

# DISCIPLE FAST TRACK

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“God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.”  
—Genesis 1:27

## 1 The Creating God

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### OUR HUMAN CONDITION

I wonder who made me and my world. If there is a creator, what is this creator like? Why was I made? Scientists say some rocks are billions of years old and stars millions of light years away. In a universe so big, surely I am only a speck of dust. Does God really have anything to do with me? Does the Bible have any answers or power to offer me?

### ASSIGNMENT

The goal of DISCIPLE FAST TRACK is to develop disciples of Jesus Christ who know and love God’s Word. Throughout the study, you will be reading Scripture. As you read it, take notes and write down your reflections and/or questions in this study manual. Daily assignments will guide you in reading the Bible, the manual, and preparing you for your group.

### PRAYER

Pray daily before study:

“Your hands have made me and set me in place.  
Help me understand so I can learn your commandments” (Psalm 119:73).

Prayer concerns for the week:

# CREATION

**Day 1 One Bible:** many books with different styles of literature. Hold the Bible in your hands, remembering that it is many books by many writers who were inspired by God. Study the listing of the books of the Bible to get a feel for the titles. Locate study aids in your Bible, such as introductions, footnotes, maps, charts, and supplementary articles. Write your impressions.

**Day 2 Read Psalm 84** (poetry); **1 Chronicles 22** (history); **Exodus 20** (law). Consider which type of literature you enjoy most.

**Day 3 Read Micah 4** (prophets); **Philemon** (a letter from Paul); **Luke 15** (parables of Jesus). Consider which type of literature you enjoy most.

**Day 4 Read aloud Genesis 1:1–2:3** (the first Creation story), **then Genesis 2:4–25** (the second Creation story); **Psalm 8** (praise to the Creator).

**Day 5 Psalm 19:1–6** (God’s glory); **Psalm 150** (praise); **Job 38** (God’s mystery and majesty).

**Day 6 Read “The Bible Teaching” and the “Marks of Discipleship” and answer the questions.**

**Day 7 Rest, pray, and attend class.**

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## THE BIBLE TEACHING

The word *Bible* means “book.” It is *the* book. All others pale beside it. Yet it is not a single book but a library of sixty-six books, written over a period of a thousand years. But the experiences that are recalled, analyzed, evaluated, and celebrated occurred over a much longer period. Stories were told around campfires; songs and psalms were sung in countless worship settings; histories were written and rewritten; laws received by inspiration were systematized and interpreted; prophecies were proclaimed, written down, fulfilled. Visions of a kingdom of justice and peace kept circulating through the people’s minds.

The Bible tells about the Hebrew people. They were a unique people, unique in that they were called to be a revealing people, struggling always to be God’s people, beginning about 2000 B.C. when Abram and Sarai heard the Lord call them to “go forth.” God spoke in and through the experiences of this called people. Later, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God made full revelation and continued to show mysteries of truth with a new people of faith we call the church.

The Bible, inspired by God, is both human and divine. You may be surprised at how human the Bible is when you read of violence, rape, betrayal, adultery, sickness, and death. Nothing is hidden. You also will be overwhelmed at how divine the Bible is when you see repentance and faith, just and compassionate laws, acts of devotion and self-sacrifice, and the unending love of the forgiving, covenant God.

Not only are the experiences both human and divine, but so are the actual writings. Oral tradition was finally put into writing, then edited and reedited, copied and recopied; the whole process is a witness to the guiding hand of God. Even the canonizing—setting the standards for what is Scripture—was inspired.

When we speak of Scripture as being inspired, we are recognizing that the Scriptures were written by particular persons in particular circumstances. We are saying that the Scriptures are connected to God and, because of that connection, the Scriptures have power to bring about an encounter between God and the one who reads Scripture. The authority of Scripture, then, lies in its ability to cause encounter. When we read the Bible and God speaks to us, we hear the Bible as God’s Word.

### How Do We Read the Bible?

Our goal is not to learn the Bible as we learn algebra. Nor do we read a book of Scripture as we would read a detective story or a novel. Rather, as we read, we listen for the Holy Spirit to help us understand eternal, universal truths. We watch for unexpected insights that are personal, just for us. We savor a promise, thrill to a story that rings true in our experience, or agonize over a law or principle that could change our lives.

As our spiritual understanding grows, we see new truth. Also, as we live through experiences of sickness, sin, trial, and tragedy,

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we come to comprehend teachings we could never fathom before. But most important of all, the Holy Spirit will lead and guide you as you study. Jesus said, “The Companion, the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you” (John 14:26).

## Why Study the Bible?

What do you bring to the Bible? Your humanity. Everything you have ever thought, done, experienced, or agonized over can be dealt with by the Bible. Every human emotion is expressed there.

What do the Scriptures bring to you? God’s authoritative guidance and counsel. The Bible has to express humanity in order to reach us; it has to express divinity in order to save us.

Once you gain familiarity with the Bible and are touched by God’s Spirit, you will hunger and thirst for more of God’s Word. What starts out as hard work turns into satisfaction and joy.

## In the Beginning—The Bible Begins With Creation

The Hebrew verb for *create* refers to the activity of God, not to human activity (Genesis 1:1). Two ideas are contained in the verb *create*. First, God freely, purposefully creates order out of chaos. Second, God arranges and designs that creation.

“The heavens and the earth” means the immeasurable universe, all that was or is or ever will be.

“The earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea” (1:2) refers to a cosmic emptiness, a formless darkness, sometimes referred to as a “sea of chaos.” The ancients believed that all creation originated from a dark, watery chaos, “the deep.” Look up Psalm 24:1-2. “God’s wind swept over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Other translations for “swept” could be “hovered,” “soared,” or “trembled.”

The Hebrews did not believe that the Creator was simply one of a group of gods. They did not believe that two gods, one good and one evil, battled to bring creation into existence. Rather, they believed that the one and only Lord of the universe, the one who had created them to be a covenant people and who had delivered them from slavery, was author and designer of all that is.

## What Is God Like?

Then God *spoke*. The universe was created by a *word* (Genesis 1:3). Jews and Christians are not pantheists. We do not believe that God and the universe are one. We are not a part of the great universal Spirit, the way a drop of water is a part of an ocean. No, a separateness exists between God and the created order. God spoke, and order came into being. God stands apart yet involved. God stays close, in contact with that creation.

Later, when Jesus Christ came, Christians understood that in him the Word had become a human being. “Word” became a synonym for Jesus Christ. John had Genesis 1:3 in mind when he wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

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Word was God. . . . Everything came into being through the Word. . . . What came into being through the Word was life” (John 1:1-14). By God’s word the universe came into being. Later, that Word walked among us.

The apostle Paul also wanted people to know that the Word God spoke in Creation was the same Word God spoke on the cross. “Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. . . . Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:16-20). Thus Christians have come to perceive the Creation story.

## Creation

*Genesis* is a Greek word that means “beginning,” “origin.” The opening Creation account (Genesis 1:1–2:3) is a carefully worded poem of praise to God, containing the accumulated faith of the covenant people.

The second account (2:4-25), and the older of the two, is a very ancient story, told long ago around campfires, under a star-studded sky. It was recited by one generation to another for centuries before it was written down.

The Creation psalms are songs of worship that spanned the centuries and are as comfortable for us today as they were for ancient Israel. These psalms chant songs of beauty and order and wonder.

The Jews, who have lived with *Genesis* for a long time, are amazed that Christians want to literalize the poetry. To take the imagery of the “first day” or “second day” as twenty-four-hour periods or to look for the bones of Adam in Mesopotamia is to miss the essential point. Even to interpret the days as eons or ages, comparing them to certain geological time frames, is to turn a faith statement into a scientific text.

The symbol of seven days is a faith statement. It implies progressive creativity and careful order. In understanding “the first day,” “the second day,” and so on, we need to remember,

“In your perspective a thousand years  
are like yesterday past,  
like a short period during the night watch”  
(Psalm 90:4).

But more, seven days are poetic symbols to show form and to remind us to order our lives as God has ordered the universe.

Some people have trouble with science and the Bible. They either say the Bible is not true, or they separate their study of science from their faith as if God does not understand how mountains are formed or how babies are born. But have you wondered why so many scientists are women and men of faith?

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Because they know how much they do not know, how many questions they cannot answer except by faith. They see that the Creation stories are statements of faith, not geology or biology. They know that in Creation God acted and is continually acting to create and to bring order.

The wise father or mother responds to the child's question, "Who made God?" by answering, "Nobody. That's who God is—the one who started it all, the one who made you and me and everything." Theologians can do no better. They say, with the Bible, that God created order and meaning and purpose out of utter chaos. In the beginning of God's creation, "God said, 'Let there be light'" (Genesis 1:3).

But what shall we think about this created universe? The biblical refrain gives us a hint: "God saw how good it was" (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Some religions, such as gnosticism, have taught that the material world is evil. The spiritual or the soul is good; the physical or the body is bad. Not so in Judaism and Christianity. Everything God made—knee joints and sex organs, flying fish and monkeys, the law of gravity and the changing seasons—is called good.

Look at the power in the Creation accounts: In a simple phrase, Genesis 1:16 says, "God made the stars and two great lights," the sun to light the day, the moon to light the night, and the infinite galaxies of the heavens. God is a great God!

A believer once asked a rabbi, "Why did God give us this mighty poem of Creation?" The rabbi's answer? "To teach us to rest on the Sabbath." Why? Because God observed Sabbath, and that makes it sacred. When we stop our work, we remember that we are God's creatures and that God will take care of us even when we rest. The loving God wants us to trust, to relax, to enjoy. If we rested, wondered, and appreciated on one day in seven, we would understand Jesus' words, "Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29). What an antidote for our frenzied, everyday, business-as-usual world.

Not only does the classic poem of faith tell us we belong to God; it tells us much more: We are made "in God's own image" (Genesis 1:27). What do you suppose that means?

## Stewards

"Then God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth'" (Genesis 1:26).

In Genesis, men and women are cocreators with God and stewards for God. Our sexuality is part of God's creative goodness, pronounced good by God's word. So we are to "be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it" (1:28). From time to time a heresy appears in the church to make sexuality sinful or dirty or evil.

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But “male and female God created them” (1:27). When persons become self-centered, that self-centeredness will affect sexual relations as well as everything else. But God’s creation as such is pronounced good.

We are to be stewards of the entire universe. The biblical world was before pesticides and pollutants, but the understanding is there.

We are to keep the air clean.

We are to keep water pure.

We are to save the topsoil and replenish the forests and protect the animals. We have been given a trust to maintain the balance of nature.

Now consider the older of the two Creation stories (2:4-25). Here, the order of Creation is different from the other. But like the opening Creation account, this account is a story of faith. Notice the dramatic symbols.

What do you think is the meaning of God’s forming “the human from the topsoil of the fertile land” (2:7)?

What do you think the Scripture means by continuing “and blew life’s breath into his nostrils. The human came to life” (2:7)?

What do you suppose is the symbolic significance of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:9)?

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## MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

We are God's creatures. As Christian disciples, we know we belong to God. God has claim on us. How do you show in the way you live that you belong to God?

Clearly, the Creation stories give us responsibility for caring for the earth, for plants and animals, birds and fish, air and water. Read again Psalm 8:6-9. What are you doing right now to exercise this stewardship of all creation?

Describe your day of rest. How does it reflect a quiet trust in the great, good, and loving God who has created you and who will sustain you? How could you rest more creatively on your Sabbath?

## IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

Take a walk outdoors. Be aware of the sky, the trees, the water. Take time to watch and listen and feel. Try to see something you have never seen before. From time to time say, "Thank you, God."

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### **Mark of Discipleship**

*Disciples know they belong to God, that God has claim on them. They place themselves under the power and authority of Scripture.*