



Wondering at Creation A 30- 45 Minute Session

This session has been adapted from the 2016 Practice Discipleship Curriculum on *Wonder*. The full session can be downloaded at www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship or www.practicediscipleship.org

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Given the scientifically-oriented culture within which we live and engage in God's mission, we have an obligation to help our young people understand that what science teaches us about the universe is not only comprehensible within the context of faith, but can also nurture a healthy and faithful wonder at what it means to be part of, and stewards of, God's creation. Wonder at creation, and specifically at the universe, can help us integrate our faith with the world in which we live.

BIBLICAL FOCUS

Psalm 8:3-5

Genesis 1:20-26, 2:7

Ephesians 1:9-10

MATERIALS NEEDED

Participants will not need any materials.

Presenter will need a 23' ball of string or yarn - if using the first suggested activity

Presenter will need black cloth, 100 feet (138 feet would be easier) of white yarn or string, and 30 votive candles – if using the second suggested activity (this is a wonderful experience for older youth or adults)

LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION

The bulk of this session will be a presentation, highlighting the ways in which our understanding of the universe has radically changed over the past century, and ways in which this new perspective might be brought into conversation with our faith

Suggested group activity one:

Part of the wonder of the universe is the deep sense of time that it can give us. Have a ball of string or yarn that is 23 feet long. Place a small mark on the string every 12 inches. Have one member of the group hold the end, and unravel the ball as it is passed from one person to the next, until the entire length is being held out by the group. If this is the timeline of the universe from the big bang until now (13.8 billion years), ask the group where on the string they think

the earth formed (it would be at about 15 1/3 feet from the beginning). Then ask them when the first single-celled organisms appeared on earth (that would be at about 17 feet from the beginning). Next, when did dinosaurs like the T. Rex show up on the timeline? (about 1½ inches from the end). Finally, where would humans show up? That would leave only 1/250" at the end of the string for human history. (The scale here is 1 inch for every 50 million years of history; scientists identify the earliest members of *homo sapiens* from about 200,000 years ago; 1/250" is about the thickness of two sheets of paper). Prompt some conversation with these questions:

- What does this imply about the things that God cares about in the universe?
- How does this make you feel about the role of humans in God's creation?
- What do you think Ephesians 1:9-10 means when it talks about God bringing all things together in Christ?

(Note: thanks to Pastor Randal Palm for suggesting this timeline analogy)

Suggested group activity 2 (highly recommended):

The Cosmic Walk is a ritual created by Sr. Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm. It has subsequently been modified and presented by many people around the world. The Cosmic Walk is a way of bringing our knowledge of the 13.81 billion year Universe/Earth process from our heads to our hearts. It is a simple ritual that can be performed in a large room or outdoors. A spiral representing the entire 13.81 billion years of the cosmic and evolutionary journey is laid out on the floor or ground. At Genesis Farm this spiral is painted on the floor of the library, but one can also use a rope. The spiral should be at least 100 feet long with each instance of emergence in time marked at a proportionate distance along the length of the spiral ((138 feet is easier to deal with since that makes 10 feet = 1 billion years). Each such station is marked by an unlit votive candle and by a card describing the emergence.

The first station, located at the very center of the spiral, represents the Great Emergence of the Universe itself. This primordial act is represented by a lit candle by itself or sometimes within a large, faceted glass bowl. One person, the walker, lights a candle from the primary candle and walks the spiral, starting with the Great Emergence and lighting each candle in turn. The walk is synchronized with the reading of the text by a second person, the reader. The ritual is accompanied by music, traditionally "The Fairy Ring" by Mike Rowland.

This ritual works for any size of group, the limitation being the audience's ability to see the candles well. For fewer than about 15 people, it is feasible to have each person in the group walk the spiral, in turn, reading the cards to itself in silence. Since the Cosmic Walk was born, many variations in text, process, and music have emerged.

The entire Cosmic Story can be found at this link: <http://thegreatstory.org/CosmicWalk.pdf>
It is recommended that you use black material of some kind, white yarn and votive candles spaced out as recommended above. If you have a smaller group, it's really powerful to have everyone sit around the black material in a circle and have each person take turns lighting the candles.

Questions for Discussion (Cosmic Walk):

1. What are your initial thoughts and reactions after experiencing the Cosmic Walk/Story?
2. How does this connect or disconnect with your previous knowledge of the creation story?
3. What challenged you?
4. Where did you see hope in this story?

Questions for Discussion:

1. What part of creation most fills you with wonder? Is that the same as a sense of God's presence?
2. Which would describe the way in which scientific discoveries have intersected with your faith:
 - a. Scientific awareness of the world has increased my sense of wonder at creation, and so deepened my sense of faith and worship.
 - b. The claims of science have challenged my faith, and caused me to rethink some theological issues.
 - c. The claims of science contradict my faith, and so I reject them.
 - d. The claims of science never seem to affect my faith or understanding of God at all.
3. Some have suggested that part of the reason that the churches in our context are declining in membership is because the message of the church is not even in conversation with the scientific understanding of reality that shapes people's everyday lives, and so it seems like an anachronism, belonging to a different time. Do you think that is true?
4. What traditional theological concepts or teachings might need reformulation to make sense in a Big Bang universe? Is that exciting to you, or scary?

Closing Prayer:

"Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies." (Psalm 148:1-4)



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