

Series: From the Garden

Lesson I: The Constant Gardener

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Contrast stereotypical images of a lonely God with biblical images of a relational God

Materials Needed:

- Board and markers
- Bibles

Lead In:

Have students play the classic game, “*Would You Rather...*”. Create an imaginary line down the centre of the room. For each question designate a side of the room that corresponds to each answer. After each answer, students will move to the side of the room that corresponds to the answer they prefer. Ask the following kinds of questions (feel free to come up with your own that might be particularly pertinent or trendy for your context).

Would You Rather...

1. Have a Coke or a Pepsi?
2. Be Superman or Spiderman?
3. Be rich or famous?
4. Have your radio stuck on a station that only plays songs about love and relationships or a station that only plays songs about work and politics?
5. Be invisible or be able to read other people's mind?
6. Be stuck in a room with Teletubbies or Barney?
7. Watch a romantic movie or an action movie?
8. Never use a computer or a TV?
9. Be in solitary confinement for the rest of your life or have one person that never leaves your side?
10. Have no friends and lots of money or lots of friends and no money?

Ask students if they noticed any trends in the questions that were asked and the way people answered them. While there is no right answer for this someone may notice that many of the “would you rathers” had to do with the company of others or relationships. Look for this answer and use it to transition to the rest of the lesson.

Transition by saying something like, *Relationships. People talk about them, look for them, cry about them, read about them, and so much more! This lesson that we are doing is the very first one in the whole curriculum and it is about relationships. Where did our*

fascination with them come from? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Let's work together to have a closer look.

Task One:

Divide a board into four sections so that there are four distinct areas to draw on. You can do this on a white board, chart paper, or any other medium that works for you. Ask for a volunteer who is willing to draw on the board for the rest of the group. Send that person to the board with a marker. Now ask the rest of the group to think of the stereotypical image of God and to blurt out some answers for the volunteer to draw in the first section. For example, someone might blurt out “God is sitting in a big chair” or “God has a beard.” The volunteer should make a picture that includes those components. Let students work until they are satisfied with the picture. The volunteer can then return to her or his seat. The stereotypical image that you are looking for here is one of God as a lonely guy in the sky type. Anything can happen, but chances are that this is what you will get. The rest of this task contrasts the lonely sky God with the relational God of the Bible. If your students begin by drawing a relational God, redirect them by saying something like, *Think of the way God is portrayed in movies, on The Simpsons, or in popular culture.*

Note: In this next part of the task, you are going to make three more drawings based on three scripture passages in which God is represented in relational ways. Your students may or may not already know that God is several persons in one. For example, the first passage is the baptism of Jesus, in which God the Father, Spirit, and Son all show up. You may need to help students understand that Christians believe that God is three persons. This task is more about the dialogue, questions, and understanding of the students, than it is about making interesting drawings. The drawings are just there to stimulate the ideas.

Leave the drawing on the board and ask for a different volunteer to find Mark 1:9-11 and be ready to read it out loud. Ask the other students to listen to the verses and identify what is different about the drawing of God and the image of God from the Bible. Ask the volunteer to read. Solicit differences from the students. Have a new volunteer draw the new image on the other side of the board as you continue to point out differences together. There are many differences of course, but guide the students towards this particular one: while many times we imagine God as the only lonely guy sitting on a throne in an empty sky, in this passage God is doing three different things! Depending on their level of knowledge, students will have varying difficulty with this concept. Guide as appropriate.

Tell students that you have another passage for a volunteer to read. Have a volunteer look up Revelation 4 and read it out. You may want to warn students that there is some unfamiliar imagery in the passage but that interpreting it isn't the main point here. Ask the students to identify how this second picture compares to the first two. Have the volunteer read and solicit some answers. Draw this picture in the third section of the board. Again, this chapter shows God as engaged in relationship with others who are worshipping God. Once again, this chapter challenges our picture of a lonely God. Now tell students that you have just one more passage to read and that this one isn't full of unfamiliar imagery from Revelation. This one is easier to understand and draw. It is John 11:1-5, 17-44. Again, have it read and drawn in the remaining section. Ask students once again to compare the three biblical images with the stereotypical one. What do the biblical images have in common? Unlike our cultural stereotypes, the Bible portrays God as a relational being, one that loves, weeps, interacts, and so on.

Task Two:

Transition by saying something like, *Well, we have looked at some very different passages from the Bible but each one has showed us that God is a relational God, not a lonely only guy in the sky. Why might that be good news to you and the people you*

know? Solicit answers. Answers could include God cares about me and other people, and God isn't just some mean guy in the sky without any feelings, and so on.

Ask students, *If you had never heard of God before tonight—and maybe some of you hadn't—which one of these pictures or scenes would be most appealing to you? Which one would move you the most?* Solicit answers, which will naturally depend on the student.

Task Three:

Transition by saying something like, *In this lesson we have been introduced to God, maybe for the first time, maybe for the millionth time. Throughout the whole year we will continue to explore who God is and what that has to do with us. Another thing that we introduced tonight, which you probably wouldn't have noticed, was the theme of this year. This year's theme is called City of God and it is about being connected in community, just like God is connected in community. What does it feel like to be connected in community?* Solicit answers. *What does it feel like to be disconnected from community?* Solicit answers.

Closing:

Close by saying something like, *Our culture often emphasizes our independence, our individual needs and desires, above everything else. No wonder our culture has this kind of image of God (point to the first image). Throughout all of the City of God lessons, we are going to look at a world created by this God (the next three images), a God that is not lonely or interested in being alone, a God that weeps for people and lives in community and communicates, a God that challenges the way our society is. This is a God that has much to say to a world full of lonely, isolated people, the way that all of us are and feel from time to time. Let's search for this God together, even as this God is searching for us. Let's pray that we would find one another.*

Pray together for the discovery ahead of you.