



SESSION 1 of 4

Creation

MEETING AIM

To explore the Bible's account of how God made the world.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 1:1-2:4

BACKGROUND

The creation story is one of the oldest parts of the Bible, and people probably shared it aloud with each other long before it was written down. Like so many ancient stories, it is simple and profound. It has been told down the years to help people of faith understand their Creator God and how they and their world came to be. Don't get bogged down by a 'creationism versus science' debate in this session. The aim here is to open up space for children to explore and ask questions about the Bible story as it is written. Encourage them to share knowledge they have about the world they live in, and to wonder about this ancient story with each other and with God.

5 CIRCLE TIME

As the children arrive, invite them to chat about what they enjoy making. Share your own creative passion and find out about each other's, whether it be music, baking, drawing, Lego building or something really unusual. Talk about what is involved in the human act of creation, such as daydreaming about big ideas, planning, making mistakes and working hard.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

This is a game to stretch the children's brains to look as far back in time as possible.

Ask the children about the oldest thing they have seen or heard about. It must be something they have personal experience of. Have they visited a Victorian building, seen a Viking sword in a museum or been to a Roman ruin? How far back can they go?

Use the length of the room as an imaginary timeline from the beginning of time until now. Asking each in turn for their contribution, place the children along the timeline. Debate the relative positions together. For example, did the Vikings or Victorians come first? Or, more challenging, is a fossil older than a mountain? Agree on the timeline order for all the children's suggestions, then invite second attempts to think of something even older, allowing them

to move further down the timeline. This time, children may not have personal experience of something, but just knowing about it (for example an amoeba) is enough. As a group, how far back can you go?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: the seven Bible readings (see below) in an accessible translation of your choice, printed in large print on separate pieces of paper; large, coloured pieces of cloth (black, white, green and blue), such as scarves, sheets or tablecloths (optional) Explain to the children that the Bible begins further back than our timeline. In fact, it reaches right back before the beginning of time itself. It begins with the story of how everything was made. Today you are going to tell this creation story using only your bodies (and pieces of cloth, if you are using any)!

As a warm-up, lead the children in making star shapes with their hands. Make a stormy sea all together using actions or a blue cloth, then individually make the shape of a tree and the shape of a rabbit with your hands or body. As a final challenge, use your bodies to act out an explosion in space!

Give out the first six readings. Work together as a whole group, or divide the readings between smaller groups of children. If you have them, they can choose the coloured cloth(s) they want to use. The children should decide how they are going to represent each day, using their bodies as expressively as possible. Give them a short time to practise.

Day one: Nothing, then light and dark (Genesis 1:1-5)

Day two: Sky (Genesis 1:6-8)

Day three: Land, sea, plants and trees (Genesis 1:9-13)

Day four: Sun, moon and stars (Genesis 1:14-19)

Day five: Fish and birds (Genesis 1:20-23)

Day six: Animals and humans (Genesis 1:24-31)

To tell the story, either a child or a leader reads each Bible passage aloud in turn, while the group energetically acts out their representation of that day of creation. By the end, everyone should be quite tired! Invite everyone to lie down and make themselves comfortable as you read day seven. Explain that this will be followed by a short time of quiet and stillness so they can rest and think about everything that happened in the story.

Day Seven: Rest (Genesis 2:1-4a)

Encourage everyone to lie still and stay quiet for a short time.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which day of creation did you like best?
- How did you feel about having a rest?
- Is anything missing from the creation story? Does this matter?
- What questions would you like to ask God about creation?
- What would you like to say to God about how the world is now?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: paper and pens

Invite the children to be creators. Can they design a new plant or creature the world could benefit from today, for example a lizard that can digest plastic or a tree that produces fruit all year round? As they draw, chat about why their creation would be a good addition to the planet. What does our world need today? What can we do to help?

5 PRAYER

Teach the British Sign Language signs for 'Nothing' and 'Everything' (search *signbsl.com* for 'vacuum: the absence of matter' and 'everything'). Practise doing the actions together whenever you say "nothing" or "everything". During the prayer, encourage children to 'supersize' their 'everything' sign to indicate the hugeness of creation, so that by the third instance they use their whole bodies and stretch out their arms as wide as they can reach. Then say this prayer:

Creator God,
in the beginning there was NOTHING.
Then you made EVERYTHING.
It was bigger than that – you made EVERYTHING!
You have given us more than we can possibly imagine.
Thank you, God, for absolutely EVERYTHING!
Amen.

CLAIRE BENTON-EVANS

writes for Kevin Mayhew and is the youth and children officer for the Diocese of Edinburgh: www.clairebentonevans.com.

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SESSION 2 of 4

Adam and Eve

MEETING AIM

To learn how the relationship between God, human beings and the natural world began.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 2:5-25

BACKGROUND

Genesis 1 gives us the 'big picture' version of creation, taking us from nothing to everything in six days. Genesis 2 is a close-up on the making of human beings and their home, the Garden of Eden. It shows us more about how God related to the first people he made, and how they related to each other and their world.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children as they arrive, and chat about pets. What pets do they have? What pets would they like? Invite them to share funny stories about the animals they own.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: photographs of strange creatures

Before the session, search online for pictures of strange creatures. Put these into a PowerPoint presentation or print them off.

Show the children the photos and marvel at the weirdness of these creatures. Which ones are their favourites? Chat about human beings. Would an alien race think we are weird? Why?

15 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a roll of lining paper; felt-tip pens; scissors; masking tape

Sit the children in a circle and tell this story:

When God first made the heavens and the earth, it was as if he was starting with a blank sheet of paper. *Roll out a long piece of paper and place it in the middle of the circle.*

Nothing had started to grow because there hadn't been any rain and there were no rivers yet. God took some of the earth and made it into the shape of a man. *Fold over the end of the sheet and draw a simple*

person shape on it. Cut off the whole folded end and cut out the person shape, cutting through both pieces of paper but leaving the hands joined at the fold, as with a paper chain of people.

God breathed life into the man, and he was alive! *Hold up the figure, keeping the second one folded behind it, and make it dance.*

Then God really got busy. He made a garden full of trees! There were beautiful trees, shady trees, trees with delicious fruit, nuts and berries, and even trees that smelled wonderful. God made them all! *Cut off individual lengths of paper from the big roll of lining paper and lead the children in making simple paper trees. Roll each length of paper up into a tube and use masking tape to secure the end. Make long cuts down from the top of the tube to make branches, then some short cuts upwards to make roots. Pull the innermost branches upwards to make the tree grow. Splay out the roots and use masking tape to stick the trees to the roll of lining paper (you may also need to stick the edges of the paper down to the floor or table). Make two large trees yourself and place them in the middle of your paper garden.*

This was the Garden of Eden. In the middle of the garden, God made two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

All these trees needed watering, so God made a river. It flowed into the garden and divided into four great rivers that went on to water whole countries. *Invite everyone to draw a big river flowing into the garden and dividing.*

Then God took the man he had made and put him in the Garden of Eden to look after it. *Lean your paper man against a tree in the middle of the garden.*

God said to the man: "You can eat anything you want from any of these trees, apart from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That fruit will kill you."

Then God said to the man: "You need a partner!" So God created every kind of animal and bird, and they filled the garden. The man named them all. *Invite everyone to draw an animal or bird in the garden and write its name.*

But the man still hadn't found a partner, so God put him into a deep sleep. *Lie your paper man down.*

God took one of the man's ribs and made it into a woman, then he introduced them both to each other. *Unfold the second figure from behind the first and stand them up together, holding hands.*

They were both naked, but they weren't at all embarrassed! They were Adam and Eve.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which part of the story did you most enjoy making?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- How do you imagine the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked?
- I wonder what this story tells us about our relationship with nature.
- What does this story make you think about God?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: visual aids from 'Bible story'
Invite everyone to draw their favourite creatures in the garden and write the creatures' name on their drawings. They could also decorate the trees with leaves and fruit. As you fill the garden together, chat about what you love in the natural world.

5 PRAYER

You will need: long strips of paper; pens and scissors

Talk about how God made everything, including us! His creation is amazing, but we often take it for granted. It's good for us to stop, look around and praise God for everything he has made.

Demonstrate how to make a paper chain of people and invite everyone to do so. Explain that you are going to write a prayer on each person that praises God for his creation. The prayers could be general ("Wow!") or specific ("Thank you for cuddles with my cat.") Allow enough time for everyone to make their people and write their prayers. Add the paper chains to the garden you made earlier.

Read out this Bible verse: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

Finally, say: "Lord, we praise you for everything you have made." Encourage the group to shout "Amen!" together.

CLAIRE BENTON-EVANS

writes for Kevin Mayhew and is the youth and children officer for the Diocese of Edinburgh: www.clairebentonevans.com.

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SESSION 3 of 4

The fall

MEETING AIM

To explore how Adam and Eve let God down.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 3

BACKGROUND

This story marks a seismic shift from God's original world, which was very good, to the world we know today, in which bad things happen. The aim of this session is to share this ancient story simply, while encouraging the children to actively engage with and wonder about it. It focuses on a fundamental of faith – obedience to God – so it's a good place for children to practise making connections between the Bible's stories of fallen humanity and the choices they make in their own lives.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children as they arrive and introduce the idea of "If I ruled the world..." What would they do or say if they were in charge of everything? What rules might they make?

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a single exotic fruit (such as a pomegranate or persimmon), which children will be unlikely to recognise; some bowls of familiar fruit such as grapes, strawberries and orange segments
Display the bowls of fruit with the mystery fruit in the middle. Ask the children which one fruit they would choose to eat, and wonder together about how the mystery fruit might taste. Might it be more delicious than anything else on the table, or might it present a nasty surprise? Who would choose it? Discuss their choices, then introduce and cut open the exotic fruit. Ask everyone to save the fruit they have chosen to eat for during the story.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a large sheet of paper; pens; copies of Genesis 3 divided into four separate readings with these titles: 'The first choice' (verses 1-6), 'The first consequence' (verse 7), 'The next choice' (verses 8-13) and 'The ultimate consequence' (verses 14-24)

The aim is to explore this story step by step as you create a decision tree (search online for examples of this) to show Adam and Eve's choices and the consequences of these decisions. Spread the paper out in front of the children and tell this story:

Our story begins with the first people, Adam and Eve, in their perfect Garden of Eden. *At the top of the page, write "ADAM + EVE + GARDEN".*

God gave them everything they needed and said: "It's all yours! You can eat fruit from any of these trees." But he gave them one rule: "Do not eat the fruit from this one tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – or you will die." So what choices did Adam and Eve have at this point? *Invite suggestions and draw the first two decision branches: "Eat the fruit" and "Don't eat the fruit" (the children may also add other original ideas). Discuss possible reasons for choosing either, eg "I wonder what it tastes like?"; "God says we mustn't" or "We'll die". Hand out and read 'The first choice' (verses 1-6) together, then discuss further reasons for eating the fruit from Eve's point of view. Hand out and read 'The first consequence' (verse 7) together and add the next branch from "Eat the fruit", for example "Gained knowledge" (use a phrase the children agree on).*

They have broken the first rule in the history of the world! What choices do Adam and Eve have now? *Invite suggestions and draw the next decision branches: "Try to cover up what they've done" and "Own up and say sorry" (the children may add other ideas). Discuss Adam and Eve's reasons for choosing one of these options. Identify what they did next by reading together 'The next choice' (verses 8-13). Draw the next branch from "Try to cover up" and label it "Blame each other". Hand out and read together 'The ultimate consequence' (verses 14-24), then add the next branches: "Punished" and "Banished" (again, use the children's choice of words). Look back together at the decision tree illustrating Adam and Eve's choices and the consequences of these decisions. What might have happened if Adam and Eve had not eaten the forbidden fruit? What might have happened if they'd owned up and said sorry?*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?
- Christians sometimes call this story 'the fall', because it's about how human beings 'fell' from a perfect way of being. Whose fault do you think the fall was?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: Lego or Playmobil

Ask the children to create a scene from today's story. As they do so, chat together about where they would physically place themselves in the scene. If they think they would be in the Garden of Eden, whereabouts would they like to be and why?

5 PRAYER

You will need: a whiteboard; some whiteboard pens; a dry cloth

At the top of the board, draw a simple decision tree with "My choice" at the top with two branches labelled "My way" and "God's way".

Invite everyone to pause for a moment and think about a time when they did something wrong; when they chose to go their own way instead of God's way. Encourage everyone to say sorry to God by coming forward to write "Sorry" on the whiteboard under the "My way" branch. Go on to say this prayer:

God, we are truly sorry for the things we have done wrong. May you forgive us and help us to do things your way from now on. Amen.

Pause, then say: "God is always ready to forgive our wrongdoing and give us a fresh start, like this." Invite the youngest member of the group to wipe off all the 'sorry' statements, leaving the simple decision tree.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Cain and Abel

MEETING AIM

To learn about offering our best to God rather than outdoing each other.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 4:1-16

BACKGROUND

The Bible doesn't explain why God preferred Abel's offering to Cain's, and the key verse (4:7) is very difficult to follow in Hebrew. The writer of Hebrews says that "by faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did" (Hebrews 11:4). Perhaps the difference lay in the men's hearts and intentions.

Cain's murderous reaction suggests sibling rivalry, and this offers a way into the story with the children. The following session begins by inviting them to consider how they compare themselves with others. It leads them to explore how they are each unique and special to God, and that the best thing we can offer him is ourselves.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children as they arrive and chat about who we compare ourselves with and why. Friends at school? Siblings? Celebrities? Friends on social media? How does it feel when we compare ourselves with other people?

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Put the children into pairs to play competitive games using just their hands, for example 'rock, paper, scissors' or thumb-wrestling (for a fun version, see Jane McGonigal's 'Massively multi-player thumb-wrestling' on YouTube). Talk together about how it feels to win or lose.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: face paint or eyeshadow; a body outline marked out on the floor in chalk or masking tape in one corner of the room; a bag of cheap potatoes of various sizes and shapes; a toy lamb
 Explain that you're going to tell this story back to front, starting with the last thing that happened. Choose a volunteer and mark their forehead with face paint, then send

them to the other side of the room. Wonder together about what the mark means and why this person has been sent away.

Then say that you're about to see what happened just before this. Gather your group around the body outline on the floor. Wonder together about what this shape means. What might have happened here? Gather some feedback from the children. Then explain that you're going to tell the story from the beginning to find out how these things came to be:

You remember Adam and Eve, the first people? They had two baby boys who grew up into very different men. Cain was a farmer and his brother Abel was a shepherd. *Move back to the centre of the room and choose two volunteers. Give them the lamb and the potatoes.*

Abel did herding, feeding and lambing; Cain did digging, sowing and harvesting. One day, the two brothers made an offering to God. *Choose someone to be God, and invite your volunteers to present the offerings as you tell the story.*

"Lord, this is for you," said Abel, giving God his best lamb. His brother gave God some things he had pulled out of the ground that morning. Perhaps they were potatoes like these. "Here you are, God," said Cain.

Now, God gladly accepted Abel's gift, but he paid no attention to Cain's offering. In fact, God completely ignored Cain. *Encourage the God volunteer to respond accordingly to the brothers, for example by shaking Abel's hand and turning his back on Cain.*

Cain was furious! God said: "Why are you so cross? I'll accept the best you can offer me, but watch out that your worst side doesn't get the better of you."

Cain turned to Abel and said: "How about a walk?"

The two brothers went off together across the fields.

Much later, only Cain came back. God said: "Where's your brother?" and Cain shrugged. *Gather your group around the body outline on the floor.*

Everything was quiet, but out in the fields there was blood on the ground, which spoke loud and clear. It said: "MURDER!"

God said: "Cain! You've killed your brother! Your punishment is that you'll find it difficult to grow anything from now on, and this is no longer your home. You'll always be on the run."

Cain cried: "But then I won't belong anywhere! Anyone could kill me!" *Summon the marked volunteer.*

But God made his mark on Cain to protect him from harm. Then Cain left his farm, his home and God, and went a long way away. *Send the marked volunteer to the other side of the room.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Which bit of the story can you imagine most clearly?
- I wonder why God liked Abel's offering but not Cain's...
- What would you write in thought bubbles for Cain and Abel?
- What do you think about Cain's punishment?
- What questions would you like to ask God about this story?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: small boxes or cardboard tubes; paper; pens; scissors; sticky tape; shiny gift wrap; ribbon

Remind the children that Cain offered his crops to God, while Abel offered his best lambs. What could we offer God?

Encourage responses by asking questions. Does God want our electronic devices? Our money? Or something else? What can we give? What could we do for God?

Allow plenty of time for the children to reflect on what they could offer God, then write it down and gift-wrap it in a parcel addressed to him.

5 PRAYER

You will need: the potatoes from 'Bible story'
 Give everyone a potato. Allow time for them to study their potato closely and discover something unique about it. Go around the circle with each person introducing their potato and explaining what is special about it.

Say that each of these potatoes is unique and special, and they are only spuds. Think how much more wonderfully God has made each of you! Explain that you're going to ask God to help everyone see how unique and special we are in his eyes:

"Lord, help me to see why I am special. Show me how to offer the best of myself to you."

Pause for a moment, then invite everyone to offer their prayers by building a potato prayer cairn. Say "Amen" together at the end. As a final challenge, can the children spot their own potato in the pile?

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