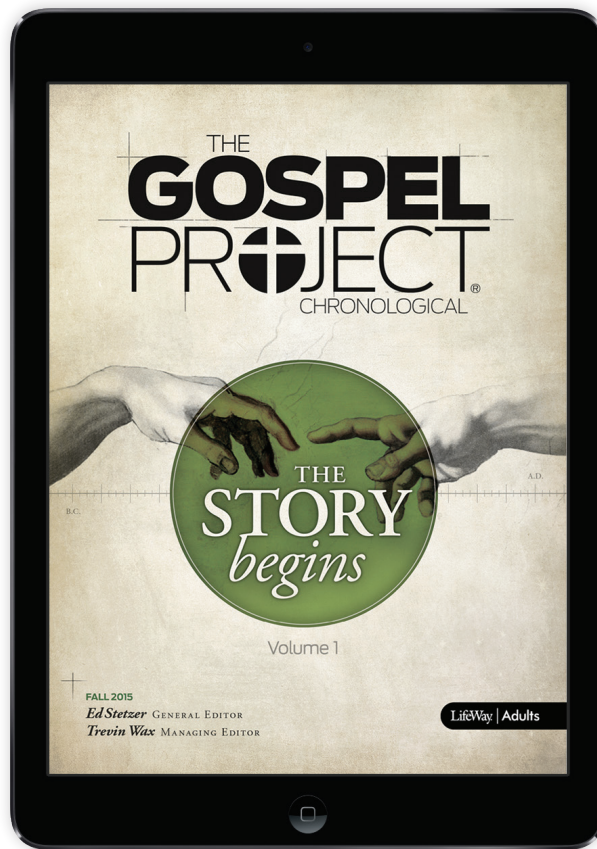
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This fall, The Gospel Project will begin a new chronological, Christ-centered study cycle in which all ages—Adults, Students, and Kids—will discover the overarching thread of redemption that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Every session, participants will be immersed in the gospel and challenged to live on mission for the Kingdom.

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