

GENERAL PROGRAM

CREATION CARE

DISCIPLES WOMEN



DATE: 2011

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Woman, Wisdom, World (based on Proverbs 8)

Purpose

To help deepen our faith and understanding our relationship with Creation and Creator as women, and gaining an understanding of stewardship of God's gifts of Creation and Creativity.

Suggestions for the Leader

Ask participants to bring:

Bibles

Journals or notebooks and pens



You will need:

For worship:

Chalice Hymnal or hymns printed (see the Worship portion for hymns)

Accompanist or singer

Communion elements and other table preparation

*Determine ahead of time a designation for the offering (suggestions: a church or school organization that promotes creative work such as a knitting circle or quilter's guild, a music program, a craft fair, a community garden, etc.—some group or organization that promotes creativity and less waste of resources)

For project:

Large sheets of paper or a chalkboard

Colored permanent markers

1 inch strips of fabric 1 yard in length for weaving (Weaving Project)

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Weaving Project: ahead of time, cut 1 inch strips of fabric 1 yard (you can ask a local fabric shop if they are willing to donate scraps, or see if there are any quilters or sewers in your group of participants that might have some scraps). Any colors will do, but for this project, make sure at least half of the strips are lighter in color. These are to make a weaving wall hanging that will be 3 feet by 3 feet. The darker strips will be used vertically and the lighter strips horizontally. You can prepare the weaving the day of the program, before you begin, by using masking tape (sticky side up) for the top and bottom, and attach the dark vertical strips to the masking tape. Save the lighter colored horizontal strips for the weaving part of the project. If you have any quilters or sewers in your congregation, you may ask them if after the program they would be willing to sew a border and/or backing to the weaving.

Background for the leader:

Proverbs 8 contains a personification of Wisdom as a woman, and tells the story of creation from her point of view. In all of the Sunday School lessons on how God created the earth and heavens and humanity, in all of our Bible studies in church, most of the time this story is missed, skipped over. It is not read often enough in church. I encourage the leader to read both Genesis chapter 1 and Proverbs 8 in preparation for this program and study, noticing the similarities and differences in the accounts of creation. This program is based on Proverbs 8 and the connection of the feminine, the divine, and creation, and how we are called to participate in creation care with our own creative gifts.

Read Proverbs 8. Who is speaking in this passage? Wisdom is personified as a woman. For the ancient Hebrews, Woman Wisdom was a figure that personified the sayings and teachings of figures such as King Solomon, along with the writers of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and some books found in the Apocrypha (books not found in Protestant Bibles, but are

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included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles). Woman Wisdom also personifies the teachings passed down from mothers to their children in Hebrew families. While the Israelites worshipped the Lord, at times they still worshipped other gods and goddesses of the land, but Woman Wisdom has come to be in our Scriptures the personification of God's Wisdom, a Divine partner for our Creator God, and in the New Testament, the attributes of Wisdom are found in both Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26-27, God speaks in the plural: "Let us make humankind in our image." As Christians we often interpret this as the Trinity speaking; is there room for a feminine voice in the Trinity, and therefore in creation? Proverbs chapter 8 suggests strongly that there is.

Verse 1 of chapter 8 gives us the suggestion that wisdom was so far gone from the actions of the people that Wisdom had to be given her own voice. As you read all of chapter 8 and learn of Wisdom's role in creation, ask yourself, what is the role of Wisdom in our speaking out on creation care as the church in the world today? How do we use our creative gifts given from God the Creator? These are the questions that will be explored in this program and study.

Introduction

Welcome participants to the program, ask them to introduce themselves, and open with prayer. Encourage participants in this introductory time to share from their heart if they feel led to share, and for all to be open to hearing viewpoints that may be different from their own. The purpose of this program is not to force an opinion of creation care but rather to instill in each person an understanding of their relationship and responsibility to God and creation.

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Invite participants to share what they remember about the story of Creation from the Bible, and write down responses on the chalkboard or large paper (for example, “7 days,” “Let there be light,” “Adam and Eve,” etc.)

Ask participants when or where they first learned or gained a sense of responsibility for stewardship of the earth. Ask how they feel humanity’s relationship with creation ought to be, and how they view it to be today. Write down responses for all participants to see. Note that responses may be varied along with viewpoints and opinions.

Lesson

Invite participants to turn to Proverbs 8:1, 22-36. Invite participants to each read a verse in turn until the whole passage is read. Afterwards, ask if any had ever read this passage before and if so, what they know about it. Explain that Woman Wisdom is the personification of God’s wisdom in feminine form, the personification of the folk wisdom passed down from mothers and grandmothers to their children. Ask the participants what new insights this passage has given them in the story of God’s Creation. What is the role of Wisdom in God’s creation?

Ask the participants how they have participated in creation. Share some examples to start the conversation: some may take this question biologically, as in having birthed a baby, or having cared for an animal giving birth; others may be gardeners, or enjoy hiking or walking along the beach. Some may be bird watchers.

Creation does not necessarily mean biology. We have been created in God’s image, and if God is the Creator, so we are also creators. But rather than creating out of nothing, God gives us insight, passion, dreams, and even

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wisdom for our creating—our creativity is a gift from God. We participate in our created nature when we are creative ourselves. **Ask the participants what gifts of creativity have been given to them** (for example, art, quilting, knitting, baking, gardening, designing, etc. There are many possibilities) **and how they use their gifts of creativity.**

It is easy in our world to get caught up in day-to-day tasks, the busy-ness of the world around us, and turn to quick fixes: disposable containers, paper towels, larger vehicles, smart phones and laptops. We often need to upgrade our tools, our phones, our vehicles, resulting in more waste. We have less time to think about caring for God's creation, let alone the creative expression God has given us.

Invite participants to look again at verses 30-31. Woman Wisdom declares that at creation she rejoiced before God always, and rejoiced in the inhabited world and delighted in the human race. Joy is found with human beings inhabiting the earth, because we are created in the image of God. We have the capacity for joy and creativity that God has given us, but we often turn away from this. Being creative—using the gifts and talents God has given us, the things we do that bring us the most joy, relaxation and peace in our lives—are often things that are not harmful to creation but can actually help turn us back to creation and away from harmful practices.

We are connected to creation through our creativity, and our creative expression gives us alternative opportunities from the mundane world and from the manufacturing of wasteful products. For example, creating homemade crafts at Christmas cuts down on our consumption of mass-produced items, along with the plastic packaging they come in. Buying from local farmer's markets aids the local economy and often baked goods, cheeses, and honey are sold along with garden vegetables, aiding in the

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creative gifts of others. Knitting, sewing and quilting create domestic products instead of importing from factories overseas. All of these cut down on the use of fossil fuels and reduce the carbon footprint. **Invite participants to share other examples of ways to use their creativity to connect them to caring for God's creation.**

Wisdom Writings in our Bible include the book of Proverbs along with Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. **Invite participants to recall some of their favorite proverbs**, either from the Bible or from folk wisdom, a saying perhaps something a parent or grandparent used to say. What happens when we turn away from wisdom? What happens when we turn away from the creativity God has given us? **Re-read verses 32-36.** When we turn away from God's Wisdom, we are looking to only our own gain, our own selfish desires, and we forget our relationship with God and with Creation. When we forget those relationships, we can suffer and cause others to suffer. When we stop doing the things we love to do that God has given us the talents for, we can lose our joy. When we stop caring about creation and think of only what makes things easier and convenient for ourselves, we risk harm for ourselves and others.

(Note: many elderly folks have to give up things they once loved to do such as knitting or playing the piano due to arthritis or failing eyesight; encourage those who are unable to do the things they once loved that they can still share in teaching others and in sharing the stories of how they learned their craft or art—this sharing is still part of Wisdom, part of the creative activity of God!)

Journaling: What would Woman Wisdom say to us today about our relationship with the earth? Invite each participant to reread Proverbs 8:1, 22 -36 on their own, and write down in their journals a letter from Woman

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Wisdom to themselves. What would she tell us about our relationship with creation now? What would she tell us about what is wise or foolish in our own lives? How would she tell us to use our creative gifts in ways that foster good relationship with the rest of creation?

Preparing for Creative Response: In verses 22-26, the Hebrew verbs used to describe the creation of Wisdom have been described by some scholars as conceiving or weaving. In Psalm 139, the author speaks of being knitted together by God in his mother's womb. God our Creator has woven us together, and Wisdom is part of that creation. We have been given creative gifts and talents as part of who we are, they are woven into our very being. However, at times we forget our creativity, or we lose sight of it with the day-to-day tasks that need to be done. We forget our connection to Creation when we forget to care for our own creativity.

Creative Response: Weaving

Invite participants to take a strip or two (depending upon the number of participants) of the lighter cloth for the weaving. Hand out the permanent markers. Invite participants to write their name on one strip of cloth along with their creative gifts and talents given by God (they may need to take a few minutes to think about this, and the leader may need to encourage some to dig deeper if they feel they have no special gifts or talents—what are some hobbies? What are things they love to do? Reading, writing, cooking, organizing—these are all creative gifts, too!) If you have enough for each person to have two strips, on the second strip have participants write down a proverb, saying or quote that they know or learned that has meaning for them in terms of wisdom. Invite participants to weave their strips into the weaving (note that some of the words or letters will be covered up under the vertical strips). If you do not have many participants, you can invite others to write down the name of someone who passed on wisdom to them, a

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grandparent or friend, for example, and include that in the weaving. Bring the weaving to the worship space.

Worship

Call to Worship (based on Proverbs 8)

One: Does not Wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

All: On the hills, beside the road, at the intersection she takes her stand!

One: To YOU she cries out, to all that live.

All: Wisdom is better than anything else we can desire.

One: Wisdom gives insight and strength,

All: When one has Wisdom, one has all the riches and honor, prosperity and wealth

One: For whoever finds Wisdom finds life, and gains favor with the Lord.

Opening Hymn Let the Whole Creation Cry Chalice Hymnal #21

Prayer of Invocation

God of Wisdom, God of our mothers and sisters, our fathers and brothers, we ask for Your Spirit to be made known among us. Creator God, You wove us together in our mother's womb, You gave us the breath of life. Guide us in this time of worship, that we might hear You in a new way, that we might understand You more deeply, and that we may come to a greater sense of purpose and insight in our relationship with You and all of creation. In the name of Christ, who was in the beginning, is with us now, and will come again. Amen.

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Scripture

Proverbs 8:22-36

Meditation

When we think of Creation Care, we often think of recycling, of using less and creating less waste. As a community people often work on regulations of emissions and eliminating pollution, encouraging recycling and reusing. As individuals we may purchase more fuel-efficient cars or install more efficient light bulbs in our homes.

Creation Care is more than caring for the earth and the environment we live in. Creation Care, as we have learned and shared today, is about caring for ourselves, for we were created by God in God's image; by Divine Wisdom, we have been given gifts and talents. Some of us are more in tune with our gifts than others, but all of us have gifts and talents that we can use to create. This creative work is meant to last, to be sustainable. It is in the gardens that we plant, the flowers that we arrange. It is in the scarves we knit and the blankets we sew. It is in the songs we sing and the novels we compose. It is in the scrapbooks of family photos passed down, the art hanging on our wall. Our creativity gives life to the creative power in each of us, part of the image of God.

We often turn away from our creative gifts because of other things that catch our attention. We go to work, we clean the house, we run errands, we become busy. We claim that our family and friends, even church comes first, and indeed they do; however, family, friends and church are all beings created in the image of God. Family, friends and church inspire us in our creativity and nurture the gifts within us. What holds us back are the tasks we feel we need to complete in order to have time. We turn to convenience: disposable items, microwave dinners, quick runs to the shopping center. We fill up our trash bags with the waste of modern convenience to save us time to do other things that take our attention away from our creativity. We

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upgrade and buy the latest things to make our lives easier, taking away from our finances and our own ingenuity.

Not all modern conveniences are bad, not all disposable items are waste. However, when we look at the words of the ancient Hebrews, of Woman Wisdom, we are reminded of the thriftiness of our elders, the sayings of our ancestors, the common sense lessons we learned as children: do not waste water. Turn the lights off when you are finished. Too much TV is not a good thing.

Wisdom calls out to us to turn back, to turn away from the things that distract us from remembering who we are: beings created in the image of God. Turn back to God, turn back to the creative work we have been given. Turn back to God, teach the crafts we have learned to our children. Turn back to God, use what you have been given, share in the rich resources of the earth without overusing, so that we can continue to build a sustainable community. For we are part of Creation; we have been created by God. We have been woven together in our mother's womb and we have been woven together with all of creation. Our lives are interconnected.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind and with all of our strength; and that the second was like the first: to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus commands us to remember our interconnectedness. Jesus tells us that loving God and loving our neighbor is interconnected—we cannot love God without loving our neighbor, and we cannot love our neighbor without loving God. We cannot love our neighbor when we overuse the resources of the earth; we cannot love our God when we do not love the rest of God's Creation.

So let us remember our gifts, our talents, our strengths that God has given us. Let us remember those who have gone before us and passed on their wisdom to us. Let us impart our wisdom to others. Let us share our Weaving with our congregation, let us remember to continue to weave our gifts, our lives, into our daily lives, so that we might wholly live into God's

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created purpose for us. Turn back, sisters, from the ways of the world.
Give. Create. Share. Care. Amen.

Response Weave

Chalice Hymnal #495

Litany of Caring for the Earth

Chalice Hymnal #695

Preparation for The Lord's Table

Scripture: Proverbs 9:1-6

We are called to this table by Jesus, and we are reminded of God's Divine Wisdom, who calls us to turn away from the ways of the world, to lay aside our immaturity, our single-mindedness, our selfishness, and to remember who we were created to be, God's children.

Words of Institution

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

(Use the resources found in the back of the *Chalice Hymnal* or other resources for Communion)

Offering

We are called to share of our gifts, our time, our talents and our finances, as well as our very selves. God has given us each our own unique gifts. Pray about what you can share here, with your congregation, with your family and community, of what God has given to you, and how you can share your gifts to deepen your relationship with God and Creation.

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Offertory Hymn: Of Women, and of Women's Hopes We Sing
Chalice Hymnal #686

Prayer of Blessing

God, in Your Wisdom, grant that Your blessings will be multiplied, that we may be inspired to create and give in new ways, that we might be wise in how we use the earth's resources and our talents given by You. Amen.

Benediction

Potential Service Projects

1. Create a community garden on your church grounds, or participate in a community garden if your community has one. Invite church members to share in the planting and work, especially the children. Plan on sharing the harvest among church members as well as local food pantries (check local regulations). Another option: if there is a local CSA (Community Shared Agriculture) farm, discuss buying a share as a church community and finding volunteers to help with the work and harvest.
 2. Sponsor a Local Artists Fair and invite artists from the community to come and share their crafts. This can be as simple as an arts and crafts fair that your church might already have, or it can become an Artist's Workshop, in which folks can come and learn to knit from a

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group of knitters, mold clay with a local potter, painting lessons, gardening tips, etc.

3. Many art and music programs have been cut from school budgets during times of economic hardship. Learn what programs are offered through your public schools and ways that your church community can help support the arts.

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