

Lesson Plans that Work

Faith Practice and Climate Justice

Lesson Plans for Young Adults: Lesson One

Theme: I belong to God's Beloved Creation.

Background: Climate change is often portrayed as something that happens on a global scale, far beyond our capacity to understand or affect. Human beings are often portrayed as somehow separate from the rest of God's creation. As we practice faith in an era of climate chaos, we need Scripture's wisdom, which teaches us that we belong in Creation and have a special role to play.

Supplies Needed: You will need a prayer table, a candle, Bibles for each participant, and small shallow dishes of soil (any kind you can access) and water to place on your prayer table. If you have access to branches, seeds, or plants, include them on the prayer table. If you are gathering a young adult group for the first time, and meeting in person, get blank nametags for people to fill out with name and pronouns - groups are much easier when people get help with these things.

Before: Prepare a central table with a candle, your dish of soil, a dish of water, and any other elements of God's creation that you can include. Open the prayerbook to p. 814, "Prayer For Joy in God's Creation," and place it on the table open to this page. If you are using the online spiritual gifts assessment, figure out how you will share it with the group: shorten the URL and ask people to use their phones to take it in person? Send the link via email ahead of time or afterwards? Print out copies?

Beginning: Gather around the prayer table. Begin with any opening routine your group usually uses. If this is the first time you are meeting, start with the basics: welcome everyone to the group, assure people that this is a safe space to be honest and also to pass if you aren't comfortable speaking, tell them that you expect a variety of backgrounds and experiences and we're here to learn with and from each other. If in person, make sure people know where the bathrooms are. Then invite people to introduce themselves: name, pronouns, highs and lows from the past week.

Opening Prayer: Light your candle, pick up the prayerbook, and pray:

O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Opening Questions: Ask about participants' current climate understanding and backgrounds. What do you know about climate change? Do you think it matters to your life? Where you have talked about climate change and justice before today? How have those conversations gone?

Tell the story: Share the basic facts about climate change: it is real, it is human-caused, it is a long-range consequence of the industrial revolution (when society began to burn fossil fuels), the impacts are serious and those impacts unjustly fall on the poorest and most vulnerable. (Optional: Show a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOht6qmuG-k>)

Introduce the curriculum: this is a Bible study in the context of the climate crisis, because the Bible can teach us how to live wisely as servants of God in a broken world. (You may wish to share the “Note on Scripture” in the curriculum overview and the background above.) Then invite everyone to open their Bibles to Genesis 2:4.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 2:4-2:9. Summarize the story so far:

- Human beings are of one substance with the soil - we are the earth
- God’s breath breathes in our lungs - we are animated by the Holy Spirit
- The first human was named “Adam” before there was male and female
- In the original Hebrew, “Adam” means human and “adamah” is the word for soil.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 2:15-17. Summarize:

- The first human is placed in a garden, and charged with the care of that garden.
- The garden has boundaries - there is one tree that is off-limits.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 2:18-25. Summarize:

- This is a story called an “etiology” which means it is an ancient story told to explain why things were the way they are.
- It teaches us that God didn’t want the first human to be lonely, and that humans need other humans of different genders to find community.
- It teaches us that in the infant stages of human life, we were like infants, who don’t care whether they were wearing clothes or not.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 3:1-13. Summarize:

- The serpent tempts the humans by promising them the power to be like God.
- The humans accept temptation and trespass against the boundaries God set for them.
- So many things happen: they put on clothes, they get scared, they hide from God, and they blame each other instead of taking responsibility.

Reflection Questions: “Climate justice” refers to the reality that the climate is changing due to human activity, and it has an unjust effect on the poorest and most vulnerable. The words “climate justice” speak to the hope for both a stable climate and more fair society. Ask: Do you see any connections between the story from Genesis and climate justice? Listen to their thoughts, and ask them what they think of these ideas:

- God put us on a garden planet and charged us to take care of it, but we haven’t done that very well. Climate change is an unintended consequence of choices our ancestors made to do things like drive cars, fly planes, have light in the middle of the night - to live more like God. Are we more like Adam and Eve than we might think?

- When things go wrong and we are part of the problem, we still have the power to choose. We can choose to blame or to take responsibility. We can hide from God in fear or we can seek God in faith. What might have happened if Adam and Eve had not hid, but looked for God and said, “We made a mistake, we are sorry, please help us try again?”

Optional Activity (In-Person or Online): You are part of God’s Creation! Take time to explore how God created you, and the gifts God has given you to be a healer in this world by taking a spiritual gifts assessment: <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Spiritual-Renewal/Assessment-Tools> - ONLINE VERSION
https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/18/18ad1f88-65ed-4eef-8c67-757b294b688e/documents/Spiritual_Gifts_Assessment_Tool.pdf - PRINT VERSION

Gather/Ending: Summarize what Scripture teaches: We are not meant to be destructive to the earth. We were created one with the earth. We are not meant to blame others when we sin. We are meant to confess, repent and begin again in love. This is the way of love that brings health and healing instead of harm to future generations. Ask people to share a sentence or two about what stood out to each of them today.

Prayer: To close, pray for all those gathered, and offer the Prayer for Joy in God’s Creation again.

As people depart, you can invite participants to bring a friend to the next session, if you think that can work for your group.

Supplemental materials: “[The Anthropocene Fall](#),” in *Earth and Altar*.

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