



A Bible Study from the LCMS Northern Illinois District

Incarnate Community Bible Study Leader's Guide

Session I Designed for Community



Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament, with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.



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Using Incarnate Community Leader's Guide

Welcome to Incarnate Community and thank you for your willingness to lead a group through this Northern Illinois District study. It is our prayer that our Lord will bless you and your group as you journey with us through this resource.

This leader's guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion of the materials with your group. In it, we've included the author's own responses to the questions with theological content to give you Pastor Kris' perspective on the questions your group will address in this study. Feel free to draw from this guide's content, making it your own, as you deem helpful for your group.

A few thoughts on your group:

- Ideally a small group consists of a leader and six to eight participants. This size allows for everyone to participate in discussion.
- The materials can be downloaded to a mobile device, printed for hard copy, or projected on screen.
- You may want to have a means of projecting the video portion of each session for ease of viewing and hearing for your entire group.
- Depending on the dynamic of your group's participation, you may not cover all the material in four one-hour sessions. If your group's goal is to work through the material in the course of four one-hour sessions, feel free to pick and choose sections and questions you think would be significant to your group and encourage participants to work through the remaining material on their own.
- It is the hope of your NID staff that many churches will participate together in this study during the Sundays of February 2022. If your group chooses to do this, you may wish to encourage them to then participate in the livestream discussion of the materials on our NID YouTube channel. (Go to the NID website at nidlcms.org to find the link.) This broadcast will feature President Buss and his panel of pastors and lay leaders who will go into more depth of discussion on each week's session.



Community Incarnate
Northern Illinois District Bible Study
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Leader's Guide

Focus 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).

OR

"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'" (Genesis 2:18).

Welcome and Fellowship [15 – 30 minutes in a 90 minute time frame]

Opening Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that in love and for love You have created us. You endowed our first parents, Adam and Eve, with Your image and blessed them to be together to joyfully share in work You had given humanity to do together. Lord, as we begin this journey to explore the gift You have given us in placing us in community, we ask that You would guide us by Your Holy Spirit. May He draw us near to Jesus, who redeemed us as Your creatures, and grow us in a deeper appreciation for how You have placed us together as Your family. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

By Design

We may not always appreciate it, or even notice it, but when something is well-designed, it brings blessings into our lives! I recently asked a few people to talk about something they believed was well-designed. One person noted their food processor. It was well-designed because it was adjustable, could be used for various foods, didn't take up much space, and is easily cleaned! Another person said they liked a computer app because it logically organized information and was easy to navigate and share information with others.

1. What is something you appreciate for its design?
2. What qualities make something well-designed?

NOTE: Answers to these questions will vary. Encourage a few different responses.

Video Segment [A three to five minute video of various people discussing what they like about their "community."]

1. What connected for you in the video?
2. What communities are you a part of? What do you like about those communities?

NOTE: Encourage a few members who did not respond to the first section to participate here. As always, show appreciation for responses.

1. How does God speak of His creating of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27?

NOTE: While God is a singularity, as He proposes to create humanity, He speaks in the plural. This form of speech conforms with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Moses also notes that God is going to create humanity in His own image, which will be a significant point in this lesson. You may also wish to note for participants how Moses uses both singular and plural pronouns to address humanity in verse 27. Saying “He created him; male and female he created them,” may hint at the intimate relationship that was to be shared by Adam and Eve in reflecting God’s image.

2. What is the significance of God referring to Himself in both plural and singular pronouns? [See John 1:1-4 and Colossians 1:16-17]

NOTE: This question allows participants to recall that God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, were all present and part of the work of creation. The New Testament references also remind participants of the significant role Jesus plays in the act of creating humanity [and all of creation].

3. What does it mean that male and female were created in God’s image? What do you think was God’s purpose in creating creatures that bore His image?

NOTE: Participants might list various attributes that were imparted to Adam and Eve in their creation that distinguished them as being created in God’s image. Adam and Eve were without sin. They were righteous and holy. They could choose to do good and God-pleasing works (as Adam does so in naming the other creatures). They were also intended by God to live without experiencing death.

In answering what was God’s purpose in creating creatures that bore His image, you may wish to draw participants to consider that an image is a reflection of the original. Therefore, humanity, bearing the image of God, were to reflect His image in their daily lives. They were to reflect God’s characteristics as they stewarded and cared for [had dominion over] the rest of creation. They were to reflect God’s image to one another in care for each other as husbands and wives and to the additional human lives God would bring about through their marital unions. Humanity would reflect God’s image back to God in their looking to Him for every good gift in faith and in offering Him their prayer and praises for His grace.

4. What clues does God give us in the Genesis 1 reading that God designed humanity to be in community?

NOTE: The fact that God already has in mind the design for humanity to be more than a singularity indicates He had designed humanity to be in community. God also commands Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, again indicating God’s plan was that humanity would not live alone in isolation, but rather as community.

5. How does God make His intentions more clear that humanity was intended to live in community in Genesis 2:18?

NOTE: As we see, there is an expanse of time between the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve, God notes that something in His sinless, perfect world where He has declared “It is good,” that something is not good. It is not good for Adam to be alone. This “not good” likely means that God’s plan for creation is simply not yet complete. It is not good for Adam to be alone because alone, he is unable to fulfill God’s plan that humanity should multiply and give life to others [again, perhaps reflecting God’s own image as the giver of all life]. For Adam to fulfill his God-given roles, he will need to be in the “community” of marriage and family.

6. What would humanity accomplish as they bore the image of God together as community?

NOTE: Humanity, bearing God’s image together, would fulfill what God had given them to do. They would bring forth life, further humans who would likewise bear the image of God. They would also be stewards of the rest of creation as they subdued the earth and had dominion over every other living creature.

7. What indications do we have from the creation account that God intended community to be “incarnate,” an in person experience? How is Adam and Eve joining together a further reflection of God’s image?

NOTE: God creates humanity to be finite beings that have flesh and blood. All of life for humans was to thus be experienced in the context of an in person experience. You may also want to note for participants the intimate way that God creates Eve taking a part of Adam close to his vital organs as his relationship with Eve was to be intimate and vital. God also actually brings Eve to Adam, so their relationship is not experienced from a distance. Moses also notes that these actions of God in bringing Adam and Eve together now sets a standard pattern which is repeated as other husbands and wives come together and the two become “one flesh” in marriage.

Enter Sin – Genesis 3:1-21

1. What does the serpent question in order to tempt Eve?

NOTE: As Satan begins to tempt Eve, he questions the word of God when he says “did God really say? ... ” This is worth noting as we have the benefit of all of Scripture and know from John’s Gospel that the Word of God is none other than the second person of the Trinity, who will become flesh and take the name Jesus. So, Satan’s first temptation has the goal to pull humanity away from the Word of God who is none other than Jesus Himself.

2. Why is getting Eve away from God’s Word important to Satan? [John 1:1-4.] What was the result of Adam and Eve eating from the fruit according to Genesis 3:6-7?

NOTE: Our Lord created and sustains life and relates to His creatures through His Word. As John reveals, the Word of God is none other than Jesus, so Satan's goal has always been to pull humanity away from Jesus. If Satan can draw humanity away from God's Word, he draws humanity away from the Lord, thus bringing death, ruin to God's creation, and perhaps in Satan's own blasphemous mind, sets himself up as having something over the crown of God's creation and thus over God Himself.

3. Why do you think God asks Adam "Where are you?" in verse 9?

NOTE: A few points can be shared in response to this question: 1. God addressed Adam rather than Eve because Adam, as the spiritual head of the household, had responsibility to care for his wife and himself which he had neglected in witnessing Eve do that which God had commanded not be done with the impending result of death on the line. 2. The content of God's question is one of location. God asks Adam "Where are you?" because, quite literally, Adam [and Eve] are not "with God." As He comes to commune with His creatures in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve physically isolate. They separate themselves from the Lord. To be separated from the Lord, as He is the source and giver of all life, means death for humanity. God with this question illustrates for Adam and Eve what they have most lost is community with Him.

4. How does sin bring separation/isolation into Adam and Eve's lives?

NOTE: Not only have Adam and Eve attempted to hide and physically separate themselves from God, as He questions them, their responses show a separation now existed between them and between them and the rest of creation. Eve seeks to push the blame for her sin onto the serpent. Adam no longer speaks of Eve as "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" but "the woman whom you gave to be with me." Adam has lost his relationship to his wife Eve and in blaming God, his relationship to Him is also illustrated as lost.

5. What are the many ways that our communities today still struggle with separation and isolation? What are some of the sad results?

NOTE: Participant answers will vary. The leader may wish to site how much our entire society became isolated during the pandemic. However, you may also wish to ponder how over the past decades there has been a general decline in participation in almost every community organization in America, from churches, to sporting leagues and hobby groups, to groups that address some common need or community benefit.

Some of the results of this growing separation and isolation have been generally increased levels of stress, depression, and loneliness in society. There has been an increase in "otherizing" people and groups that do not match one's view of themselves and a growing fear to interact with new individuals and new groups. The sense of "tribalism" coming from this mindset further fuels separations within our communities as well as perhaps a growing desire to make connection and build some kind of community experience from the seemingly safer vantage point of social media platforms.

These attitudes have also made an impact on how Americans view dialogue with someone on matters of faith or spirituality both for those who do and do not consider themselves followers of Jesus.

6. Even in the curses that come with sin, how does the Lord demonstrate and promise His grace to humanity?

NOTE: The leader may want to draw attention to the fact that the Lord, in mercy, does not simply immediately judge and condemn humanity to everlasting death as Adam and Eve had deserved. Rather He demonstrates a patient love in even addressing His fallen creatures in the first place.

Woven into the curses that God announces are signs and promises of His grace. While the woman's pain in childbirth will increase, the fact that God notes childbirth is a sign that He will be faithful to His commands to humanity that they are to be fruitful and multiply. Life, even fallen into sin and death, will continue. Adam's working of the soil will be burdensome and will produce thorns and thistles. They would be a reminder of the sting of sin which brings death. Yet they will also crown Jesus' head as He brings the restoration of life everlasting through His death on the cross and resurrection. While Eve has listened to Satan who brought God's creation into this disaster, now through one of Eve's female descendants God will bring the One who will crush Satan and the ruin and death he brought. This salvation will come at the cost of Jesus' life, but with His death, Satan's head is crushed. He is defeated.

Final Thought

Our Lord had created out of love, and with creatures that were to reflect His image to the rest of creation, to one another in loving, life-giving community, and back to God in joyful service and praise, behold, it was very good. When our first parents reached out for themselves, over what God had given for them, their thoughts and actions turned away from God, each other, and all creation and brought sin, separation, and death. Yet, our Lord had intended that humanity would know Him ... know Him at the depth of His heart ... so even in the midst of sin, our Lord begins to reveal His heart of grace, promising to send in the flesh His chosen Messiah. He will not come aloof from humanity, isolated from our fallen lives in order to preserve Himself. Rather, God's chosen Messiah will have an incarnate and in person ministry in the midst of a family, a people, a community ... and with His acts of salvation He will mold His followers to have the same.

