

Does God Know What Will Happen Before It Happens?

(And If So, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?)



weBelieve.
God's Word for God's People

Session 4



Psalm 139; Romans 8:31–39

Session Objective

The questions don't get any easier: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, why doesn't God intervene and prevent natural disasters and disease? Or murders and robberies? Or plane crashes and car wrecks? The problem of evil has been around a long time, and this session won't solve it—but we will try to discover the proper responses of God's people to life in an imperfect world.






Faith Statement

Q. 28. What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?


A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from God's love, since all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without God's will they cannot even move.

—*The Heidelberg Catechism* (4.028)

Session Overview

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 Enhancements
Family Connections
Connect to the World in Prayer
Visit a Local Outreach/Mission Center
Embrace Another Country


The coffeehouse version of this session is available at: pcusa.org/webelieve/faithquestions/god01.htm



Download the Web Resources at pcusa.org/webelieve/faithquestions/god01.htm

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Read Psalm 139:7–8. We live in a troubled world. We may face strained relationships, work-related stress, and financial pressures. Our world seems to be filled with homelessness, road rage, crime and poverty, and racism. It can be more than frustrating to come to church on Sunday morning—to worship and pray and sing—and then to go back out into the world and find that nothing has changed.

But there's a truth that we can affirm, even in this troubled and troubling world, a truth that is spoken loud and clear by the psalmist and by the apostle Paul: God is with us. Yes, there are trials, but none of these things "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

- How easy or difficult is it for you to call honestly on God, saying, "Search me . . . and know my heart"? If it's difficult, why?
- Paul asks who can bring charges against or condemn God's people (Romans 8:33–34), and then he answers his own question. Take a look at Paul's answer and think for a moment about what that means for you.
- Addressing God, the psalmist writes, "Darkness is as light to you" (Psalm 139:12). Think of a time of personal darkness that God turned into light, and close this time of reflection with a prayer of thanksgiving.



Understanding the Scripture

Perhaps the most intensely personal of all the psalms, Psalm 139 is an expression of faith in a God who is all-knowing (omniscient) (vv. 1–6), present everywhere (omnipresent) (vv. 7–12), and all-powerful (omnipotent) (vv. 13–18). Poetically beautiful, the psalmist's words evoke not just God's attributes, but also the depth of the relationship between God and the writer.

Things change drastically, however, beginning with verse 19, as this beautiful psalm of praise turns to an angry prayer that God will "kill the wicked." It's not surprising that we often tend to end with verse 18 when this psalm is used in worship! While some have suggested that verses 19–24 must have been a later addition, it's worth noting that the two parts of the psalm are tied together by its opening and closing verses: verses 23–24 ("Search me, O God, and know my heart") are an appeal for that which verse 1 ("O LORD, you have searched me and known me") proclaims.

More to the point of today's question, the second part of Psalm 139 acknowledges the reality and presence of evil without dwelling on where that evil comes from. Yes, God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, but still there are the wicked and the bloodthirsty and those who speak maliciously of God. There are enemies of whom the psalmist is not ashamed to proclaim, "I hate them with perfect hatred" (vv. 19–22). The psalmist clearly lives in a world that is much like our own! Interestingly, the only hint that the writer is concerned with the origin of all this evil comes at the very end: "See if there is any wicked way in me . . ." (v. 24).

Like the psalmist, Paul, in Romans 8:31–39, acknowledges the presence of evil in the world in a list that encompasses evil that occurs through both nature and humanity (v. 35). Also like the psalmist, Paul refuses to dwell on the origin of that evil. But then Paul takes things a step further, proclaiming that none of the bad things that happen in life can separate us from God's love.

Indeed, in Jesus Christ, God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence have taken on new meaning: God knows what it's like to be one of us, because God became one of us in the person of Jesus. God experienced the evil in the world in Jesus' suffering, and God's defeat of the powers of evil and death in Jesus' resurrection foreshadow God's ultimate victory. To put it plainly, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).



Understanding the Faith Statement

The twenty-eighth question of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) asks, "What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?" Note that the answer does *not* say that we will never experience adversity. Rather, we must be "patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing." Whether we are experiencing good or evil on any given day, we are called to look to the future with "trust [in] our faithful God," when our union with God's omnipotent love will be realized once and for all.

Interestingly, the catechism's understanding of providence is that God is directly responsible for "health and sickness, riches and poverty" (4.027), an understanding that is rejected not only by most Christians today, but also by much of Scripture, including our passages for today. "The God of scripture," according to Shirley Guthrie, "is a living, personal God who is present and at work in our lives to lead the way, set free, judge, forgive, help, and save—not just cause, program, and determine everything that happens."¹ While we may question the catechism's conclusions about how God acts in the world, however, we can embrace its teaching of how we are to respond: in patience, gratitude, and trust.



Teaching Today's Question

The problem of evil—or as the question is often put by people of faith, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"—has surely been around for as long as human beings have existed. Its potency lies, of course, in its utter resistance to a satisfactory answer and in the fact that it touches so many people in real and personal ways. Many teenagers have begun to struggle with this question, often because they have been victims, or know victims, of random "natural evil" (evil that occurs in nature: disease, natural disasters, etc.) or "moral evil" (evil with a human origin).² For some it will provoke (or has already provoked) their first real crisis of faith.

With this topic, generating discussion will not likely be a problem. More likely, it will be challenging to rein in the discussion and deal compassionately with participants' frustration at the lack of answers. The youth may feel that they are the first people to ever ask the question of why bad things happen to good people. One step toward helping them grow in faith and understanding will simply be to let them know that they are not alone in their struggle and that they are joined by the community of faith and by their God, who in the person of Jesus Christ has experienced the absolute depths of human despair and suffering and is with the youth in their own times of need.

1. Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 171.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 166–67.



Enter

Dicey Questions



Dice (one die for every three or four students), copies of "Dicey Questions" (Web Resource 4a) or newsprint and markers

Either print out several copies of "Dicey Questions" (Web Resource 4a) or write the following questions on a sheet of newsprint and display it in a visible location.

1. Do you think God knows what will happen before it happens?
2. If Jesus sat down next to you on a bus, what one question would you ask him?
3. What event lately has really gotten you down?
4. In what ways can you often see God at work in the world?
5. In what ways do you not see God at work in the world?
6. Why do you think bad things happen to good people?

As participants arrive, invite them to gather in groups of three or four. (If you have fewer than six people in your class, do this activity as an entire group.) Give each group a die and, if you did not write the six questions on newsprint, give each group a copy of "Dicey Questions." Explain that, taking turns in their small groups, each person will roll the die and answer the question that corresponds to the number that he or she rolled.

Gather the groups together and invite participants to share highlights of their small-group discussion with the whole group. If you did this activity in one group, ask participants to share which questions were particularly easy or difficult and what made them so.

Explain that the focus of the session is found in questions 1 and 6: Does God know what will happen before it happens? And if so, why do bad things happen to good people?



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question



Candle or oil lamp, matches, music player, recording of "Break Your Heart" performed by Natalie Merchant

Consider setting the mood by dimming the lights, lighting a candle or oil lamp, and listening to "Break Your Heart." Gather the group in a comfortable space and explore the following questions with the young people. Pray the opening prayer.

- Is God in complete control of the world? If so, why do bad things happen in the world?
- Does God know what will happen before it happens?
- Does God control our every move, or does God let us make our own decisions even if God doesn't approve?

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we believe in your power and in your care for creation. But we have a lot of questions. When a bad thing happens, does it mean that you care but aren't strong enough to stop it? Or does it mean that you could stop it but you don't care enough? Or is there another question we ought to be asking? Visit us this day, we pray, and send your Spirit among us so that we might learn more about your ways. Strengthen us to deal with the evil in the world as your faithful people. Amen.

Option B: Praying Together

- Copy of “So Many ‘Whys’ ” (Web Resource 4b) for each student, candle or oil lamp, matches, music player, recording of “Break Your Heart” performed by Natalie Merchant

With the group seated in a circle, distribute copies of “So Many ‘Whys’ ” (Web Resource 4b) and play the song “Break Your Heart.” After the song, invite participants to join you in the responsive litany and prayer “So Many ‘Whys’.”



Explore

Option A: Bible and Faith Statement Study

- Bibles, copy of “No Escape from God” (Web Resource 4c), copy of “God Is With Us” (Web Resource 4d), pens, newsprint and markers

Facilitate a whole-group discussion using “No Escape from God” (Web Resource 4c) and “God Is With Us” (Web Resource 4d) as guides.

Write each question below on a separate sheet of newsprint:

- Does God know what will happen before it happens?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?

Call the participants’ attention to the questions on the newsprint. Ask the group to share any answers to these questions that they have discovered in the Scripture passages and Faith Statement. Record the group’s responses on the newsprint.

Most likely, the group will find that the Bible and the Faith Statement have an answer(s) for the question “Does God know what will happen before it happens?” but not for the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Conclude the discussion by exploring the following questions:

- Psalm 139 makes no mention of the origin of evil until the very last verse (v. 24). Where does this verse suggest that evil comes from?
- In Romans 8:31–39, Paul lists many evils—natural and human—that affect presumably innocent people. Why, in your view, doesn’t he dwell on why these bad things happen to good people? What, for Paul, is the important thing to keep in mind?
- Though they don’t answer this question specifically, how do you think Paul and the Faith Statement would say we should respond when we are victims of evil or when we are suffering? When we see others who are suffering?

Option B: Small-Group Study

- Bibles, copies of “No Escape from God” (Web Resource 4c) for half of the students, copies of “God Is With Us” (Web Resource 4d) for half of the students, pens, newsprint and markers

Explain that this part of the session is designed to explore the questions “Does God know what will happen before it happens (and if so, why do bad things happen to good people)?” and “What does it mean to be people of God in a world like ours?”

Divide the class into two or more small groups. Give each student in half of the groups a copy of “No Escape from God” (Web Resource 4c) and give each student in the other half of the groups a copy of “God Is With Us” (Web Resource 4d). Ask each group to follow the instructions on their resource page.

While the groups are working, write each question below on a separate sheet of newsprint:

- Does God know what will happen before it happens?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?

When the groups have finished exploring the questions on the resource pages, gather the class back together. Ask the group(s) that studied Psalm 139 to report their findings. Call the students' attention to the posted sheets of newsprint. Ask the group to share any answers to these questions that they have discovered in Psalm 139 and the Faith Statement. Record these responses on the newsprint. Next, do the same with the findings presented by the group(s) that studied Romans 8:31–39.

Most likely, the group(s) will find that the Bible and the Faith Statement have an answer(s) for the question "Does God know what will happen before it happens?" but not for the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Conclude the discussion by considering some or all of the following questions:

- Psalm 139 makes no mention of the origin of evil until the very last verse (v. 24). Where does this verse suggest that evil comes from?
- In Romans 8:31–39, Paul lists many evils—natural and human—that affect presumably innocent people. Why, in your view, doesn't he dwell on why these bad things happen to good people? What, for Paul, is the important thing to keep in mind?
- Though they don't answer this question specifically, how do you think Paul and the Faith Statement would say we should respond when we are victims of evil or when we are suffering? When we see others who are suffering?



Express

Option A: Stained-Glass Art


- Black poster board, colored construction paper (eight to ten colors if possible), craft glue for paper

This project provides an opportunity for students to create an artistic response to the abstract concept of God's revelation to humanity. Cut the black poster board in half the short way, creating two 15- by 20-inch pieces; tape them together on the underside, creating a piece that measures 15 by 40 inches. Explain that the group will work together to create a replica of stained-glass art to express how they find, see, and know God in the world. Share the following instructions:

1. Take time to brainstorm. During this time, tear some of the construction paper into quarter- to half-dollar-sized pieces.
2. Working together, arrange the torn, colored pieces of construction paper into a mosaic image that reflects (either abstractly or concretely) how you find, see, and know God in the world.
3. When you have decided on an image that the group likes and agrees on, glue the small pieces of construction paper to the black poster board.

During the design process, you may choose to guide participants' reflection and work with some or all of the following questions:

- What colors best represent human evil? What colors best represent suffering caused by natural forces? Are they the same or different colors?
- What concrete images do you picture in your mind when you imagine evil and suffering in the world? How might those images be translated into this "stained-glass" format?
- Have you ever been struck by a powerful image of evil and suffering in a real stained-glass window? What did it look like?

 If you use this activity in all six sessions, consider displaying each session's replica of a stained-glass pane on the window frame described in "Stained-Glass Art" (Web Resource 4e).

Option B: Movie Clip—*The Count of Monte Cristo*

 Bibles, *The Count of Monte Cristo* DVD (2002, PG-13), TV and DVD player, newsprint and markers

Facilitate a discussion of the ways in which the themes found in the session's Scripture passages are reflected and/or not reflected in the film *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Introduce each of the following movie clips and then show each clip to the group. Consider enabling the subtitle feature (if available) to assist students in hearing and understanding the dialogue. After each clip, use the discussion questions and record the responses on newsprint.

Clip 1 (start cue: 53:00, end cue: 54:07)

Edmond Dantes is living the idyllic life until he is wrongly imprisoned, his fiancée is kidnapped, and his reputation and name are ruined. In this clip, Dantes, in jail, has been befriended by a dying priest who teaches him and offers him the secret to a treasure that will make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. The priest reflects that even though Dantes no longer believes in God, God believes in him.

Discussion Questions

- What different definitions of *believe* are used in this clip?
- How is God's *belief* in human beings reflected in Psalm 139 and Romans 8:31–39?

Clip 2 (start cue: 1:49:35, end cue: 1:52:11)

In this clip, Dantes has escaped from prison and found the riches he learned about from the priest. He has been plotting and enacting revenge on the people whom he believes to have conspired against him. Dantes is then reunited with his fiancée but tries to resist acknowledging that he still loves her. He says, "Can I not escape [God]?" "No," she says. "He's everywhere and in everything." Even in the midst of Dantes' suffering and efforts for revenge, God's presence is made known to him.

Discussion Questions

- When Dantes' fiancée tells him that God is everywhere and in everything, does Dantes consider this a good thing? Why or why not?
- How does the psalmist seem to feel about God's inescapability? How do you feel about it?

Dantes could be considered an innocent victim of evil. Read Romans 8:31–39 with Dantes in mind.



- How does he or does he not embody a Christian response to innocent suffering?
- How does Paul, the author of Romans, seem to think we should respond to evil and suffering?

Option C: Spiritual Reading of Psalm 139:1–12

- Bible, “*Lectio Divina Guidelines*” (Web Resource 4f), candle or oil lamp, matches, music player, recording of “Ubi Caritas” (instrumental) performed by the Taizé Community (or other suitable contemplative, instrumental music)

Ask the group to sit in a circle and place the candle or lamp in the middle of the circle. Play “Ubi Caritas” or other suitable music (repeating if possible) at low volume. While the music plays, use the information found on “*Lectio Divina Guidelines*” (Web Resource 4f) to lead the group in a *lectio divina* reading of Psalm 139:1–12, inviting the youth to reflect on the psalmist’s intensely intimate portrayal of the relationship between God and human being. If time allows, help students compare what they learned from this passage with what they learned from the other Scripture passages in Explore.



Exit

Praying the News

- Copies of daily newspapers (news sections only) from the preceding week, newsprint and markers

The evils mentioned in the Scripture passages for this session include: wickedness, bloodthirstiness, malice, hatred, loathing, enemies, hardship, distress, persecution, famine, poverty, peril, war, and murder.

Help the students create a list on newsprint of the variety of evils mentioned in Psalm 139 and Romans 8:31–39.

Then point to the list and acknowledge that the group has tackled many difficult questions and issues in this session. Reinforce the good news that God is with us in our suffering, and remind the group that God is present to us in our times of need through family, friends, the church, and even strangers. In the same way, we’re each called to be present with others in their times of need.

Invite the youth to spend a few minutes combing through the week’s newspapers, locating instances of evil, suffering, and need, and tell the group that they will be asked to pray about these examples of evil. When the youth have selected news items to pray about, gather the group into a circle and close the session in prayer, inviting those who wish to pray aloud to do so at the indicated point in the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, we believe in your power and in your care for creation. But we admit that we still have a lot of questions. Lead us to continue to ask those questions, but also motivate us to become your agents of renewal and healing and transformation. Hear us as we pray for those in need this week. . . . Now lead us out to truly be the people you created us to be—your people in the world. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for each of the six sessions in this course that families can talk about after class. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Connect to the World in Prayer

Visit worldinprayer.org, an online a ministry of the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, Lodi, California, which offers weekly Scripture-based prayers on world events.

Visit a Local Outreach/Mission Center

Take the group to a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. If possible, arrange for the youth to meet and talk with those who have struggled with poverty and homelessness. Many people have wrestled with tragedy and held on to their faith. It can be a powerful experience for young people to meet with such people and to ask them about where God has been in their lives.

Another possibility would be to bring in a family from a Habitat for Humanity house, especially if the congregation has helped build one. Ask the family how God has been present in their lives.

Embrace Another Country

If your congregation sponsors an overseas mission worker(s) or a child from another country, have the group do some research on that region. What challenges do people face there? What have been the effects of poverty, hunger, or war? What is the local government doing to help (or hinder) recovery? What are PC(USA) mission personnel doing in the region? You might also seek out stories or letters that the congregation may have received from the child or the child's family and share them with the group, asking, "How is God at work in these places that we consider to be places of sadness and tragedy?"



Does God Know What Will Happen Before It Happens? (And If So, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?)



Session Objective

The questions don't get any easier: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, why doesn't God intervene and prevent natural disasters and disease? Or murders and robberies? Or plane crashes and car wrecks? The problem of evil has been around a long time, and this session won't solve it—but we will try to discover the proper responses of God's people to life in an imperfect world.

Faith Statement

Q. 28. What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?

A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from God's love, since all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without God's will they cannot even move.

—The Heidelberg Catechism (4.028)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Is God in complete control of the world? If so, why do bad things happen in the world?
- Does God know what will happen before it happens?
- Does God control our every move, or does God let us make our own decisions even if God doesn't approve?
- In what ways can you often see God at work in the world? In what ways do you not see God at work in the world?



Explore

Read Psalm 139 and explore the following:

Looking at verses 1–18 . . .

- What is the writer's understanding of God?
- What words would you use to describe God as God is pictured in these verses?

Looking at verses 19–22 . . .

- Do these verses "fit" with the rest of the psalm? Why or why not?
- In verse 19, the writer speaks of people who are "wicked" and "bloodthirsty." Does the writer give any indication of where such people come from, or how they got that way?
- In your view, how do "evil" people get that way?

Read Romans 8:31–39 and explore the following:

- What is your answer to Paul's question: If God is for us, who is against us?
- What does this question mean to you?
- What is the relationship between the situations listed in verse 35 and Christ's love?
- Does Christ's love prevent bad things from happening, or does Christ's love serve another role?
- What powers do the things listed in verses 38–39 have over us, and what powers do they not have?
- What promise does Paul make in this passage?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has new perspectives after exploring the biblical passages.

- Using what you've learned from Psalm 139 and Romans 8, how would you respond if someone asked you, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"
- In today's conversations, what have you learned about who God is?
- After today's conversations, is your understanding of God clearer or more confused? Why?



Exit

Invite group members to brainstorm a list of people or situations in the world that seem broken and in need of God's healing. Close in prayer, lifting up the people and situations that have been mentioned and thanking God for being present during times of brokenness.



DICEY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think God knows what will happen before it happens?
2. If Jesus sat down next to you on a bus, what one question would you ask him?
3. What event lately has really gotten you down?
4. In what ways can you often see God at work in the world?
5. In what ways do you not see God at work in the world?
6. Why do you think bad things happen to good people?





SO MANY 'WHYS'

Based on Genesis 1:1–3; Psalm 139:1–4

Leader: In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,

Males: the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep,

Females: while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Leader: Then God said, “Let there be light” . . .

(Pause while the candle or lamp is lit.)

All: . . . and there was light.

Leader: By that light God searches us out and knows us.

Females: God knows when we sit down and when we stand up.

Males: God reads our minds from far away.

Females: But if God made all and knows all and sees all, why are there tsunamis and hurricanes?

Males: Why is there starvation and disease?

Females: Why are there house fires and car wrecks?

Males: Why is there violence and crime?

Leader: There are too many *whys*. Let us pray:

All: Loving God, we believe in your power and in your care for creation. But we have a lot of questions. When a bad thing happens, does it mean that you care but aren't strong enough to stop it? Or does it mean that you could stop it but you don't care enough? Or is there another question we ought to be asking? Visit us this day, we pray; send your Spirit among us so that we might learn more about your ways, and strengthen us to deal with the evil and suffering in the world as your faithful people. Amen.



NO ESCAPE FROM GOD

Directions: Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Psalm 139. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

Step 1: Read Psalm 139 silently. Then have a group member (or several) read the psalm out loud.

Step 2: Focusing on verses 1–18 only . . .

- What is the writer's understanding of God?
- What words would you use to describe God as God is pictured in these verses?

Step 3: Now focus on verses 19–22 . . .

- Do these verses "fit" with the rest of the psalm? Why or why not?
- In verse 19, the writer speaks of people who are "wicked" and "bloodthirsty." Does he or she give any indication of where such people come from, or how they got that way? In your view, how do "evil" people get that way?

Step 4: Now focus on the final "prayer," verses 23–24 . . .

- How would you put those verses in your own words?

Step 5: Read the following statement from the *Heidelberg Catechism* silently. Then choose a group member to read the statement aloud:

Q. 28. What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?

A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from God's love, since all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without God's will they cannot even move.

—*Heidelberg Catechism* (4.028)

Step 6: Discuss the following:

- What does it mean to be *patient in adversity*?
- Think about how this statement describes God. In what ways does this description of God agree with the description of God in Psalm 139?
- Considering how God is described in Psalm 139 and in the faith statement, how do you think we are called to respond when evil or suffering strikes in the world around us?



GOD IS WITH US

Directions: Use this page to help guide your group in exploring Romans 8:31–39. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the group.

Step 1: Read Romans 8:31–39 silently. Then have a group member read the passage out loud.

Step 2: Read the second half of verse 31.

- What is your answer to Paul's question: If God is for us, who is against us?
- What does this question mean to you?

Step 3: Read verse 35. Paul lists serious situations that affected people in his time and still affect people today, including persecution, famine, and sword (meaning, war). He also mentions the *love of Christ*.

- What is the relationship between these situations and Christ's love?
- Does Christ's love prevent bad things from happening, or does Christ's love serve another role?

Step 4: Verses 38–39 contain another list, longer and more abstract, of things that we face in life.

- What powers do these things have over us, and what powers do they not have?

Step 5: In your own words, what promise does Paul make in this passage as a whole?

Step 6: Read the following statement from the *Heidelberg Catechism* silently. Then choose a group member to read the statement aloud:

Q. 28. What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?

A. We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from God's love, since all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without God's will they cannot even move.

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Step 7: How does the message of this statement agree or not agree with Paul's message in Romans 8:31–39?

Step 8: Considering the messages of Romans 8:31–39 and the faith statement, how do you think we are called to respond when evil or suffering strikes in the world around us?





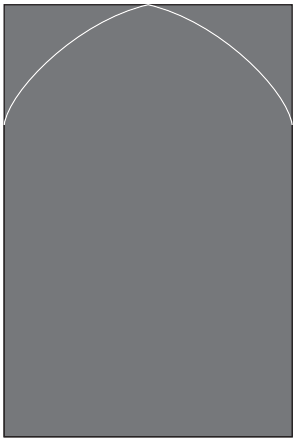
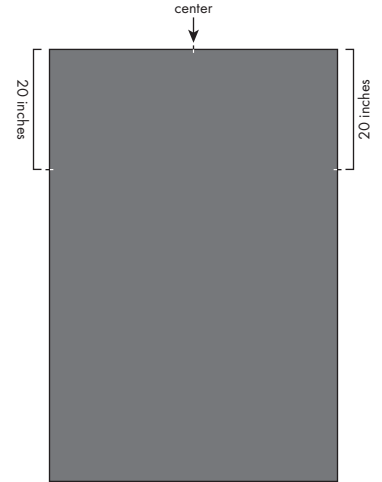
STAINED-GLASS ART

Note to leaders: If you decide to do the stained-glass art project in all six sessions, you may use these instructions to create a stained-glass window frame on which to mount and display the individual panes that your group will make in each session.

Supplies needed: One 4' x 6' sheet of black foam-core board, yardstick, pencil, newspapers, cutting tool, craft glue for paper, completed stained-glass art projects

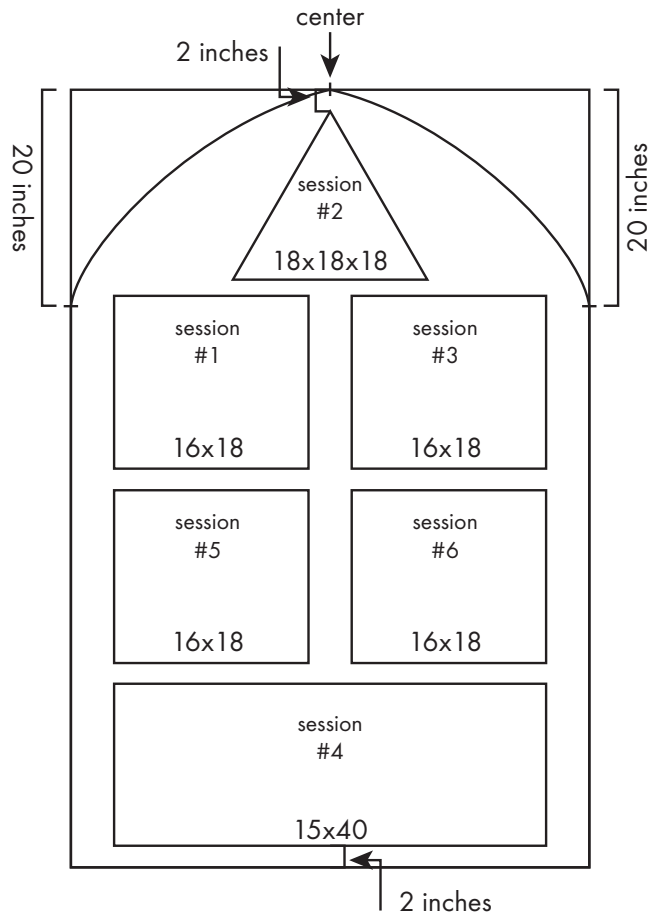
Creating a Gothic Arch

1. Lay the foam core so the shorter sides (the 4-foot sides) are at the top and bottom. Use the yardstick and pencil to mark the center of the top of the foam core and to mark 20 inches down each side of the foam core.



2. Use the diagram to guide you in connecting each side mark with the mark in the center, creating a Gothic arch shape. Place the foam core on a stack of newspapers to protect the table or floor. Cut on the connecting lines to cut out the arch.

3. Mount the individual stained-glass panes that your group has created in each session on this foam-core board frame with craft glue.





Lectio Divina Guidelines

Lectio divina ("divine reading") is an intentional, contemplative way to connect with God's Word. This ancient spiritual practice involves listening to multiple readings of the same Scripture passage interspersed with short periods of silence. If possible, invite different types of voices to be readers (e.g., young and old, male and female).

Relax in God's Presence

Dim the lights. Light a candle or oil lamp. Play contemplative music. Take a few minutes to relax in God's presence.

Listen for God's Word

First Reading

Have a group member slowly read the Scripture passage out loud while the rest of the group members listen for a word that "jumps out" to each of them. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her word (without comment or explanation) with the rest of the group. Allow a time of silence before the next reading.

Second Reading

Invite each group member to think about his or her word during the next reading, exploring the question "How does this word and this Scripture passage connect with my life?" Have a second reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and allow for a time of silence after the reading. Give each person an opportunity to share his or her response to the question.

Third Reading

Invite each group member to think about the question "What is this passage calling me to do?" or "Who is this passage calling me to be?" during the next reading. Have a third reader slowly read the Scripture passage out loud to the group and end with a time of silence. Give each person an opportunity to respond to the question "What have you heard from God in this Scripture passage?"

