



LIVING DISCIPLESHIP

# EXPLORING THE BIBLE

**Adult Facilitator Guide**

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# Class overview

With the exception of the first and final sessions, each class follows a similar structure:

## Opening Collect (2 minutes):

The sessions begin with prayer; each class includes a suggested collect.

## Review (5 minutes):

Each week will start by looking back at the story that has gone before. The goal of this course is to learn the narrative of the Bible and to see that the Bible isn't a bunch of different, isolated stories, but one, big, interconnected story. So the first five minutes of class is a time to look back and retell the story from previous weeks. A good way to do this is to ask a volunteer from the class who attended the week before to retell the story from the previous session in a few sentences. Then you can invite other members of the class to fill in key details to flesh out the story. You will have an image or icon for each week of the story. We suggest that you put these icons on a wall at the end of the class to create a visual expression of the Bible's narrative. Direct the class to this timeline each week as they retell the story; looking at the image might help jog some memories.

## Encounter the story (20-25 minutes):

This is the part of the class where you encounter this week's story. The hope is that those who are gathered will have read the chapter from *The Path* in advance, so this is a time of retelling the story as a group. Though this may seem redundant, the best way to learn a story is to retell it yourself. Invite those who have read to summarize the chapter and encourage others to chime in and add salient details. Prompt the conversation with leading questions. Some will be hearing the story for the first time, and that is okay. When you feel that the group has captured the story, you can move to discussion.

## Engage the story (20-25 minutes):

This is a time to engage the story more deeply with some reflection and discussion questions. A list of reflection and discussion questions is included for each week. Some general questions are the same every week, and there are also some questions specific to the portion of the story from each week. These questions are designed so that the class can discuss them all together or break up into small groups for discussion, whatever best suits your church context. This is not a time to find a moral to the story but to wonder about the story, to explore connections between the different stories heard over the course of the year, and to make connections between the weekly story and our modern lives.

## Preview (5 minutes):

As a way of exploring the greater arc of the Biblical story, at the end of each class the leader gives a “preview of coming attractions.” The leader or a volunteer from the class places this week’s icon in the correct place in the display timeline. (The icons are available as PDF downloads in the resource appendix). As the image goes up, the leader will talk about the image. (e.g. “For this week’s story of creation, we have an image of a moon and stars. The icon of the moon and stars reminds us that the same God who shaped each one of us created the sun, moon, stars and the vast expanse of heaven and earth. All of the story that will follow in the coming weeks is grounded in this moment, as God stretches the very heavens with his hands and shapes and separates light from dark, night from day, waters from earth.) Then, very briefly, the leader will say something like, “And the story of God doesn’t end here, with [creation]. Join us next week as the story continues, as the children of Adam and Eve, the first human beings made in the image of God, multiply and spread over the earth...” The leader will then summarize in two to three sentences the story for the next week. Previewing the next lesson can increase excitement about attending the next class and hearing what’s next and also help participants begin to see the story of God as a continuous narrative.

## Display

This curriculum includes an “icon” representative of each week’s session. (The icons are available as PDF downloads in the resource appendix. You should cut the chapter titles off of each icon before posting.) These simple images are intended to facilitate learning the arc of God’s story. This is important so that we don’t merely remember single, isolated stories within scripture, but we begin to see the way that the stories connect to one another and develop through time. Images also help with memory; by using and displaying the images for each week, you can help the students (children, youth, *and* adults) to have a visual reminder of the stories that they have heard and learned.

We suggest that you make a “timeline” along one wall (or even around the entire room) in each of your classrooms. Each week, as you study the assigned portion of the biblical story, put the corresponding image up at the appropriate place on your timeline. This timeline will not contain dates but rather a sequence of images, so that we can learn and remember the way that the biblical story, God’s great story of love and redemption, builds from one week to the next. At the beginning and end of each class, we will turn to the timeline as a way to reinforce the progression of the story we are hearing each week. By the end of the year, members of the class will be able to tell the story of the Bible using the images in the timeline as a guide.

## Additional Classes

This curriculum is designed to cover twenty-six weeks: an introductory class, twenty-four sessions, and a closing class. Because of time constraints, there are portions of the biblical story that are not included in this curriculum: for example, there are only a few psalms, and the book of Job is not included. You are welcome to use the class format to add additional classes, if that is important in your church context.

## Additional Resources

This curriculum is designed so that it can be led by any member of the congregation, clergy or lay. Most of the class sessions are discussion-based and require no special knowledge beyond what is provided. All that is needed is the free curriculum download and copies of *The Path: A Journey Through the Bible* (if desired). If, however, the person leading the class would like some further information for background, the following resources could be helpful:

LivingDiscipleship-FM.org: The *Living Discipleship* website published by Forward Movement includes many resources, including links to images and PowerPoint presentations.

*The Path: A Family Storybook* encourages children and adults to explore the Bible together, published by Forward Movement, 2016.

*Pathways of Faith*, an adult coloring book with original art that explores the major stories of the Bible, published by Forward Movement, 2016.

*HarperCollins Bible Commentary* by James L Mays, published by HarperOne, New York, 2000.

*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* by Mark Allan Powell, published by HarperOne, New York, 2011.

*An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann, published by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville & London, 2003.

*Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* by Mark Allan Powell, published by Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009.

*Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today* by Adam Hamilton, published by HarperOne, New York, 2014.





## CHAPTER I GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

### SUPPLIES FOR THE JOURNEY



#### For this week's class you will need:

- *The Path: A Journey through the Bible*.
- A copy of the icon for this week, printed from the provided PDF.
- Extra copies of this week's chapter from *The Path*, for those who may have forgotten theirs.
- If you are not using the *The Path* book, copies of next week's handout.
- Images for discussion, available from the resource section of the curriculum as well as on the website at [LivingDiscipleship-FM.org/exploring-the-bible-resources](http://LivingDiscipleship-FM.org/exploring-the-bible-resources) (optional)
- Projector (optional)

### OPENING COLLECT

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 288

### Encounter the story (15-20 minutes)

Participants should have read chapter one from *The Path: A Journey Through the Bible* so this is a time of recalling the story as a group. The leader(s) should not tell the story themselves; allow the group to retell the story, encouraging them with leading questions and offering corrections when necessary.

Though this may seem redundant, retelling the story as a group helps individuals learn the story. The intention is to simply retell the story rather than moralize or jump to what people believe is the "point" of the story. During this time, help people stick to the facts and what the story says rather than what they think it means.

Invite those who have read to summarize the chapter, and then encourage others to chime in and add salient details. You can prompt the conversation with leading questions such as:

- What is happening in the beginning of the story? What does God say? Then what happens next? And what is next?
- What are the highlights of this week's story? What are the low points?
- Who are the important people in this week's story?
- Which moment or quotation do you most remember from this week's story?
- What did you read or hear in this week's story that you don't remember hearing before or that struck you in a new way?
- What three words would you use to describe this week's story? How would you summarize this week's story in one sentence (or a Facebook post)?

Resist the temptation to cut the story short; you want to capture the fullness of the story. If people are struggling to remember the story, say, "Okay, let's look at the story together," and invite everyone to pull out their books or handouts. Beginning on the first page, go step by step through the narrative, saying "And then what happened?" to prompt people to respond.

When you feel the group has captured the story, you can move to discussion.

## Engage the story (20-25 minutes)

After the group has summarized the story, reflect together about the story. All together or in small groups, discuss one or more of the following questions:

- What was surprising (or interesting or exciting) to you in this week's chapter?
- What challenges you about this week's story?
- Was there anything that you found confusing from this week's chapter?
- Where does this story connect with your life? Where do you hear God speaking in this story to you as an individual? Where is God speaking to us as a community?
- The Bible tells the story of creation in two different ways. What might this tell us about the nature of creation? What might it tell us about the Bible?
- According to Genesis 2, the human is put in the garden with a purpose: to till it and keep it. What does this suggest about the relationship between humans and the earth? What does this passage suggest about the relationship between humans and animals?
- Before God sends the people out of the garden, he makes clothes for them. How does this act of tenderness relate to the punishment immediately preceding? What might we learn about God from this action?



- Sin is often defined as “separation from God.” Although the word sin doesn’t appear in the Bible until later, Adam and Eve’s actions in this story are traditionally seen as the entrance of sin into the world. What does this story reveal about the nature and impact of sin?
- In this chapter, we hear the Bible’s story of how the world began. How might this story complement and enhance scientific explanations for the origin of the universe?

### Images (optional; 10-15 minutes)

As part of the class, you might want to share some artistic representations of the story. Possibilities are included on the *Living Discipleship* website, or you can substitute others that are meaningful for your community.

The images can be displayed during the conversation, or you can use them as a focus for discussion during the engagement time.

Possible discussion questions include:

What moment from today’s story does this image represent?

Does this image look like the scene you pictured in your mind? How so or why not?

How does this image enhance your understanding of the biblical story?

Is this depiction faithful to the biblical story? How so or why not?

What is missing from this image? What is added?

What surprises you about this depiction?

What might you do differently if you were the artist portraying this story?

### Preview (2-3 minutes)

This curriculum includes an “icon” representative of each week’s session. These simple images are intended to facilitate learning the arc of God’s story. This is important so that we don’t merely remember isolated stories within scripture but see the way that the stories connect to one another and develop through time. Images also help to develop memory; by using and displaying the images for each week, you can help students (children, youth, and adults) to have a visual reminder of the stories that they have heard and learned. The icons are available as downloadable PDFs in the resource appendix.

We suggest that you make a “timeline” along one wall (or even around the entire room) in each of your classrooms. Each week, as you study the assigned portion of the biblical story, put the image up at the appropriate place on your timeline. This timeline will not contain dates but will instead simply be a sequence of images, helping us learn and remember the way that the biblical story, God’s great story of love and redemption, builds from one week to the next. At the beginning and end of each class, we will turn to the timeline as a way to reinforce the progression of the story that we are hearing each week. By the end of the year, members of the class will be able to tell the story of the Bible using the icons in the timeline as a guide.

Since this is the first week, introduce the idea of the icons and the timeline to the students, using some of the text in the preceding paragraphs. You will need to prepare a space for the display in advance. Have a volunteer from the class place the first icon at the beginning of the timeline.

As the image goes up, talk briefly about the icon. (e.g. "For this week's story of creation, we have an image of the moon and stars. This reminds us of the way that, in the beginning, God created everything, the sun and moon and stars and water and earth and animals and people and you and me. The story of God (and the story of people) begins with God lovingly and joyfully creating everything in the world and calling it very good.")

Then say, "And this is only the beginning of the story of God. Next week, the story continues, as we hear about Cain and Abel, the children of Adam and Eve, and their legendary sibling rivalry. We will also hear the story of Noah, which we often hear as children but are able to encounter in a new way as adults. Come join us as we continue our exploration of these important stories."



## CHAPTER 2 THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT

### SUPPLIES FOR THE JOURNEY



#### For this week's class you will need:

- *The Path: A Journey through the Bible*.
- A copy of the icon for this week, printed from the provided PDF.
- Extra copies of this week's chapter from *The Path*, for those who may have forgotten theirs.
- If you are not using the *The Path* book, copies of next week's handout.
- Images for discussion, available from the resource section of the curriculum as well as on the website at [LivingDiscipleship-FM.org/exploring-the-bible-resources](http://LivingDiscipleship-FM.org/exploring-the-bible-resources) (optional)
- Projector (optional)

### OPENING COLLECT

Almighty God, you have placed in the skies the sign of your covenant with all living things: Grant that we, who are saved through water and the Spirit, may worthily offer to you our sacrifice of thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 289

#### Review (5 minutes)

Begin by looking back at the story that has gone before.

Point to the icon from last week.

Ask a volunteer from the class who was there the previous week to retell the story in a few sentences.

Then invite other members of the class to fill in key details to flesh out the story.

The retelling should take about five minutes; you don't need to cover all the details of the previous week, but you want to be sure that people mention all of the main points so that they are better able to hear connections from one week to the next.

## Encounter the story (15-20 minutes)

Participants should have read chapter two from *The Path: A Journey Through the Bible*, so this is a time of recalling the story as a group. The leader(s) should not tell the story themselves; allow the group to retell the story, encouraging them with leading questions and offering corrections when necessary.

Though this may seem redundant, retelling the story as a group helps individuals learn the story. The intention is to simply retell the story rather than moralize or jump to what people believe is the "point" of the story. During this time, help people stick to the facts and what the story says rather than what they think it means.

Invite those who have read to summarize the chapter, and then encourage others to chime in and add salient details. You can prompt the conversation with leading questions such as:

- What is happening in the beginning of the story? Then what happens next? And what is next?
- What are the highlights of this week's story? What are the low points?
- Who are the important people in this week's story? Who are some of the people we might be tempted to overlook or forget?
- Which moment or quotation do you most remember from this week's story?
- What did you read or hear in this week's story that you don't remember hearing before or that struck you in a new way?
- What three words would you use to describe this week's story? How would you summarize this week's story in one sentence (or a Facebook post)?

Resist the temptation to cut the story short; you want to capture the fullness of the story. If people are struggling to remember the story, say, "Okay, let's look at the story together," and invite everyone to pull out their books or handouts. Beginning on the first page, go step by step through the narrative, saying, "And then what happened?" to prompt responses.

When you feel that the group has captured the story, you can move to discussion.

## Engage the story (20-25 minutes)



After the group has summarized the story, reflect together about it. All together or in small groups, discuss one or more of the following questions:

- What was surprising (or interesting or exciting) to you in this week's chapter?
- What challenges you about this week's story?
- Was there anything that you found confusing from this week's chapter?
- Where does this story connect with your life? Where do you hear God speaking in this story to you as an individual? Where is God speaking to us as a community?
- Cain and Abel is the first of many stories in the Bible of sibling conflict. Why do you think this might be?
- The story of Noah is often told as a children's story, yet it has some difficult parts. What do you notice about this story, reading it again? Which parts are difficult for you? Which parts sound like good news?
- These stories balance God's punishment with God's mercy: God punishes Cain yet also protects him; God destroys nearly all living creatures but saves Noah and a pair of each species of animal. What do these things tell us about God? How do you understand the relationship between God's judgment and God's mercy?
- In the Noah story, God's anger at humanity has implications for all of creation; the animals die alongside the wicked people. God's final covenant is also with "every living creature." What might these things tell us about the relationship between God, humanity, and creation?

### Images (optional; 10-15 minutes)

As part of the class, you might want to share some artistic representations of the story. Possibilities are included on the *Living Discipleship* website, or you can substitute others that are meaningful for your community.

The images can be displayed during the conversation, or you can use them as a focus for discussion during the engagement time.

Possible discussion questions include:

What moment from today's story does this image represent?

Does this image look like the scene you pictured in your mind? How so or why not?

How does this image enhance your understanding of the biblical story?

Is this depiction faithful to the biblical story? How so or why not?

What is missing from this image? What is added?

What surprises you about this depiction?

What might you do differently if you were the artist portraying this story?

### Preview (2-3 minutes)

Have a volunteer from the class place this week's icon in the correct place in the display timeline. The icon is available as a PDF in the resource appendix.

As the image goes up, talk briefly about the icon. (e.g. "For this week's story of Noah, we have an image of a rainbow with a dove. This reminds us of God's promise to Noah and to all creation, that God will never again destroy the earth with a flood. Every time we see a rainbow, we are reminded both of the faithfulness of Noah and of the faithfulness of God.")

Then, very briefly, say something like, "And the story of God doesn't end here, with Noah. Next week, the story will continue, as we hear about two very special people who listened carefully to God named Abraham and Sarah."

