

Study 2: Evil and Injustice Multiply

We left off last week taking in the beauty of Creation as God intended it. This glimpse of flourishing, created from an overflow of God's love, fell apart quickly because of humanity's actions. The first people chose to act against God's desire, centering themselves rather than God (Genesis 3), and forever impacting humanity's relationship with God, one another, and nature. This first act of rebellion against God resulted in the proliferation of violence, evil, and injustice that reverberates throughout the Bible—and all of history—even into our world today.

While we might feel tempted to place ourselves at a distance from the brokenness of the world, all of creation is connected. Describing the concept of *ubuntu*, South African archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "My humanity is bound up in yours for we can only be human together." The reality is, our actions (and even *inaction*)- can perpetuate systems of injustice, further the destruction of nature, and contribute to the brokenness around us. Today's text paints a bleak picture of the pervasiveness of evil and violence, where all of humanity is complicit. You might find yourself with more questions than answers, and that's ok! God welcomes our questions. This is a community where we are learning to dialogue and process together.

Discuss

- How might our actions or inaction contribute to the injustice we see and experience in the world?



Genesis 3-11 shows the exponential growth of pain, violence, and evil against individuals, within communities, in the heart of all humanity, and eventually in systems and structures.

Genesis 6:5-22

⁵ The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.⁷ So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. ⁹ This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴ So

make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. ¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” ²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

Discuss

- What would the world look like if “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time”? How might that impact how we treat ourselves, each other, and nature? How would you feel about that world?
- What is God’s response to injustice in this text? What does that show us about the character of God?
- Additional questions (optional)
 - What are God’s actions in the text? What are humanity’s actions in the text? (O)
 - What similarities and differences do you see between this text and the last study of Genesis 1? (O/I)
 - Where do you see death and life in the text? (I)
 - Why do you think God’s heart was troubled by the state of creation? (I)
 - The text describes every inclination of humanity’s heart as evil. How do you see that evidenced in the world around you? How do you see that statement evidenced in your own heart? (A)

Summary + Reflection

It grieved the heart of God to see how far Creation had strayed from the original picture of life and flourishing. Creation was on a path of self-destruction. So, in love, God set apart Noah’s family and animals to give Creation a chance to start again. Yet the state of the world around us shows how humanity’s actions have continued on this self-destructive path. Without God, humans will *always* gravitate towards prioritizing ourselves over others, hatred over forgiveness, and overconsumption and exploitation over stewardship and cultivation.

The Hebrew word that captures what we long for—when things are as they should be—is *shalom* (usually/always translated in English bibles as “peace”). *Shalom* connotes a sense of wholeness, completion, and peace in a material, physical, relational, and moral sense. To seek

shalom is to work for justice and righteousness on personal, communal, and systemic levels.

Facing the reality of brokenness in the world grows our sense of urgency and desire for shalom. Our culture gives so many opportunities to move on quickly from hard things. We are tempted to scroll on and disengage from the pain and injustice. It's intimidating and overwhelming. This week we want to pause to remain in the tension as a community, and sit with God in grief, sadness, and anger.

- Take a minute to pause and listen; reflect on the text and the state of the world. How might God be speaking to you? To us?

Apply

Spiritual Practice: Lament

Anger and grief are right—and even Godly—responses to injustice. Lament is not forced, emotional catharsis, but an authentic expression of our grief and anger to God. “Lament is not despair... It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world's deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are.”¹

As a community, practice lament together, bringing the heaviness of injustice in our world before God. To guide that time, follow this Lament Liturgy online at: bit.ly/lamentliturgy.

Reflect + Share

- What is God saying to you or your community through this passage?
- In what broken area of your life, community or campus are you longing for God's shalom?

Closing Prayer & Announcements

¹ *Reconciling All Things* by Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, pp. 78