

LIVING THE WORD—Week 3 (Sun., Feb. 8 - Sat., Feb. 14)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

Creation (Part 2)--God's Creatures Sin, but God Is Merciful

Genesis 3; 6:5-22; 9:1-17; Psalm 51; Romans 1:18-2:11; 3:9-26; 8:19-23; Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verse: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Genesis is an introduction to the story of God's saving work in the world. Most of the book is about the promise God made to Abraham to bless all nations through his descendants—a promise ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The first eleven chapters provide a brief background to that story, beginning with the creation and then recounting the fall of creation into rebellion and sin.

These first chapters cover a long expanse of time (over 2,000 years by even the most literal reading of Genesis), but really focus on only four events: Adam and Eve's sin, Cain's murder of Able, the great flood, and the prideful building of the tower of Babel. Each story tells of human sin and God's judgment; but each also points to God's mercy. God removes Adam and Eve from the garden, condemns Cain to be a wandering nomad, destroys the sinful world with a flood, and scatters the people across the earth. But he gives Adam and Eve and even Cain a chance to begin again as they have children; he provides the ark to rescue some of his creatures; and the tower is followed by the birth of Abraham as God begins his plan to save the world.

The highlight (or better, the low point) of these chapters is the story of Noah. God's creation continues to plunge deeper into rebellion until God decides to destroy the world and begin again with Noah's family. The description of humanity in Genesis 6:5-13 is chilling—wickedness, violence, corruption, and evil that causes God to grieve that he had created human beings. But God does not completely destroy the human race, giving us a chance to begin again. The terrible punishment is followed by the promise of the rainbow and the rebirth of God's creation. But the world quickly descends into sin again, beginning immediately with Noah's own son.

The tension between God's wrath and his mercy cannot be understood without grasping what Scripture says about sinful human nature. God gave his creatures the freedom to choose obedience or sin, good or evil, love or unfaithfulness, life or death—and human beings chose sin. The striking character of God in the Old Testament is not his wrath; we could hardly have expected anything else. What is striking is that again and again, throughout the Bible, we see the truth that God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in merciful love"!

Next Week: The Promise (Gen. 12:1-7; 28:10-15; Deut. 7:7-9; 30:19-20; Eph. 1:3-14; 3:6)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 1-4): Exodus 34:6

On the Mountain ("Love God"—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and reflect on what it says about our sinful nature apart from Christ.
2. Read Psalm 51:1-5 several times and ask God to bring to mind the sins you need to confess. Write your confession on a piece of paper.
3. Read Psalm 51:6-17 and ask God to create a clean heart in you.
4. Tear up and throw away your confession as you thank God for the incredible riches of his grace in Christ Jesus.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. What do you see in the world today that seems like the world in Noah’s day?
2. What do you see in Genesis 9:1-17 that reminds you of Genesis 1?
3. In what ways does the story of Adam and Eve in the garden still happen?
4. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul says that people should have recognized something of God in his creation, but instead they took a path away from him—they did not honor or thank God, which led to futile thinking, which led to idolatry, which led to all kinds of sins (look at the list in verses 29-31!). Why do you think each of those steps might lead to the next?
5. Romans 1:32 says that people applaud those who do such sins. What does that mean? Do our entertainment choices sometimes lead us to do that?
6. Do you have anything to share from your time with God or with your family last week?
7. Pray together for the sinful world around us. Pray for forgiveness for the sins we commit even though we know God and his word. Thank God for his merciful love.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. Read Romans 1:28-32. Open a copy of a TV guide from a newspaper or magazine. Discuss how the things you read in Romans are seen in the programs listed. (You can do the same thing with movie listings or a list of popular music.)
2. Talk about how these things might be seen at school or in your workplace.
3. What steps could we take to avoid being influenced by the world around us? What could we do to be a more positive influence on people around us?
4. Pray that God will help us walk with him in this world like Noah (see Genesis 6:9).

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. As you go about your week, be aware of the sin present all around us. Whenever you see a sign of this sinfulness, let your heart grieve like God’s.
2. Look for an opportunity to be a positive influence on someone this week.
3. Pray that God would use our church to be an ark to rescue people from destruction.