



Stewardship in the First Testament

Lesson 1: Created in the Image of God

Overview

This lesson explores what it means to be created in the image of God and how that shapes our understanding of power, generosity, and stewardship. Participants will reflect on biblical and cultural narratives of power and consider how God's life-giving power calls us to live and give.

Preparation for the Teacher

- Read the texts (found below) ahead of time.
- Watch the video—it may stimulate additional questions appropriate for your context. Make certain you have tested the equipment necessary for showing the video—it helps to keep the technical gremlins away!
- Do a little homework about your church and community. Think about people in your church or your community who have been particularly effective leaders, who have been able to get good things done. What makes them so effective? How do they interact with other people? Do they try to share power and responsibility, or do they keep a tight grip on power?

Background

The story that opens the Bible is the first of two full-blown biblical narratives about the creation of the world. The other follows immediately in Genesis 2–3. There are other, much more fragmentary, allusions to ancient creation stories sprinkled throughout the Bible.

The story in Genesis 1:1–2:4a makes a number of unmistakable allusions to an ancient Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*. For example, the Hebrew word usually translated “the deep” (Genesis 1:2) is *tehom*, a Hebrew variation of the name Tiamat, the sea goddess in the *Enuma Elish*. The term often translated “the spirit of God” that hovers over the surface of the waters in 1:2 is probably better translated as “an awesome wind,” an allusion to the four winds that the Babylonian god Marduk blew across the belly of Tiamat, i.e., the surface of the waters.

These and other allusions to the Babylonian story set up the brilliant and surprising switch that happens as the biblical story unfolds. In the Babylonian story, the creation of human beings is the final act of a bloody, violent narrative where the world is the end result of a divine massacre, and human beings are created as slaves.

In the biblical story, human beings are created to exercise power in the world as God exercises power in the universe. But that power stands in stark contrast to the kind of violent, dominating power exercised by the Babylonian empire and its patron god Marduk. God's power is generous and joyful. The world, created in peace, is the source of flourishing life. Human beings, male and female, created in the image of God, are called to exercise power in the world the way God does—with life-giving generosity, confidence, and joy. Filled with power, women and men are free to give.

Pray for your students as you prepare this week's lesson.

Facilitating the Lesson

As the class begins, welcome the class and engage in your usual opening exercises (taking attendance, collecting an offering, prayer concerns, other announcements, etc.).

Opening Activity

Ask the class to list words that come to mind when they hear the word “power.”

- Create a list of “positive” connotations
- Create a list of “negative” connotations

Discuss:

- What makes the difference between the two lists?
- What makes power “good”?
- What makes it “bad”?

Scripture Reflection

Read the following biblical texts.

Is “power” positive or negative in each of these passages? What makes the difference?

- Daniel 8:4
- Daniel 8:23–25
- 2 Corinthians 12:8–10
- Luke 6:19

Video Segment

Have the class watch the following videos:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p625lnoGcnE>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxNecE0sqcw>

Discussion Questions

Invite the class to wrestle with the following:

1. Competing Creation Stories

The Babylonian imperial creation story portrays a dangerous, unsettled world where justice and peace depend on domination and the threat or actual use of extreme violence.

The biblical story, by contrast, portrays a created world called into being by a divine word—without threat, without a fight, without bloodshed of any kind—a world teeming with abundant life.

- How might each of these worldviews affect the way someone thinks about material possessions?
- About giving and sharing?

2. Naming Our Fears

Name some of the fears—as a nation, as a community, as a church—that hold us back and cause us to act without generosity and self-confidence.

- What might we be able to do if we could move beyond those fears?
- How might we begin to put those fears behind us, or at least address them in a way that allows us to move forward?

3. Sharing Power

In the biblical story, human beings are created in the image of God to share power in the world.

- Discuss examples of people not experiencing their God-given power.
- What might the church do to help them experience that power?
- How can we increase the sense of shared power in our church?
- In our community?
- In our nation?
- In our world?

Closing

Close the lesson time with prayer.

This is from a set of four lessons written by Rev. Dr. Richard H. Lowery, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister, retired Hebrew Bible professor, and President Emeritus of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. He examines stewardship from the perspective of the faith of ancient Israel. The lessons advance to touch on Second Testament themes and their connection to the faith of Israel and how these ideas have been adopted and understood by the Church.