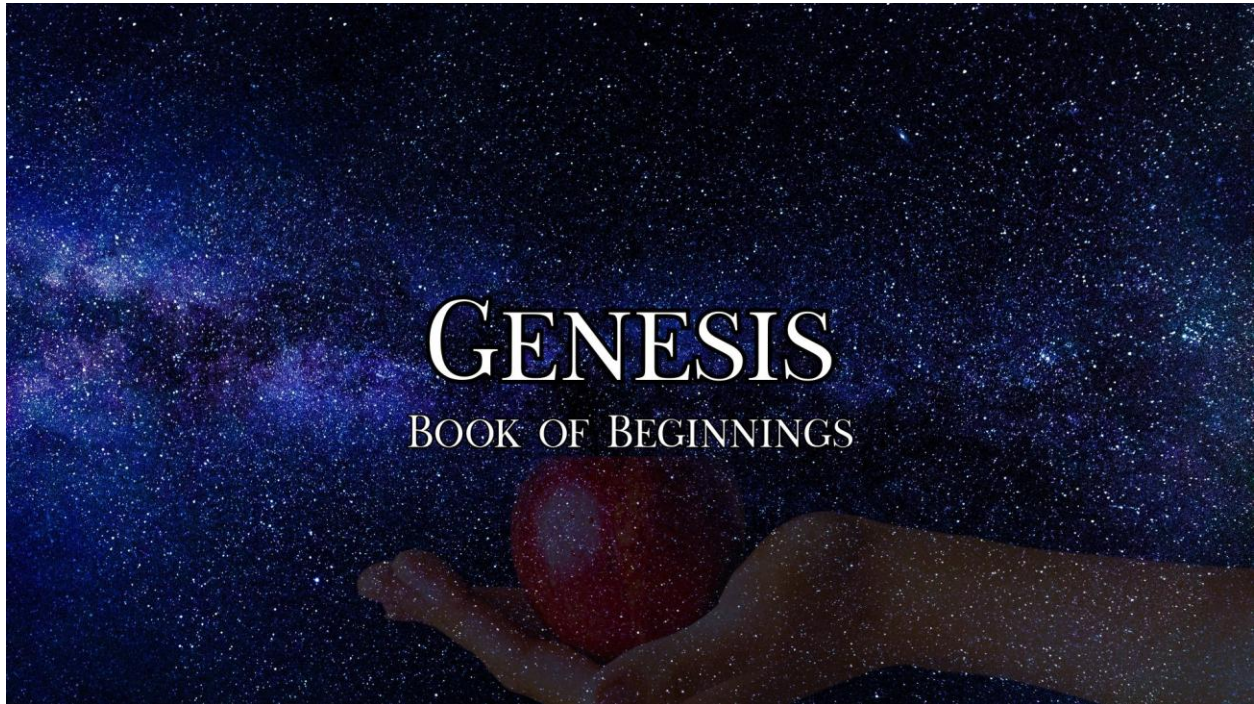


Small Group Guide: Genesis 1 — In the Beginning



Overview

This session explores Genesis 1 and the opening chapters of the book of beginnings. Rather than settling every debate about the age of the earth or the length of creation days, the sermon invites us to sit with what all serious interpretations agree on: that God alone existed before time, space, and matter, and that he created everything out of nothing with a redemptive purpose in mind. The goal of this guide is to help your group think deeply about what Genesis 1 reveals about God, humanity, and the gospel.

Key Takeaways

- The universe had a beginning, and whatever caused it must exist outside of time, space, and matter — which points to a supernatural, personal Creator.
- Genesis is a book of beginnings, and while it covers the origin of the entire universe in a single chapter, it devotes far more space to people — reflecting that God is in the people business.

- Christians throughout history have held a variety of interpretations of Genesis 1. Disagreement on the specifics does not place someone outside of orthodox Christianity.
 - The Trinity is visible from the very first verses of scripture: God the Father creating, the uncreated Word present in the text, and the Spirit hovering over the waters.
 - The universe was created to function as it was meant to function, with human responsibility and free will built into it — and the gospel is the answer to what happened when humanity used that freedom to rebel.
 - The pattern of creation week — light on day one, man on day six, rest on day seven, and a new day beginning — foreshadows the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in a striking way.
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Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of an important "first" in your own life — a first job, a first day of school, a first major decision. What made that moment significant? How do firsts tend to shape what comes after them?

Section 1: Something Rather Than Nothing

The sermon opens with the philosophical question of why anything exists at all, and argues that the only sufficient answer is a personal Creator who exists outside of time, space, and matter.

1. Before this sermon, how did you tend to think about the question of why the universe exists? Did you have a ready answer, or was it something you had not thought through carefully?
2. The sermon argues that nature cannot explain nature — that whatever caused the universe to begin must be timeless, spaceless, and immaterial. How does that reasoning sit with you? Does it feel compelling or does it raise further questions?
3. If God is timeless, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and spiritual, what does that tell us about what kind of being he is? How does that shape the way you think about prayer, worship, or your daily relationship with him?

Section 2: A History of Interpretation

The sermon surveys a wide range of interpretations of Genesis 1 — from early church fathers like Augustine and Justin Martyr to modern views like old earth creation, theistic evolution, and young earth creationism — and argues that this diversity has existed from the very beginning.

4. Were you aware that Christians have held a variety of views on Genesis 1 since the earliest centuries of the church? How does that knowledge affect the way you approach this passage?
5. The sermon distinguishes between what all interpretations agree on — that God created everything out of nothing — and the details that are still debated. Why do you think it matters to identify that common ground? What is lost when Christians treat secondary questions as primary ones?
6. Is there a particular interpretation of Genesis 1 that you have held or been taught? After hearing this sermon, has your thinking shifted at all, or has it been confirmed? What shaped your view in the first place?

Section 3: What Genesis 1 Reveals About God and Humanity

The sermon draws attention to specific details in the text — the Trinity in the opening verses, the phrase "very good" rather than "perfect," the command to be fruitful and subdue the earth, and the creation of humanity in God's image.

7. The sermon points out that the Trinity appears in the first two verses of scripture: the Father creating, the uncreated Word present in the Hebrew text, and the Spirit hovering over the waters. How does seeing the Trinity from the very beginning of the Bible change the way you read Genesis?
8. God declared his creation "very good" — a phrase that points to proper function rather than absolute perfection. The sermon suggests this leaves room for human responsibility and free will. How do you respond to the idea that the world was designed to function correctly while still allowing for the possibility of rebellion?
9. Humanity alone is described as being made in God's image. The sermon notes that God devotes far more of Genesis to individual people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph than to the creation of the entire universe. What does that say about how God views you personally?

Section 4: Creation Week and the Gospel

The sermon closes by drawing connections between the days of creation and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus — crucified on the sixth day (the day of man), resting in the tomb on the seventh day, and raised on the first day of the week, the day of light.

10. When you heard the connection between day one (light), day six (man), day seven (rest), and the resurrection on the first day of the week, what was your reaction? Did it feel like a meaningful pattern or did it raise questions for you?
11. The sermon describes the gospel as being introduced in the very first chapter of Genesis — that God's plan from before the foundations of the earth was to redeem what was created in his image. How does it affect your understanding of the Bible to see the gospel present at the very beginning rather than only in the New Testament?
12. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 that those who are in Christ will one day put on incorruptible, immortal flesh — that what is corruptible will be changed. How does that future hope affect the way you live in your corruptible body right now?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to reflect on personally or discuss as a group this week.

- 1. Sit with the question.** Spend time this week simply thinking about the fact that you exist — that there is something rather than nothing. Let that lead you into a moment of worship or prayer, acknowledging that God is the only sufficient answer to that question.
- 2. Read Genesis 1 slowly.** Read Genesis 1 through Genesis 2:3 in one sitting, paying attention to the rhythm and structure of the text. Notice the pattern of evening and morning, the movement from simple to complex, and where God declares things good. Write down one observation that you had not noticed before.
- 3. Extend grace in a secondary debate.** Think of someone in your life — a fellow believer, a family member, a friend — with whom you have disagreed about a secondary theological question. Consider what common ground you actually share, and look for an opportunity to express that shared foundation rather than focusing on the disagreement.
- 4. Reflect on being made in God's image.** Because you are made in the image of God, you carry something that no other part of creation carries. This week, consider one specific way

that truth should change how you treat yourself or how you treat another person who also bears that image.

5. Trace the gospel backward. Starting from a New Testament passage about redemption or resurrection, try to trace that theme backward through the Old Testament toward Genesis. Notice how early the thread begins and how consistently it runs through all of scripture.

Closing Thought

The pastor put it this way near the close of the sermon:

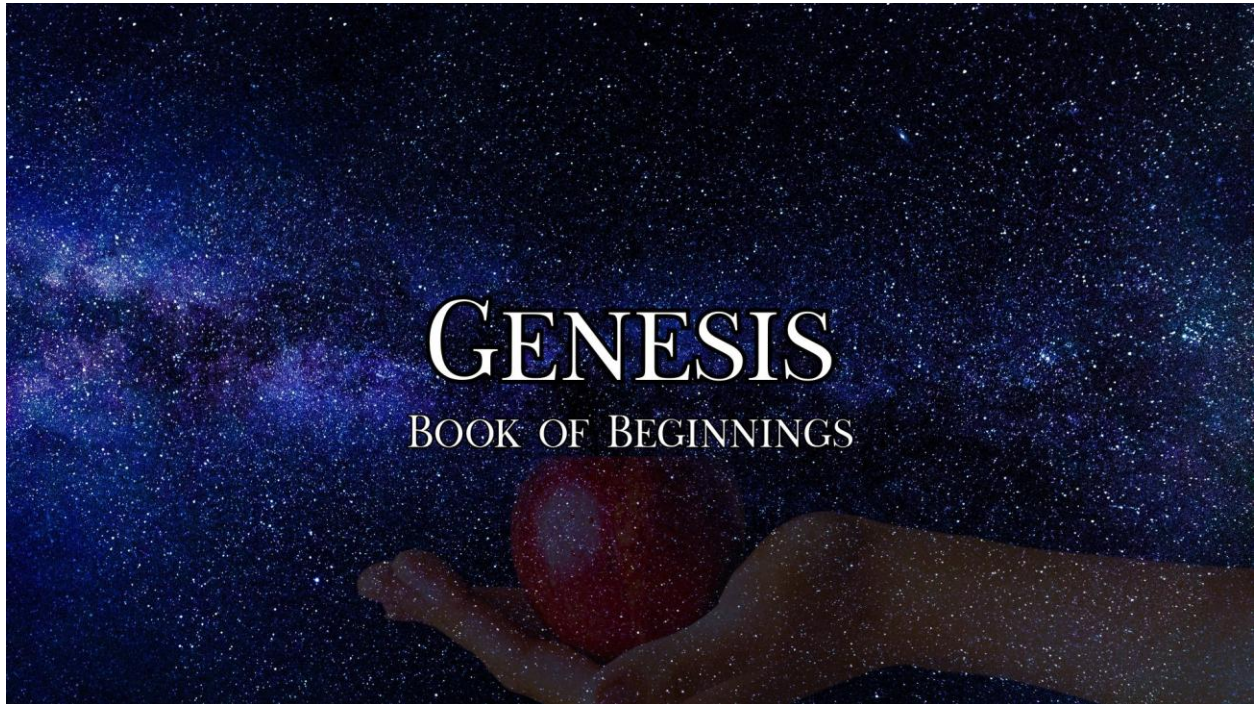
"There is an answer to why there is something instead of nothing and that answer is a who. God. God is the only thing that explains what can be outside of the universe. The universe itself, nature, made up of time, space, and matter. So the only thing that could cause it needs to be outside of it. Timeless, spaceless, and immaterial. Or to put it another way, timeless, eternal. Spaceless, omniscient, and omnipotent, and omnipresent. And immaterial, spiritual. Only a supernatural force could have caused nature to have a beginning."

Close your time together by reading Genesis 1:1 aloud as a group. Let that single sentence — the foundation of everything that follows — be your anchor as you go into the week.

Suggested reading for further study: Seven Days That Divide the World by John Lennox

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on the Themes of Genesis 1 and the Nature of God as Creator and Redeemer



Day 1: In the Beginning, God

Reading: Genesis 1:1 -- The opening declaration that God created the heavens and the earth, establishing that all things have their origin in him.

Devotional: Before time, before space, before matter -- there was God. The most profound answer to the most profound question humanity has ever asked is not a theory or a formula but a person. The universe did not generate itself. Something cannot come from nothing unless that nothing is interrupted by a Someone who exists outside of all natural categories. God is timeless, spaceless, and immaterial -- and yet he chose to create. That act of creation was not random. It was intentional. He made a world, and he made you, with purpose in mind. Today, rest in the truth that your existence is not an accident. You were made by a God who was there before everything else, and who has never stopped being present.

Reflection: What does it mean to you personally that God existed before everything and chose to create? How does that shape the way you see your own life as having meaning and purpose?

Application: Take five minutes today to sit in silence and simply acknowledge that God was before all things. Let that reality reorient your sense of where your worth and purpose come from.

Day 2: The Trinity in the Opening Lines

Reading: Genesis 1:1-3 -- God creates, the Spirit hovers over the waters, and God speaks light into existence. Also, John 1:1-5, which describes the Word as being present with God at the beginning, through whom all things were made, and who is the light of men.

Devotional: The Trinity is not a doctrine invented by church councils. It is woven into the very first words of Scripture. God the Father creates. The Spirit hovers over the formless void. And the Word -- through whom all things were made -- is present and active. Even the untranslated Hebrew word sitting quietly in the first sentence, the aleph and the tau, the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, whispers of the One who would later call himself the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God has never been alone. He has always existed in relationship. And from that eternal relationship, he created you to know him.

Reflection: How does understanding God as Trinity -- Father, Son, and Spirit -- change the way you think about his desire to be in relationship with you?

Application: Pray today by intentionally addressing each person of the Trinity. Thank the Father for creating you, the Son for redeeming you, and the Spirit for dwelling within you.

Day 3: Created in His Image

Reading: Genesis 1:26-28 -- God declares his intention to make humanity in his image and likeness, granting them dignity and dominion over creation.

Devotional: God spent one chapter on the creation of the entire universe, but devoted the majority of Genesis to the stories of individual people. That proportion is not accidental. God is in the people business. Of all that he created, only humanity bears his image. The stars do not bear his image. The oceans do not bear his image. You do. That image is not about physical appearance -- God is spirit. It is about the capacity for relationship, moral reasoning, creativity, and the ability to respond to God himself. No matter what your life has looked like, no matter what has been done to you or what you have done, that image has never been erased. You are still the being God looked at and said: this one reflects something of who I am.

Reflection: How does knowing you bear the image of God change the way you see yourself? How does it change the way you see the people around you?

Application: Today, intentionally look at one person you find difficult and remind yourself that they also bear the image of God. Let that truth shape how you treat them.

Day 4: Very Good, Not Yet Perfect -- The Hope of Redemption

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 -- Paul describes the transformation that awaits believers at the resurrection, when what is corruptible will put on incorruption and death will be swallowed up in victory.

Devotional: God looked at everything he made and called it very good -- not perfect, but functioning exactly as he designed it to function. Built into that design was human responsibility, the real and weighty freedom to choose. And when humanity chose rebellion, God was not caught off guard. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the plan of redemption was already in place. Paul tells us that this corruptible flesh will one day put on incorruption. What sin damaged, grace will restore -- and then exceed. The resurrection of Jesus is called the first fruits, meaning more is coming. The story that began in Genesis 1 is moving toward a conclusion where death itself is swallowed up in victory. You are living inside that story right now.

Reflection: Where in your life do you most feel the weight of living in a fallen, corruptible world? How does the promise of resurrection and transformation speak to that specific place?

Application: Write down one area of your life where you are waiting for God's redemptive work to be completed. Offer it to him in prayer and ask him to give you the endurance to trust his timing.

Day 5: Light on the First Day -- The Resurrection and the New Creation

Reading: Genesis 1:3-5 -- God speaks light into existence on the first day. Also, John 1:4-5, which describes Jesus as the life and the light of men, a light the darkness has not overcome.

Devotional: The pattern embedded in the Genesis week points forward to the greatest event in human history. Jesus was crucified on the sixth day -- the day attributed to the creation of man. He rested in the tomb on the seventh day. And on the first day of the week, the day God first said let there be light, he rose from the dead. The word John uses for light

in describing Jesus as the light of men is the same word used in the Greek translation of Genesis when God called forth light on day one. The resurrection was not just a miracle. It was a new creation. God said let there be light again, and the darkness did not overcome it. That same light now lives in every believer. You are not living in the dark. You are living in the age of the first day.

Reflection: In what areas of your life do you need to allow the light of Christ's resurrection to push back the darkness? Where have you been living as though Saturday -- the day of waiting and silence -- is the final word?

Application: Begin each morning this week by saying aloud: the tomb is empty. Let that declaration reframe how you approach whatever uncertainty or difficulty you are facing that day.