

## **Leader's Guide for *Conversations from the Garden***

**Note:** The sample below is one of 36 commentaries, currently under development for parents, Sunday school and Bible study leaders using *Conversations* in a group setting. Each write-up coincides with the 36 discussion topics provided in *Conversations*. The intention is to offer those leading the conversation a larger context for where the discussion and insights of Genesis 1-3 point. They are not written to be read aloud to the group. But if you wish to use them for this purpose, please read them after the family or group has completed the discussions prompted by the question from *Conversations*.

All 36 commentaries will be available in October as a free download to any purchaser, past or present of *Conversations from the Garden*.

### **“Let there be light”**

Creation is the canvas upon which God painted His self-portrait. Of course, this portrait is not of a physical being; God is Spirit. But the world He painted came from the mind of God and is an expression of (or analogy for) what the Creator of the universe is actually like. The psalmists expressed this truth about God's reflection bursting forth in the brilliance of the starry hosts, the holy mountain, the rock of refuge, the hills “from whence cometh my help” and in man crowned with glory and honor to rule on the Creator's behalf. Contemplating the creation directs hearts and minds to the Maker.

Discovering what God is like should be our chief endeavor in studying the creation narrative. But it is easy to reduce Genesis 1 to the mere historical record of an event called “the creation of the world”. This text was not written for history's sake to give us a straight account of the facts. God is not a historian who figures out, records and preserves events that happened long ago. With God there is no past, present or future. God always is. And in His “is-ness”, all past, present and future co-exist in an eternal now.

Nor God is like a scientist, who figures out how things fit together or why they work. He knows what He made and why He made it. And He made it for purposes much larger than the historian's or the scientist's. He made it to reveal Himself and to share Himself with His beloved.

God is much more like an artist. The artist who paints a human portrait knows that he or she is attempting to capture a likeness that, in not so many years, will no longer exist in this life. This portrait is a work of art *of* a work of art. Or course, as long as the person is living and we can see them, touch them, and hear them speak, the person is always preferred to the portrait. But when the person is gone from this life, a beautifully rendered likeness becomes a treasure, allowing family and friends to still see the beloved.

Of course, when it comes to God, our analogy breaks down, because it is creation, the beautiful portrait of God, that is slowly passing away, after which we shall see Him face to face.

In the meantime, though we cannot see, touch or hear God speaking in an audible voice, we learn all sorts of things about Him by gazing at His painting. The first thing God spread across His canvas was light. Light contains all the colors of the world. An artist would of course start here.

But there is more. Thanks to the scientists, we know that light is essential for all life forms. Plants could not make food without light. All life depends upon plants. In speaking forth light, the message of creation is clear: All life depends on the Light-Giver.

Light both in reality and as a metaphor shines against darkness. God knew darkness would exist in His world. In the creation story, He never explains why. Genesis 1:2 simply says, "... Darkness was over the surface of the deep ...". But notice that, in the very next verse, He reassures His viewers: God is light.

Light is pure. Light sterilizes. Light penetrates. It chases away the dark. It reveals both beauty and ugliness. But things exposed to the light can be transformed. By the end of the Bible's first chapter, something that was empty, formless and covered with darkness is now a glorious creation breathing with all forms of life. When God said, "Let there be light", this was the Bible's first message of hope, written before hope was ever needed.

Light is a metaphor for hope, and, in that vein, light is a word-picture that is repeated across the biblical canvas. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). Even as God reveals Himself in all the colors of light portrayed in His world, He also painted Himself in words, words commonly known as the Bible.

Why is the Bible called "holy"? There's nothing sacred, divine or pure about ink, paper and leather. But the message we read offers another portrait of the character of God through the story of His people and especially in the likeness of His Son. The Son is also called the Word. We should not be surprised that the Word is called the light and life of the world (John 1:1-5). Nor should we be shocked to discover that bearing His light and shining in this darkness was one of the purposes of God's people before and after the cross (Proverbs 4:8; Isaiah 42:6; Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15).

From the perspective of the Bible's grand story, it is interesting to note that God brings forth light before the sun, moon and stars, and then at the end of the story, the New Jerusalem is lit with the glory of Father and Son. No longer will there be any sun or moon, for Christ lights the new heaven and earth (Isaiah 60:18; Revelation 21:23; 22:5)

Now think some more about the properties of light: what does it illuminate about God? How was it portrayed in the human life of God as the man Jesus Christ? How and why should the same qualities of light be present in our lives?