

Sin Floods the World • by Michele Hershberger

KEY VERSE:

"I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you ..." Gen. 6:17-18a.

FAITH STORY:

Genesis 6:5 - 9:17

FAITH FOCUS:

God saw that all people on earth were all corrupt and violent, except for a man named Noah. So the Lord decided to destroy all living things on earth. God instructed Noah to build an ark for himself and his family and a pair of each kind of animal. Noah was obedient. God sent floodwaters for forty days and every living creature was destroyed. But God saved Noah and his family and made a covenant with them that the world would never again be destroyed by flood.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students realize that sin destroys our relationship with all creation.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Students will name the relationships that sin broke in the Noah story.
- 2 Students will name one way sin hurts our environment today.
- 3 Students will formulate a plan to reverse the effects of sin on our environment.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Ask an environmentalist to sit in on your session today. He or she should be prepared to share about a local situation of pollution or environmental trouble in your area.
- 2 Information about local environmental situation for Focus, Option A.
- 3 Computers for Focus, Option B. (You may need to make arrangements to use computers with internet access in the church offices.)
- 4 Copies of the worksheet for everyone.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (15 minutes)

After everyone arrives, introduce your guest and allow him or her to talk about an environmental problem in your area. Then facilitate the group as they ask questions and give their responses.

Option A: Pull some information about your local environment from the Internet. Make hard copies and distribute them to the class for discussion.

Option B: If the class is small or you have several handy computers available, have the class break into groups of two or three and give each group the challenge of finding out about their local environment and what shape it is in via the Internet. Compare notes to see what

each group found out.

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Ask these questions:

- 1 *Do our local environmental problems have anything to do with what we would classify as "sin"?*
- 2 *If not, are we just not defining sin well enough? If so, do we talk enough about this kind of sin in our church?*
- 3 *What were your feelings as we talked about these environmental problems? Did you feel guilty? Did you feel like "Oh boy here comes another tree-hugger freak"? Did you feel bored, threatened, or interested?*
- 4 *Would solving our environmental problems involve our local economy? Is it worth fixing the problem if it threatens our local economy?*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–12 minutes)

Break the class into groups of three. Have each group find the answers to these questions. Instruct them to put their answers on the worksheet provided.

- 1 What is the sin in this story? Do we just have to speculate? See Gen. 6:13.
- 2 List every relationship that sin broke in this story. What does this say about sin?
- 3 What is God like in this story? Did God have a right to flood the whole earth? Where is God's love and grace in this story?
- 4 Even though the sins of the people greatly hurt the created world, how did God not let everything be destroyed?
- 5 What are some of the most incredible facts of this story? What do they say about Noah or God?

After groups have completed their worksheets, call them back together and share answers and comments.

APPLY: (15 minutes)

Ask someone in the group to re-state the local environmental problems in your area.

Say: *Do you buy the idea that sin even hurts our relationship to the earth?*

Ask for someone else to state how the problems are connected to "sins" of the community (maybe there will be a connection and maybe there won't be).

Say: *What responsibilities do we have to our local environment? What responsibilities do we have to others in the community, and the future generations that will live here?*

Now say: *Okay, what are we going to do about our environmental problems?*

Have a whole group brainstorming session. Give the cardinal rule of brainstorming if the group is unfamiliar with the term: State ideas as fast as you can and no idea is dumb. Explain that the more "out-there" ideas usually help foster the creativity of others and actually lead to a possible solution. Choose one problem and brainstorm on solutions.

Option: Break the class into smaller groups and have each group work on possible solutions.

RESPOND: (7–9 minutes)

Explain to the class that while it is good to brainstorm solutions and talk about our responsibilities, it is even better to commit to doing something about it. Ask them what they are willing to do as a group, if anything. Write those commitments down on paper and make other plans if needed to follow through. Perhaps a whole other session can be devoted to making plans and carrying them out.

Then, remind them of the spiritual aspect to this whole discussion. Make it clear that God is calling the class to something far beyond being “tree-huggers.” God doesn’t just care about the environment. God cares about our spiritual relationship with him and our relationship with others. No one relationship is more important than the others are. Help them also realize that they can’t do these solutions alone. They need God to strengthen and guide them. Close in prayer, asking God to fill them with his Spirit for the tasks ahead.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

The story of Noah is the third sin or fall story in Genesis. Like the others, its purpose is to explain what sin is and what its effects are. And like the other fall stories, there are elements of both judgment and grace. Adam and Eve faced the judgment of being thrown out of the garden, but that very act kept them from eating the Tree of Life and living forever in sin. Cain had to wander the earth as his judgment, yet through a special mark, the Lord kept Cain from being killed. In the Tower of Babel the people were scattered, kept from accomplishing their task, which was both a judgment and grace in disguise. In this story too, the Lord brought the judgment of the flood, yet he saved Noah and his family and two of every kind of animal. Creation was destroyed and yet creation was saved by the very same act. The earth and people were washed clean and given a chance to start over.

We are not completely sure what the people did on earth to displease the Lord so much. Corruption is the main word used to describe their sin. Gen. 6: 5 relates how that every inclination of the hearts of people was evil all the time. Verse 13 specifies violence as one sin, which matches the story of Cain and Abel. The stories of Adam and Eve and the Tower of Babel both indicate pride and trying to be God as the real source of sin. Cain’s story shows that the awful act of violence is perhaps the most gruesome outcome of our attempt to control as only God has the right to control.

There are many miraculous events in this story—events that point to God’s providence and love. God told Noah how to build a boat that would sustain them throughout the flood and the next several months. God shut the door of the ark, after bringing in animals that would not usually gather at this place or enter a manmade structure. Somehow God helped the floating zoo to get along together well enough to survive the trip. There was enough food, the storms did not capsize the boat, and birds signaled to Noah that the water was receding and their stay was ending. In all this, we see God’s hand at work.

After they landed, Noah built an altar to God and offered burnt sacrifices. The Lord was pleased and made a covenant with Noah that never again would all living creatures be destroyed (Gen. 8:21) and that floods would never again destroy the earth (Gen. 9:11). The rainbow appears in the biblical narrative again in Revelation 4:3. This is no coincidence. John was writing for Christians who were being persecuted. They needed the hope of the rainbow.

The vision of the rainbow was a specific reminder that God would not destroy the whole earth again, which helped them (and us) better understand the later visions in Revelation that show the power of sin and how much of the earth is destroyed.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from this fall story is the devastating effect that sin can have on all creation. The ground was cursed when just two people sinned—Adam and Eve. Now the whole earth is flooded, as all humanity becomes corrupt. As sin becomes corporate, so also does the destruction.