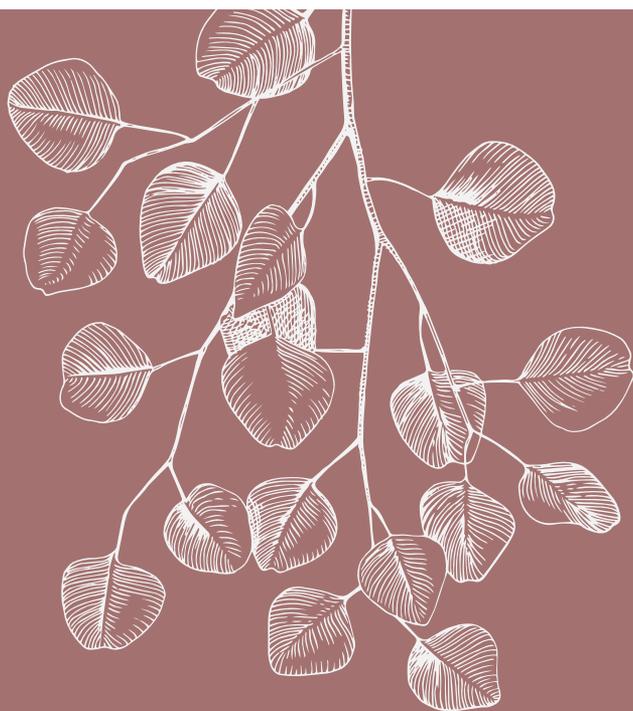


JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS



50 DAYS OF

Eastertide

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL

by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville

WEEK 1

Introduction

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Did you know that Easter is not a day, but a whole season in the church's calendar? Beginning Easter Sunday and stretching through Pentecost at the end of May, we mark the 50 days of Eastertide. This is a time for us to continue to celebrate and reflect on the incredible gift of the resurrection. In the early church, Lent was a season for new converts to learn about the faith and prepare for baptism on Easter Sunday. The initial purpose of the 50-day Easter season was to continue this faith formation of new Christians. So taking our cues from the early church, let us dedicate this Eastertide to learning more about who we are as God's people. We'll be reading through the first book of the Bible, Genesis, in this season. There are 50 chapters in the book, so we'll take a chapter a day as we trace the messy, startling, often confusing and beautiful narrative of God's faithfulness to His people "in the beginning." The God Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph worshipped is the God we serve today. May this Eastertide bring us into deeper communion with Him and His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 1

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 12

READ

Genesis 1

REFLECT

As we begin our study of Genesis, we are met with some of the most familiar words in all of Scripture, “In the beginning . . .” There is a very clear poetic pattern to the way this first chapter is written as the author describes for us the way our faithful God lovingly sculpted our world and called each part “good.” Of course, the crown of creation, the final touch was humanity itself. And after creating male and female in His own image, God called it “very good.” God had fashioned this expansive world complete with celestial lights and swarming fish, flying birds, creeping animals, trees and flowers and fruits. But it is not until he forms a man and a woman that he uses the words “very good.” It is in His own image that he creates humanity and they are given dominion over the earth. In the Ancient Near East, pagan kings and rulers would often call themselves the “image of God” they would require worship and adoration and would even erect idols and statues reflecting their likeness. But here we see the true king, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, creating his own image-bearers – us! We get to point people to worship this worthy King!

RESPOND

What does it mean for us to be created in the image of God? What does it mean for you, specifically, today? Are there ways you can reflect the goodness and grace of your Creator today? You may have to get a bit more creative in this season of quarantine, but what could that look like?

There is a great online resource for further study of this concept. Check it out if you can <https://bibleproject.com/explore/image-god/>

PRAY

Creator God, Lord of all that is seen and unseen, we ask today that you would help us to more faithfully bear your image. That those who see us (even if it's just on Zoom) might see your goodness and love reflected clearly. Grant us the vision to see your image in others as well, even those we may have trouble loving... especially them. Amen.

DAY 2

MONDAY, APRIL 13

READ

Genesis 2

REFLECT

Genesis 2 opens with the 7th day of creation. On the seventh day, God puts the finishing touches on creation by choosing to rest in creation. God doesn't create and then leave creation to fend for itself. God stays with creation. The seventh day we discover that God is Emmanuel: God with us. Once the biblical narrative has established that God has decided to be with us in creation, we hear a second account of the creation narrative in the second chapter. This second account zeros in on God's creation of and being with humanity. Specifically, God's creation of the first two humans. First, God starts out with only one. "It is not good for man to be alone." These are the first recorded words we have from God to humanity. God begins with creating community. Most of the chapter is spent providing the first human with someone to be with them. From the very beginning, God created us to be together. It's interesting that God starts with animals and then ends by dividing the first human into man and woman. What would have happened if God had started out with two and then brought animals to them to be named? Perhaps God needed to show us from the beginning that there is no substitute for authentic human community. It is not good for us to be alone. We were made for relationship with God and relationship with one another. This seems to be the first thing we're taught by God and maybe one of the first things we forget.

RESPOND

How often do you forget that it is not good for you to be alone and isolated from community with God and others? What does that forgetfulness look like? Reflect on the way you live your life. In what ways do you choose to be alone and in what ways do you say yes to the community God has created for you? Today, how could you say yes to the goodness of community with others and communion with God? Who are the people in your life that God says it is good for you to be with?

PRAY

Gracious, loving, creator God. From the very beginning you chose to be with me. From the very beginning you did not leave me alone. From day one you created me for community. Show me the people you've called me to be with. Give me the courage to choose the good of communion with you and others. Free me from anything that fools me into thinking I'm better alone. In the name of the word made flesh who was with you from the beginning, Jesus Christ, Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

READ

Genesis 3

REFLECT

I was a young man, committed to a life pleasing to God. I didn't realize that what had happened earlier in my life made it difficult for me to please God later. I went to a counselor. He was helpful, but I remember the day when he said, "What do you want with your life?" I replied, "To do God's will." He replied, "Yes, but what do *you* want?" I said, "God's will." And he replied, "What is *your* will?" Exasperated, I said, "I think we're done here."

Terence Fretheim, in commenting on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, says that eating the fruit "entails deciding about one's own best interests, to become autonomous, independent of the will of God for one's life." To refrain from eating acknowledges the value of God's law and recognizes that "certain limits are in the best interests of human life and well-being."

A person doesn't have to be fully self-aware or an expert in ethics in order to walk in ways that result in well-being. When I was a young man, in some ways I was a mess. But someone had told me about that tree in the garden, and about Adam and Eve. I knew enough to know that autonomy, self-rule, asserting my own will, was not in my best interests. Now that I'm an almost-old man, in some ways I'm still a mess. But the lessons of Adam and Eve have been confirmed over and over. Sometimes (too many times) I repeat their mistakes. Always, I realize where I erred. Always, there is a fig leaf.

RESPOND

Adam and Eve's example is written for us: Reject the voice that says, "Do what *you* want."

Jesus's counter-example is written for us, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Remember the voice that says, "You are a creature, made by a good and wise God. Trust *him*, as a child trusts the Father."

PRAY

Father, thank you for those people in my life who urge me to trust your voice, especially when it limits my freedom to do what I want. Thank you for every fig leaf. Thank you for the Spirit of Christ Jesus at work in me, that I may will your will, and do your will. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

READ

Genesis 4

REFLECT

After Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden as a consequence of their disobedience of God, there is a sign of hope in the gift of new life. God blesses them with two sons, Cain and Abel. But jealousy and conflict ensue between the brothers, and tragedy and death result as Cain kills Abel. Conflict and rivalry between brothers is a theme that arises throughout the work of Genesis. Cain must bear the consequences of his sin. The course of his life is changed forever.

We also are sinful beings, and as sinful beings, we have experienced selfish desires, pride, anger, jealousy and evil intent toward others. As the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 51, our sin is ever before us. We are not told that Cain repents of his sin against his brother and seeks God's forgiveness. But the scriptures assure us, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and he will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all forgiveness." Thanks be to God.

RESPOND

Take time to examine your life. Reflect upon the last 24 hours. What manifestations of sin do you see? Are there patterns of sin that you find yourself repeating again and again? Confess your sin, knowing that God's forgiveness is reaching out to you. Accept, with thanksgiving, the gift of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ and ask for His help to live a life pleasing to Him. ?

PRAY

Gracious God, Make us mindful of our sin and our need for Your forgiveness. Guide us as we reflect upon our lives to see the sin and to earnestly confess our sin to You with repentance. Create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us. Thank You for Your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

READ

Genesis 5

REFLECT

This is one of the chapters that would be easy to skim over and zone out while reading a super long list of names, but there is a reason this genealogy made it into our Bibles, so we would do well to pay attention. In this particular genealogy tracing the lineage from Adam to Noah, we find a very interesting detail. For every man listed you find their age and their descendants and then the words "...and he died." Not so in verse 24, rather we read, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."

What are we to make of this? The Hebrew word for "walked" here does not merely refer to a journey from point A to point B, but rather a meandering, slow stroll like the ones God used to take in the Garden a few chapters before this. Usually people are said to have walked BEFORE God, but here Enoch is walking WITH God which implies a certain friendship and familiarity. Even though his ancestors (namely Adam) had strayed from God's path, we still see some grace here that Enoch walks with God and is not bound by the disobedience that preceded him. .

RESPOND

These stories of grace in the Old Testament are not as explicit as they are in the New Testament, but God is still God. And He is good. Are there places in your life that you feel restricted by your past? Has guilt or fear kept you from walking with God?

PRAY

God, help me to find your pace in this time of social-distancing that I might walk with you as Enoch did. Free me from the past I cannot change that I might boldly follow your Son, Jesus Christ this Easter-tide. Amen.

DAY 6

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

READ

Genesis 6:1-22

REFLECT

Genesis chapter six has it all; Nephelim, God's disappointment, and the beginning of the story of Noah. The chapter raises more questions than most. Who are the Nephelim? How can God be so disappointed? Why did God find favor with Noah? This chapter lends itself to the, "you will find what you are looking for" sentiment. In these 22 verses, you can paint a picture of God with the brushes of anger, disappointment, and punishment. You can also paint a picture of God with the brushes of favor, justice, and mercy. I believe the latter to be a more faithful rendering, but that does require a particular amount of trust. Perhaps the proper question to help guide the coming chapters of Genesis is just that, "How much do I trust God?"

RESPOND

How much do you trust God in this season of life? Is there a season that you trusted more in God's work within the world? Is there a season you trusted less? What is THE thing you would need to trust, or trust more, in God's work within the world? If you did trust God more, what would that matter for how you lived your life? What is at stake in not trusting God, or only trusting God a little?

PRAY

God of mercy, help me to trust you. It seems our world is in need of more people who trust you as your servant Noah did. Help me to know you are a god of love. May I learn to lean not on my own understanding. Give me _____, that I might trust in you more; that this world would experience your mercy. Amen.

DAY 7

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

READ

Genesis 7

REFLECT

The Great Flood. The force of the rushing waters wipes out everything. The churning of the waters creates a chaos of destruction. The waters cover the whole earth until all is lost, except for Noah, his family, and the animals. God has returned the earth to its formless void of Genesis 1 to almost restart creation. It is interesting that in salvation history we do not remember this event for its destructiveness, but that God moved over the flood waters and saved Noah. The symbol of the ark has become the symbol of the church. The nave (ship) is the place for the congregation to worship and be in the presence of God. Hebrews feared chaotic waters. Yet God's Spirit moves over those waters. God moved over the waters of chaos and creation burst forth. God moved over the waters of the flood and saved Noah. God moved over the waters of the Red Sea and delivered us from slavery. God moved over the waters of the Jordan and led us into the promised land. God moved over the waters of the Jordan and declared that Jesus was his beloved son. God moved over our baptismal waters claiming us as forgiven beloved children of God.

RESPOND

At times the waters seem to be rising around us even up to our necks. Remember no matter how hectic the situation, God can move over the waters and bring salvation.

PRAY

Gracious Lord, remind us of our baptismal waters this day. You have made us new creations, saved from evil, set free from our sin, led into the kingdom of your love, and have claimed us as your children. May we live in this truth following Jesus our Lord. Amen.