

# Let There Be

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*Genesis 1:1–2:3*

## Leader Preparation Guide

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim.** The group discovers that Genesis 1 is a carefully architected account of God ordering creation, a pattern many scholars describe as God building a cosmic temple: three days of forming, three days of filling, a crown (humanity in God's image), and a rest that the whole structure has been building toward.

**Catholic Touchstone.** Creation from nothing, by the free wisdom and love of the Triune God, with man and woman as its summit made in His image (CCC 279–281, 290–298, 355–357).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 1 is neither a modern laboratory report nor a fictional tale; it is inspired Scripture, a highly structured theological narrative written in exalted, liturgical language that ancient Israel would have heard as a direct answer to the pagan creation stories around them. In Babylon's stories the world is built from the corpse of a defeated god and humans are made as slaves to feed the gods. In Genesis, one God creates effortlessly, by His word, and makes humanity not as slave labor but as His own image, blessed and given dominion. The polemic is quiet but sharp: the sun and moon, worshiped as deities across the ancient Near East, are not even named in Genesis 1. They are just “the greater light” and “the lesser light,” lamps God hung.

The structure is the argument. Genesis 1:2 names two problems: the earth is “without form and void” (Hebrew *tohu wabohu*). Days 1 to 3 answer formlessness by separating and shaping: light from darkness, waters above from below, sea from dry land. Days 4 to 6 answer emptiness by filling each realm with its ruler and inhabitants: lights for the day and night, fish and birds for sea and sky, animals and humanity for the land. Day 7 is the climax the whole structure builds toward: God rests, an image many scholars and ancient readers understood as a king taking his throne in a completed temple.

On the six days themselves, be honest with the group about the Church's latitude. The Catechism says Scripture here “presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days” (CCC 337), and the Church teaches there can be no true conflict between faith and sound science because God is the author of both (CCC 159). The Church has not defined the age of the universe or required one scientific chronology, though Catholics should receive sound science and sound exegesis with intellectual honesty. What is not optional is what the chapter and the Church's canonical reading firmly teach: one God, on whom everything depends, creating freely, in order, and calling it good; and the Church further defines, reading the whole canon, that God creates from nothing (CCC 296). Do not let the session become a science debate; let it become an encounter with the God the text reveals.

“Image of God” (Genesis 1:26–27) echoes a royal practice of the ancient world: kings set up images of themselves in territory they ruled to declare whose realm it was. Many scholars hear Genesis taking that king-language and democratizing it: every human being, male and female, is the living statue of the true King planted in His world. This grounds everything the Church teaches about human dignity, from conception to natural death.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 1 is the root system; the fulfillment shoots run through the whole canon. St. John deliberately reopens the book with the same three words: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1), and identifies the Word by which God spoke light into being as a Person, the Son. Paul tells the Corinthians that the God who said “Let light shine out of darkness” has shone in our hearts in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6), and tells the Colossians that in Christ “all things were created” (Colossians 1:16).

The seventh day has no “evening and morning” formula. The Fathers noticed: God's rest is open-ended, still standing, still offered (Hebrews 4 will develop exactly this). And the canon that opens with creation closes with new creation: a renewed heaven and earth, the light of God replacing the sun (Revelation 21:1, 22:5). The Bible is a single arc from first light to unfading light.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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**St. Augustine** · *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis (De Genesi ad litteram), Book I*

St. Augustine teaches, in substance, that a Christian must not rashly chain the faith to a shaky claim about the physical world, because when a believer is heard talking nonsense about nature, unbelievers conclude the Scriptures themselves are nonsense. Interpret Genesis with humility, he counsels, holding firmly what is certain (God created all things) and holding loosely what is not.

### VOICE OF THE CHURCH

**St. Basil the Great** · *Hexaemeron (homilies on the six days)*

Preaching through the six days to ordinary working people, St. Basil teaches, in substance, that the created world is a school: a training ground where souls learn to read the wisdom, power, and generosity of the Creator in everything from the stars to the seed. Creation is not a rival to be worshiped but a work through which the Creator's wisdom, power, and goodness may be perceived.

### VOICE OF THE CHURCH

**St. Thomas Aquinas** · *Summa Theologiae I, q. 45; q. 104, a. 1*

St. Thomas teaches, in substance, that creation is not a change in things that already exist; it is the sheer gift of existence itself. God does not rearrange raw material like a craftsman; He gives being to what had none, and created things remain dependent on Him for their continued existence at every moment. Applied to us: creation is not merely an event at the start of time; it is a relationship you are inside of right now.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 279–281: catechesis on creation is of first importance; it answers the questions every human being asks.
- CCC 290–292: the Father creates through the Son and in the Spirit; creation is the common work of the Trinity.

- CCC 296–298: God creates freely, from nothing, and can therefore also give sinners a new heart and the dead new life.
- CCC 337: Scripture presents the Creator's work symbolically as six days of divine work completed by rest.
- CCC 339: every creature possesses its own goodness; “God saw that it was good.”
- CCC 355–357: man and woman, made in God's image, are the summit of visible creation, capable of knowing and loving their Creator.
- CCC 345–349: the sabbath completes the first creation; the “eighth day,” Sunday, begins the new one.
- CCC 159: faith and science: no real discrepancy is possible, because the God of faith is the author of nature's order.

### THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

- The toledot backbone begins next session (Genesis 2:4, “These are the generations”). Genesis is built on ten of these headings; start listening for them. Do not point this out yet.
- “And God saw that it was good” climaxing in “very good” (1:31) sets the baseline that Session 3 will shatter. Let the goodness land heavily now so the loss lands heavily later.
- Light versus darkness will return at John 1 (today's live discovery) and again at the end of the study. The study's title lives in this thread.
- Do not resolve the question of the seventh day's missing “evening and morning” beyond noticing it; Hebrews 4 pays it off much later in the canon and we will gesture there today only lightly.

### SESSION GOALS

1. The group discovers the forming-and-filling architecture of the six days by charting it themselves.
2. The group hears Genesis 1 against its ancient Near Eastern background and feels the force of its quiet polemic.
3. The group articulates what the text and the Church's canonical reading firmly teach (one God, creation from nothing, order, goodness, the image of God) versus what the Church leaves open.
4. The group connects Genesis 1 to John 1 by live discovery and meets Christ as the Word through whom all things were made.
5. Each participant leaves with one concrete practice of receiving creation as gift this week.

### TIMED PLAN (75–90 MINUTES)

- Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- Win questions (10 min)
- Build: read Genesis 1:1–2:3 aloud in parts, then Q1-Q4 with the forming/filling chart (30 min)
- Build: image of God, Q4, and the steelman chain (20 min)
- Live discovery: John 1:1–5 and 2 Corinthians 4:6 (10 min)
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer (10 min)

**If time runs short:** *Cut the Dig Deeper box first, then Q4 (the sun and moon question) if needed. Never cut the John 1 live discovery; it is the hinge of the session.*

## Discussion Guide

### OPENING PRAYER

*Father, in the beginning You spoke, and there was light. Speak again tonight. Open our eyes to see Your world as You see it, open our ears to hear Your word as Your word, and open our hearts to the Son through whom You made all things, and in whose light we pray. Amen.*

### WIN · OPEN THE ROOM

**W1.** Tell us about something you have made with your own hands (a meal, a deck, a playlist, a business, a kid's costume). What did it feel like to step back and look at it finished?

**W2.** Where in creation do you feel most alive: mountains, water, night sky, open plains, a city humming? Why that place?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

*Have the group read Genesis 1:1–2:3 aloud, rotating readers by day. Then work the questions. Let silence do some lifting; inductive study means they find it.*

**Q1.** Genesis 1:2 gives us the starting condition: “without form and void.” Two problems. Now scan days 1 through 6. On a sheet, list what God does on days 1, 2, 3 in one column and days 4, 5, 6 in another. What do you notice about how the columns line up?

#### ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Days 1 to 3 form (light/darkness, waters/sky, sea/land); days 4 to 6 fill each formed realm with its occupants (lights; fish and birds; animals and humanity). Day 4 fills day 1, day 5 fills day 2, day 6 fills day 3.

The two problems of 1:2 are answered in order: forming answers “without form,” filling answers “void.” This is architecture, not accident. The chapter is built like a building, and buildings have builders.

**Q2.** Count how many times some form of “And God said” drives the action. How does God create here, and why might that matter?

#### ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Creation happens by speech, roughly ten times, effortlessly. No struggle, no rival gods, no material God is beholden to: His word is enough. (Leader note: Genesis 1 depicts God's effortless sovereignty; the full doctrine that God creates from nothing is the Church's confession drawn from the whole canon, so see CCC 296.)

Hold this loosely for now: if God creates by His Word, the question “who or what is this Word?” is live. We will let the New Testament answer it before the night is over.

**Q3.** Look closely at day 4 (1:14–19). What does the text call the sun and the moon? What does it pointedly not call them?

**ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION**

“The greater light” and “the lesser light.” Genesis avoids the ordinary Hebrew words (shemesh, yareach), a choice many scholars read as deliberate, since those terms named celestial deities and their cults across the ancient Near East.

Genesis demotes the neighbors' deities to fixtures: lamps God hung, calendar tools, servants. The chapter is quietly dismantling the pagan habit of treating created powers as gods. Ask the group: what do people treat as ultimate today that this chapter would file under “created thing”?

**Q4.** Read 1:26–27 slowly. In the ancient world, kings planted “images” of themselves in territory they ruled. Who gets to be God's image here, and what two details in verse 27 deserve weight?

**ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION**

Not a king, not an elite: humanity as such. “In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Every human being is the living marker of whose world this is.

Both details matter: the image is universal (grounding the dignity of every life the Church defends, from conception to natural death), and it is male and female together, equal in dignity, made for communion. Session 2 will build on that second detail.

**BUILD, THEN PRESS · STEELMAN**

Build this at full strength before answering; let the group feel its weight.

“A plain reading of Genesis 1 gives six twenty-four-hour days a few thousand years ago. Science says the universe is billions of years old. So either the Bible is wrong on page one, and if it is wrong on page one why trust it on any page, or Christians must torture the text to save it. Honest people should just admit the conflict.”

Press it: this is not a fringe worry. Many people you love have quietly left the faith over exactly this. What do we say?

**ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION**

First, refuse the false choice. The question “what kind of text is this?” comes before “is it true?” A love poem is not false because hearts are not literally on fire. Genesis 1 is a highly structured theological narrative written in exalted, liturgical language, with a visible architecture (Q1); the Church herself directs us to attend to literary form in order to grasp what the sacred author truly asserts (CCC 110).

Second, this is not a modern escape hatch. St. Augustine, fourteen centuries before Darwin, warned Christians not to chain the faith to shaky claims about nature, and read the “days” non-literally for his own textual reasons. The Catechism says Scripture “presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days” (337) and that no real conflict between faith and science is possible (159), because God authors both books.

Third, be precise about inerrancy: Scripture teaches without error the truth God willed to assert for our salvation (CCC 107). This does not mean Scripture may assert falsehood outside some narrow band of religious claims; it means inerrancy is judged by what the inspired author truly intended to

affirm, with literary form taken into account. What the chapter and the Church's canonical reading firmly teach (one God, the complete dependence of creation upon Him, its order and goodness, humanity as His image: and, as the Church defines, creation from nothing) stands untouched by any telescope. The Church has not imposed a timetable; she does not leave the Creator negotiable.

#### LIVE DISCOVERY

Live discovery. Ask someone to find and read John 1:1–5 aloud, then verse 14. Do not introduce it; just ask: “Where have you heard this before? What is John doing?” Then have a second reader find 2 Corinthians 4:6.

#### ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

John reopens Genesis: same first words, same light in darkness, and he reveals the Word by which God spoke to be a divine Person: “and the Word was God.” Verse 14 completes the identification: the Word became flesh, the only Son from the Father. The Word through whom the Father speaks creation into being is the Son who lies in the manger and hangs upon the Cross.

Paul closes the loop personally: the God who said “Let there be light” shines the same creative light into human hearts “in the face of Christ.” Conversion is creation happening to you.

#### DIG DEEPER · THE SEVENTH DAY HAS NO EVENING

Every day ends with “and there was evening and there was morning.” Day seven does not. The rest of God is left open, still standing, still enterable. Hebrews 4:9–11 will say exactly that: “a sabbath rest” remains for the people of God. File it away; this study ends with rest that does not end.

#### SEND · OUT THE DOOR

**S1.** God created human nature good, and every person in this room still bears His image. What part of yourself or your life is hardest to receive as created gift rather than accident or burden, and what would change if you received it that way?

**S2.** If every person you meet this week is the image of God planted in His world, who specifically will you treat differently, and how?

#### LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Practice a real sabbath hour this Sunday: no screens, no commerce, one thing that is pure gift (a walk, a meal, a nap, adoration). Let rest preach Genesis 2:2–3 to you. This hour is devotion added to Sunday Mass, never a substitute for it.
- Once this week, stop in front of something created (sky, tree, your own kid) and say out loud: “God saw that it was good.” Mean it.
- Read Genesis 1 once more alone, slowly, before next session.

### **SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE**

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)*

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Lord Jesus Christ, Word of the Father, through You all things were made, and without You was not anything made that was made. Shine in our darkness this week. Make us good stewards of Your world, honest bearers of Your image, and grateful receivers of Your rest. Amen.*

## Leader Reference Card

*Every passage used in the Discussion Guide, in order.*

| Where It Is Used                             | Passage                       |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Read aloud to open Build                     | Genesis 1:1–2:3               |
| Q1 starting condition                        | Genesis 1:2                   |
| Q3 the lights of day 4                       | Genesis 1:14–19               |
| Q4 image of God                              | Genesis 1:26–27               |
| Steelman answer (inerrancy, symbol, science) | CCC 107, 159, 337             |
| Live discovery 1                             | John 1:1–5, 14                |
| Live discovery 2                             | 2 Corinthians 4:6             |
| Dig Deeper                                   | Genesis 2:2–3; Hebrews 4:9–11 |
| Memory verse                                 | Genesis 1:27                  |