

SMALL GROUP STUDIES LEADERS NOTES

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY MOBILISATION BIBLE STUDIES



tearfund

Following Jesus where the need is greatest

God's Purpose for Humankind

Genesis 1:25-31, 2:8-18, 3

This series of bible studies are designed to be used in your small group, however they also contain additional 'Going Deeper' background notes at the end for a deeper understanding and for use as a sermon guide. The studies have been created from Tearfund's work around the world using the Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) process.

CCM is Tearfund helping the local church work with its community, sharing a vision to address local needs using their own resources. Around the world it is an approach that has brought remarkable transformation to local churches and their communities

OVERVIEW

God created a world which was good, suitable for His purposes and reflected His character. In this world, everything had its place and a sense of harmony and well-being/shalom (see Going Deeper section) prevailed.

Tragically, humankind was seduced into believing that a better life might be enjoyed by living independently of God's oversight. Rather than manage creation on God's behalf, we seek to master it for our own benefit. This stubborn drive for independence is here portrayed as the root cause of all the difficulties we now experience.

The aim of this bible study is to grow in each of us a greater sense of our own purpose and calling under God, as those who were created by Him to work together with Him as stewards of His creation. It leads us to reflect on what it means to be created in God's image, to bear His character and to be co-workers with Him.

We will explore what human thriving looks like from God's perspective, as presented in the story of the Garden of Eden, while also reflecting on our current experience, and that of humankind which generally falls short of God's ideal. This will lead us, finally, to consider what specific actions God might be asking each one of us to undertake.

INTRODUCTION

As an introduction, we want to encourage people to be creative, whereas God created the world, what can your group create?

Either; Give each person an A4 piece of paper and ask them to make something with it (either by folding, tearing or drawing) and then explain what it is and why they made it (or get the group to guess what it is)

Or ask; In what ways would you describe yourself as creative? Are there creative activities you especially enjoy? What makes them so enjoyable or satisfying? Everyone is creative in some way, don't let anyone say differently.



STORY

Tom and Jimmy's parents died as a result of AIDS/HIV. They were left as orphans, dependent on their uncle. The family plot was left unattended and their sister Agnes, and younger brother Stephen, were sent to other relatives.

Tom and Jimmy were passing by the village Church meeting one day when they overheard some teaching. 'God has a purpose for you', a local trainer was explaining, 'He wants you to be fruitful. Indeed, he has given you the resources that you need, if only you would take hold of them'.

Looking at Genesis chapter one, the Church and Community Mobilisation trainer was asking people to see whether God had provided for what He created. Was vegetation placed in a habitat? Were animals provided with food? Were humans given a place to flourish? In every case, the answer was positive.

This set the boys thinking. 'If God has a purpose for us, why are we living with our Uncle while our parents' land lies waste?' Driven by this impulse, they set about to return to the family plot. They built a hut and began to cultivate the land. Soon they were able to build a second hut and their family began to return. Tom and Jimmy became the providers for Agnes, Stephen and their grandmother too. God's word was bearing fruit in their lives and on their land.

DISCUSS

Read Genesis 1:25-31, 2:8-18

- Q** What are the positive things about God's creation which leads Him (v25) to describe it as 'good'?

Productive, fruitful, perfect environment for us both materially and spiritually. Positive relationships with God and each other, enough resources. Safety within the boundaries established by God for our protection and welfare.

- Q** If we were asked to describe our own community today would we describe it as 'good'? Why/why not?

- Q** What role, according to these verses, does God intend people to play in His world?

Called to administer God's rule over creation, to care for it and help it to thrive so that it continues to be an environment suitable for us. To reflect God's character, to grow in our understanding that human thriving and the flourishing of the creation is dependent upon us maintaining a right relationship with God

Read Genesis 3:1-7

- Q** What was the attraction, for the woman and man, in disobeying God and making choices which were opposed to His will?

The desire for wisdom and to know right and wrong without God; the desire for independence; to become like their own 'god'.

Read Genesis 3:8-24

- Q** What are the key differences between life after the Fall and life before the Fall?

Broken relationship with God leading to fear and insecurity, Self-consciousness as opposed to security; Having to provide for ourselves rather than enjoying God's provision; Broken relationships with others; Distortion of gender roles and relationships; The loss of 'shalom'

- Q** Can you think of ways in which the negative factors which invaded Creation after the Fall affect the lives of people in our community today? Which of these is the biggest concern for you? Which of these is the biggest concern for those around you?

- Q In what ways is the Church already working for the benefit of those in our community most affected by these negative factors?**
- Q If resources were available and if we could be guaranteed success, what other initiatives do you think we might take in order to enable people in our community to experience God's 'good life' more completely?**

ACTION

Break into twos or threes:

- Q As a result of this study, what do you feel challenged by God to think more about, or to do?**
- Make a list of all the small or big actions your group/Church do this week, to make an impact?
 - Challenge your group to pick one or more action and report back the following time you meet.
 - If there is time, are there any actions you could do right now?

PRAY

Pray for one another, asking God to strengthen us to respond to His challenge.

GOING DEEPER

'Shalom is usually translated as "peace" in English Bibles, but it means far more than what our English word conveys. It means complete reconciliation, a state of the fullest flourishing in every dimension - physical, emotional, social, and spiritual - because all relationships are right, perfect, and filled with joy.'

God created a world which was good and suitable for His purposes and reflecting His character. In this world, everything had its appropriate place and a sense of harmony and well-being (shalom) prevailed. Everyone and everything has enough in a creation which has resources for all to enjoy. The creation is a material realm, indicating that the physical matters to God and is the arena in which His great drama is acted out. To God, material well-being and spiritual well-being are related to each other.

"When society disintegrates, when there is crime, poverty, and family breakdown, there is no shalom. However, when people share their resources with each other, and work together so that shared public services work, the environment is safe and beautiful, the schools educate, and the businesses flourish, then that community is experiencing social shalom. When people with advantages invest them in those who have fewer, the community experiences civic prosperity and social shalom."

(Tim Keller - Generous Justice)

After the Fall, our relationship with God was broken, as was our relationship with creation, with others and with ourselves. Relationships are now distorted by selfish desires, the world has become a less hospitable place, while work, for which we were created, becomes harder and less instinctive. Whereas God intended the world to be a place in which all thrive, the experience of many is now not of provision but of poverty.

"Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings."

(Bryant L Myers, Walking with the Poor, (1999), Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, p86)

Spiritual dysfunction leads to material problems; which should alert us to the fact that there can be no lasting solution to material and social issues which does not pay attention to the spiritual realm.

"Human beings are multi-faceted, implying that poverty alleviation efforts should be multifaceted as well. If we reduce human beings to being simply physical - as Western thought is prone to do - our poverty-alleviation efforts will tend to focus on material solutions. But if we remember that humans are spiritual, social, psychological and physical beings, our poverty-alleviation efforts will be more holistic in their design and execution."

(Brian Fikkert - When Helping Hurts, (2012), Chicago, Moody, p57)

God invites us to take up our responsibility to be good stewards over His creation and especially with respect to our communities. This calling will find a variety of different expressions but may well include e.g.:

- Helping people find new life and fresh hope through faith in Christ;
- Organising prayer for our community;
- Addressing issues to do with poverty and deprivation through initiatives such as food banks, lunch clubs etc;
- Healthy eating/cookery clubs;
- Offering debt counselling or budget coaching;
- Setting up enterprise initiatives or job clubs to help the unemployed find work;
- Providing resources for family life through e.g. marriage/relationship and parenting courses, toddler groups, 'Who let the dads out?' etc;
- Advocacy on behalf of the marginalised with statutory and other agencies;
- Addiction recovery groups;
- Involvement with voluntary sector and other community groups and agencies;

We're Christians passionate about ending poverty. We go to the places of greatest need, responding to disasters and helping communities to see their own potential to overcome poverty. We won't stop until poverty stops.

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