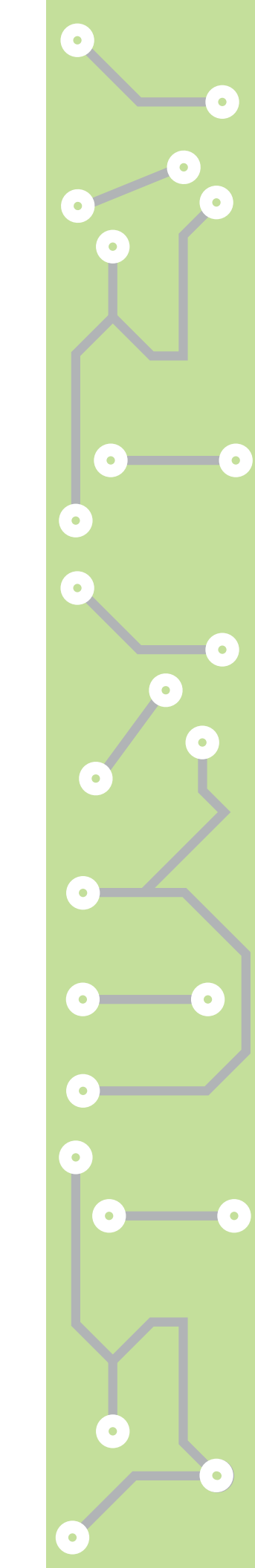




THINK, Volume 1 Culture

Jake Kircher



To Andrew, David, Jeffrey, Kyle, Mac, Ned, Nolan, and Tyler.
Thanks for being my guinea pigs with these materials over the last seven years.



THINK, Volume 1 Culture

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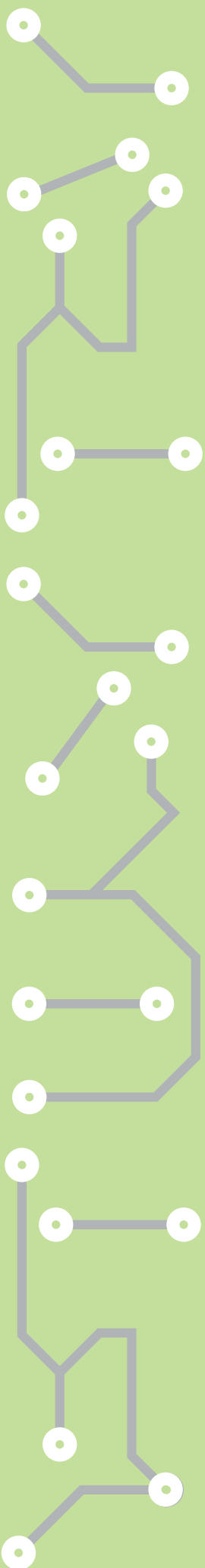
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How to Use the THINK Series

The studies within the THINK series are different from many Bible study resources in that they aren't intended to be "taught." Instead, **the role of the youth worker, small group leader, or volunteer is that of a facilitator.** Believe me, it's hard to stay in that role—especially for those who are gifted teachers. I still struggle with doing this myself!

To help with this, there are a number of things I'd recommend that I've begun practicing in my own ministry:

First, learn how to be a part of the conversation with your students. Ask a lot of questions. Use the materials provided as prompts and allow teenagers to discuss and talk as much as possible. When a teen asks a good question, resist the urge to dive in and answer it. Instead, use the question to help the whole group think deeper by pulling a Jesus and turning the question back to the group. Say something like: "Great question! What does everyone else think?"

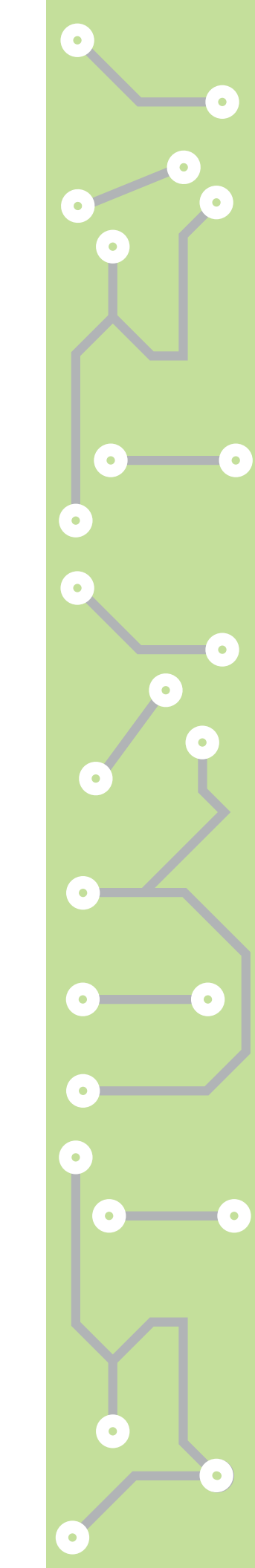
By facilitating and being a part of the group—not just teaching the group—you will not only help teenagers feel important and valuable, but you'll also be surprised about what you learn about God, faith, and the Bible. Honestly, every time I use this format rather than just teaching, I have my list of things that I want to make sure get put out there for the youth to consider. Yet, I rarely have to share those things myself because my students bring up every point in a more natural way during the group discussion.

Now, that being said, this *does not mean* there's never a time to briefly (key word) teach or explain something to your group as part of the discussion. There will be times when, as the person who's taken the time to study the topic beforehand, you will need to explain the background of a passage you're discussing. In fact, I've provided thoughts like these throughout the curriculum (marked **NOTE**) for certain questions that are more likely to need further explanation.

The important thing to understand is that you should *always* do your best to give the youth a chance to answer first. (Always.) *Then* you can jump in and explain only when necessary. Honestly, you may be surprised how much your students know about the historical context of the Bible. Even when they don't know, take the time to help teens figure out how to find the answers. So many great Bible tools are available for free online, and it's important that we teach teenagers how to study the Bible. Don't worry—I've helped you with this as well. At points throughout the curriculum, there are places where I encourage you to get teens to go online to different Bible resource websites such as *BlueLetterBible.com*, *BibleGateway.com*, and others.

There will be times when you ask a question and you're met with silence. When that happens, it's okay to jump in and provide some of your own thoughts. I highly recommend sharing a couple answers you've heard in response to that question—just to get teens thinking—and then turn it back to the youth and ask what they think. Another great way to handle a silent room is to prep volunteers beforehand and let one of them jump in and respond. Then you can ask the group if they agree or disagree with that response and why.

Second, make sure multiple people get the opportunity to share. As you facilitate



conversations, you'll most likely encounter certain people who tend to dominate the dialogue. (A person or two probably came to mind as you read that last sentence.) To avoid this scenario, an easy solution is to pose questions directly to those people in the group who haven't shared yet. However, it's important to let everyone know up front that they don't *have* to share and that "I don't know" is a perfectly valid answer. Many times when you get a noncommittal response like that, there's a good chance the person is simply processing the information being shared.

Third, *THINK* is all about challenging the typical answers. When you're talking about a subject, don't just present your church's "correct" theological answer. Instead, do your best to stay neutral in how you present the information. When someone shares an opinion, your best tool is going to be the question "Why?" Learn to play the devil's advocate and gently challenge them to defend what they're sharing. Ask them to explain their answers and back up their statements. By doing this, you'll help teenagers really think about what they're saying and what they believe.

Fourth, the contents of *THINK* are purposefully structured to be used as overall lessons, not single sessions. The reason for this is that sometimes you'll need more than a week to fully explore a conversation. Honestly, for some topics you could spend your entire youth group meeting talking through just the introduction options! The goal is not to complete the materials in any particular amount of time. Allow your students to set the pace and determine whether a topic takes one week or multiple weeks to cover.

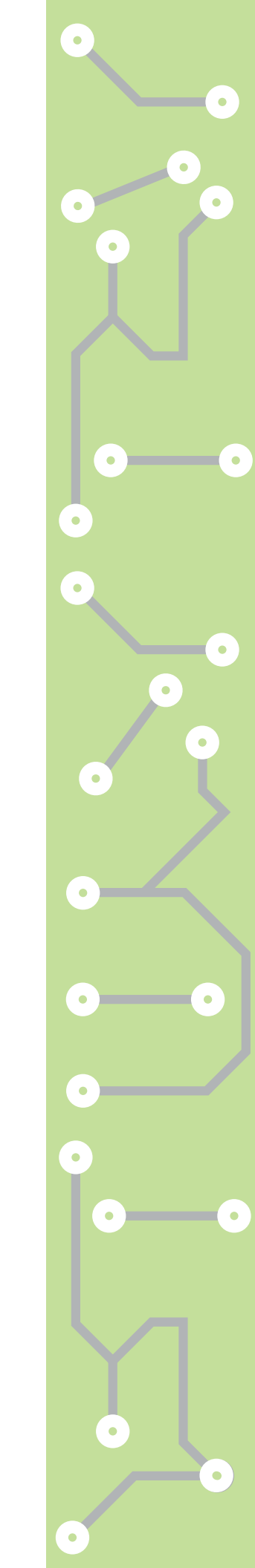
You can decide in which order you want to have the six conversations as well. You can use a particular lesson as a standalone conversation and then come back to the other ones another time, or you can do a series and go through the entire book, picking and choosing which order to do them in.

Fifth, avoid forcing a linear discussion based on the materials provided. Instead, allow your students to naturally direct the flow of the conversation. If you're discussing a Scripture passage and a teenager shares some thoughts that jump to a point made later in the materials, go with the flow and circle back later. Sometimes I don't have to be the one who circles back, as the youth will often do it on their own.

Sixth, *THINK* discussions are designed to leave people hanging. This will probably be the most difficult thing you have to do while using this curriculum. But when the conversation is nearing an end, resist the urge to reveal which answer is the "right" one. Instead, challenge everyone to keep wrestling with the issue. Utilize the Going Deeper handouts that include suggested Bible readings, books, articles, or websites that will help them continue processing the topic at home. Teach parents to carry on the dialogue after youth group and follow up with their teens to continue the conversation.

Please don't hear what I'm *not* saying. I'm *not* saying you should never take a theological stand from your perspective or never share your opinion. Again, this curriculum is designed to help adolescents think through their own beliefs, and sometimes one of the best ways to do that is by allowing them to hear different opinions—including yours.

However, I've found it's better not to share my perspective until someone specifically asks for it. Or I may wait to do it until I'm talking with a teenager one-on-one. The reason I do that is because too often when a pastor or ministry leader shares his or her opinion, the



conversation and thinking in the group tends to stop. Sometimes it's because of *how* we share it, but sometimes it's just because the teenagers assume the answer has been found and there's no more work to do.

When sharing our opinion isn't our primary mode of teaching, what we think about a given topic still tends to flow naturally into the conversation. This gives space for young people to process—as well as question—the perspective we're offering.

As far as a format for *THINK*, these materials could be used in almost any setting. You can use many of these prompts during one-on-one meetings with teens, but the materials will also work great in small groups. You can even use this curriculum in larger group settings, such as a church service, by simply allowing for interaction from the audience. (Check out this example of how it can be done: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UTXdlGxlko.) Or you can have the youth break off into smaller groups or just turn to the person sitting next to them and discuss something for a few minutes.

You'll find that the materials in each lesson are chock-full of ideas, prompts, and possibilities. Some of them will work well with your group, and some won't. That's okay. Again, the goal is simply to foster great conversation. So use what works for your group dynamics or setting, and ignore what doesn't.

Because it's ultimately the job of the Holy Spirit to bring about change, clarity, and conviction, I highly recommend putting together a prayer team of three to five people to lift up your group each week. This is a great way to get more people in your church, who may not have the time or desire to attend meetings and work hands-on with teens, involved with your ministry.

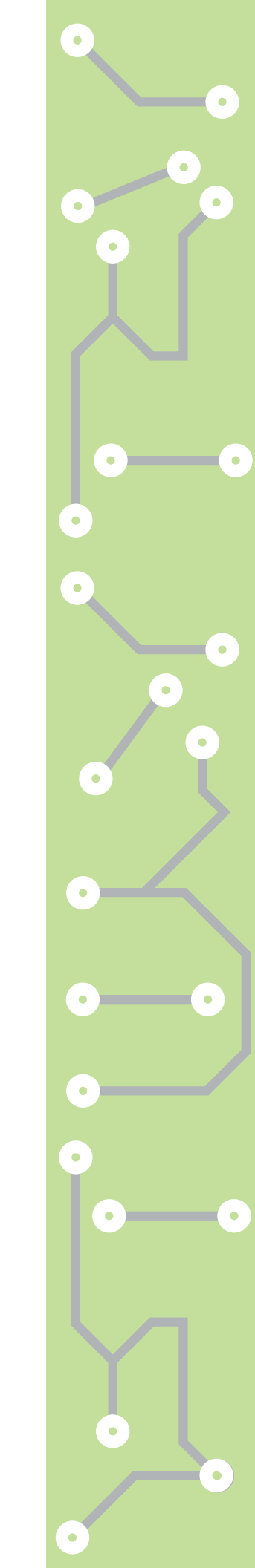
Once you have a team in place, simply send out an email each week with a brief recap of what happened the previous week, a description of the topic you'll be discussing in the coming week, and some specific prayer requests concerning your group's dynamics or specific teenagers.

Lastly, before you dive into discussions with your group, it will be very important that you establish some ground rules prior to your conversation—*especially* for the more controversial topics. The best way to do this is to allow your group to collectively come up with the rules before you begin the series. (Honestly, it would be a little weird if you started working your way through a curriculum that's all about fostering interaction and discussion by dictating the rules to the group.)

However, here are some rules that I suggest your group consider when making up their list:

1. Listen first, speak second. (See James 1:19.) Part of thinking critically is learning how to really listen to other people and process what they're saying, rather than just waiting to jump in with your own opinion.

2. Be tolerant and respectful of each other's views. This in no way means that members of the group have to act or talk like everyone's opinions are *right*. The word *tolerance* has been badly misused in our culture today, coming to mean that every opinion needs to be affirmed as being "right for you," even though viewpoints may contradict one another.



When I was in college, I had the opportunity to spend a couple days with John Perkins. He's known for his amazing work with racial reconciliation in the South, and he worked with Martin Luther King Jr. During one of our conversations, he bluntly shared that true tolerance is when, "You believe what you believe; I'll believe what I believe; and we won't kill one another." That has stuck with me. Teenagers should challenge and push one another's viewpoints, expressing when they disagree and think someone else is wrong. However, there's a respectful and loving way to do this. We don't need to model the poor response of some Christians who resort to name-calling, Bible-bashing, and writing someone off solely because they have different opinions.

3. Emotions are okay but keep them in check. With a few of the topics being covered, discussions could get heated. Keep in mind that emotions are good and God created them for a reason. On the one hand, you should challenge your group to be sensitive when someone gets emotional. There's a *reason* why our emotions come out of us. Oftentimes, yet probably unknown by the others in the room, a teen may be wrestling with a personal situation that's connected to a particular topic. So tread lightly and with love.

On the other hand, sometimes a person's emotions can hit a point where they aren't helpful to a conversation. If a teenager gets too emotional, give him or her permission to step out of the room for a bit or leave the gathering altogether. Sometimes thinking critically involves some necessary alone time in order to process what's going on beneath the surface. When a young person does need to leave, make sure a trusted peer (I highly encourage letting the teens minister to one another whenever possible) or a trusted adult, like you, reaches out to that teenager later on in the week to follow up. Perhaps it would be helpful to meet one-on-one to talk things through.

4. Don't gossip about what's shared during youth group. Sometimes in the midst of these discussions, teens will share why they believe certain things, and personal experiences or situations will also be shared. It's important to create an environment where the youth know they can safely share without fear of a certain story or information winding its way around school the next day. This means everyone must agree to show respect when others are being vulnerable.

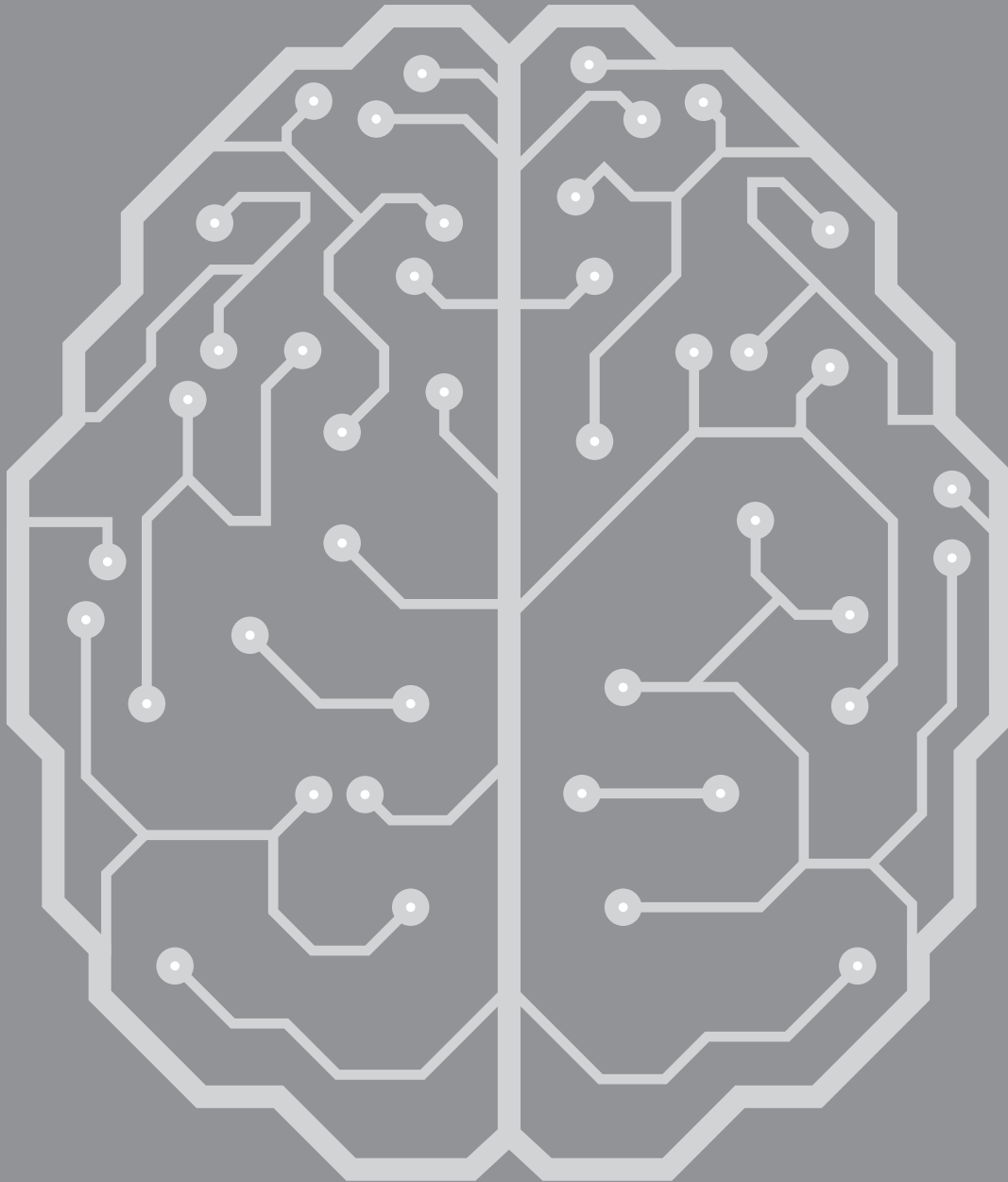
I'm sure your group can come up with many more ground rules besides these four!

However, on top of coming up with some rules, it's also helpful to come up with the consequences if a particular rule isn't followed. This isn't to make the process legalistic, but simply to ensure the health of group discussions and protect personal feelings. As a good starting point for your broken-rule protocol, I recommend using the format for conflict resolution that Jesus lays out in Matthew 18:15-17.

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

All right, so now with all of that preliminary stuff out of the way, let's dive in...

Lesson 1
THINK: Science vs. Creation



Lesson 1

THINK: Science vs. Creation

How life began is a crucial question on teenagers' minds today. In school, most of our students are required to study Darwinian evolution, which is presented as a proven fact by many scientists and in many textbooks. But is it actually proven fact? At the same time, the book of Genesis has found no place in the classroom conversations of public schools. So at church we tend to teach about a God-created world, while almost never engaging the theory of evolution. Meanwhile our youth are stuck in the middle wondering whom to trust and whom to believe: Do they trust their science teachers who say life happened by chance, their pastor who says everything was created by God, or do they fall somewhere in the middle?

What makes this question even more important is how it ties in to our identities and impacts how we define the purpose of life. Who we are and how we got here is a foundational question that points us to what we're supposed to do with our lives while we're here on earth. If everything happened by chance, then does it really matter what we do with our lives? If, instead, God created everything with a greater purpose in mind, what does that say about our value and worth?

Everyone agrees that the way we look at Genesis 1 and 2 will dictate and flavor our view of the rest of Scripture. Yet, what's the right response to the creation story and what do we do with the science that seems to contradict it?

Before Your Meeting

Study Materials

Here's a list of great resources and Scripture passages for you to familiarize yourself with as you prepare to facilitate your group's conversation. It will be important for you to purposefully explore some materials that hold a different viewpoint than yours.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 1-2
Exodus 20:11
Nehemiah 9:6
Psalm 90:4
John 1:1-3
Romans 1:20
Colossians 1:16
Hebrews 11:3
2 Peter 3:8

Helpful Websites

<https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/>
www.answersingenesis.org/cec/creation-evolution-report
www.expelledexposed.com
www.theisticevolution.org
www.talkorigins.org

Books

If you're going to read one book, I highly recommend you read this one:
The Case for a Creator by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2004).

Videos You Could Watch

[*Bill Nye Debates Ken Ham*](#) YouTube Version (Answers in Genesis, 2014)
Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed DVD (Premise Media Corp., 2010)
The Case for a Creator Documentary (Illustra Media, 2006)

Other Great Options

Biology Through the Eyes of Faith by Richard T. Wright (HarperCollins, 2003)
Coming to Peace with Science by Darrel R. Falk (InterVarsity, 2004)
[*Expelled: No Intelligence Design Allowed Leader's Guide*](#) PDF Download (Premise Media Corp., 2010)
The Fingerprint of God by Hugh Ross (Whitaker House, 1989)
Redeeming Darwin: Discovering the Designed DVD and Guide by Dr. Ray Bohlin and Kerby Anderson (Probe Ministries, 2007)

Promoting Your Meeting

Text/Twitter Prompts

Use these to help promote the upcoming conversation with your youth group.

- How was the world created? Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on the Bible versus science tonight!
- Does the Big Bang theory (not the TV show) contradict the Genesis creation account? Hope you can make it for a great conversation!
- Can a Christian embrace the theory of evolution? Can't wait to hear what you think about this question tonight at youth group!
- Who gets the creation story right, the Bible or science? Do some research before you come to group and be ready to share what you think.

Email to Parents

Here's a sample email you can rework to suit your own group, and then use it to let parents know about your upcoming conversation. In my experience, it's especially important to let parents know you'll welcome opinions from those who lean more toward evolution. Whenever this conversation comes up, I usually receive concerned emails from parents about that specific issue. Meanwhile, I find that parents who lean toward creationism tend to assume that's the angle I'll teach from during the meeting:

Dear Parents,

Starting this week, we'll be tackling the topic of creation. This is an especially important conversation because it ties in to our identities and impacts how we define the purpose of life. If everything happened just by chance, then does it really matter what we do with our lives? If, instead, God created everything with a greater purpose in mind, what does that say about our value and worth?

Throughout our conversation, we'll be looking at both Darwinian evolution and creationism as possible theories of how the world began. We'll also remain open to the possibility that a combination of both could explain creation—in other words, theistic evolution.

We feel it's crucial for teenagers to think through this issue and form their own beliefs on the topic. Rather than teaching a "correct" viewpoint, we'll be challenging them to wrestle with Scripture, and we'll work hard to create a safe environment where young people can share their differing opinions. We feel it's more valuable for teens to own and be able to defend their opinions on a topic like this, rather than just regurgitate someone else's opinion. This results in personal beliefs and well-explored ideology (and theology!) that will last long after high school graduation.

We want our discussion to be complementary to any conversation you've had or will have with your children. I've found these youth group discussions can really open up a door for more family dialogue. That's why we challenge you to ask questions about what we discussed. Here are some suggestions:

- *How do you think the world was created? What makes you think that?*
- *Did anyone bring up an idea or opinion about creation you'd never heard or thought of before? What do you think about it now?*
- *Did your opinion on creation change after your conversation at youth group? How so?*

We also challenge you to be “slow to speak and quick to listen” (James 1:19) as your child responds to your questions. Notice the questions above all come from a neutral perspective and foster important life skills like critical thinking and listening.

We understand it may be difficult for you if your child has a different opinion than you do on this issue. But this is not a conversation about your family's house rules; it's about what your son or daughter is thinking. In light of that, please resist the urge to “correct” or “teach” what you feel is the right view. This is a great time to play devil's advocate, ask why, and challenge what your teens are saying to help them really think through their views. (But, by all means, if your child asks what you think, dive in and share your thoughts openly.)

Please feel free to email or call me if you'd like to talk before our group meeting.

Movie Night Option

Depending on your group's flexibility and availability, it could be a great introduction to this topic to have a completely separate movie night prior to the group's full discussion. I suggest watching either *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* or the 2014 debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham. Due to time constraints, it may not be wise to have a long conversation right after either movie, but here are a couple discussion questions you could throw out. Use these videos as a launching point, where you can encourage young people to think through what they've heard and be ready for a great conversation at your upcoming meeting.

Discussion Questions

1. What jumped out at you during the movie? What did you agree with and disagree with?
2. Did anything you heard surprise you?
- 3a. *Specific to the Bill Nye and Ken Ham debate:* Who do you think won the debate and why?
- 3b. *Specific to Expelled:* Do you think Ben Stein effectively made his point? Or do you think he missed the mark? Why or why not?

Setting Up Your Space

This conversation is written as a debate using a format that I've found works extremely well—especially with this topic. All you'll need is a roll of tape, or something similar, to make a line on the floor and split the room into two sections. This format will work regardless of your group size. However, the more people you have, the more logistics you'll have to deal with. (Think about the amount of time it takes for people to move from one side of the line to the other, and making sure people can be heard across the room or over other voices.)

Before the youth arrive, make sure the line is already drawn down the middle of the floor, and have each half labeled on either the wall or floor: one side is YES, and the other side is NO. Run the beginning of your meeting just like you always do. This mysterious setup will create a bit of suspense about what's coming, which can help hold the students' attention while you're explaining what it's all about later.

If you want to see this in action before you do it, check out this link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UTXdlGxlko

(Hint: This material can also be easily translated to a small group meeting or used in more of an open conversation, as opposed to the debate style I am going to describe.)

Starting Your Meeting

Setting the Tone

Before you dive into the conversation, I recommend starting with something like the following:

Science versus creation is an old debate: Which one is right, how did the world begin, and where is our world going? I know many of you have studied evolution in your science classes, and for our conversation right now, we'll be exploring evolution. But we'll also be comparing and contrasting evolution to the creation story in Genesis.

We want to make it clear that no matter what your opinion or belief is about the creation of the world, we'd love for you to share your thoughts, and we welcome your participation. Hopefully we'll have a fun, challenging and engaging conversation that will help all of us with this question of how life began.

After you set the tone, take a moment to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to be present in your conversation, for peace and love to be at the forefront of the discussion, and for God to lead everyone in the room to his truth and no one else's.

REMEMBER: As you dive into the content, **your job is to facilitate**, not teach the whole time. Do your best to ask a lot of questions and use some of the tips suggested in the Introduction. Also, please remember it's okay to jump around and not follow the curriculum linearly. Take the time to be extra sensitive and allow conversation to develop. If you need to carry the discussion over more than one week, that's totally okay.

Conversation Starter

Honestly, with the format here, I've found you don't really need a conversation starter, as the activity will get things rolling for you. However, here's a fun option that will help set the stage for your debate and the idea that people have very different opinions on how life began.

Make sure you have a piece of paper and something to draw with (crayons, colored pencils, markers, etc.) for each student. Instruct your students that you're going to read through Genesis 1 bit by bit, and you want them to take the account literally. As you read, they should draw what the world would have looked like after creation was complete. They can either do six different drawings to reflect each day of creation, or they can do one large drawing that adds each day as they go.

For an example of what this might look like, check out:

<http://scribalishess.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/reading-genesis-1-literally/>

Discussion Questions

As you ask discussion questions, you can either have teens respond to the whole group, break your group into smaller groups to discuss, or have them pair up. (A great option that helps promote listening skills is to pair up students, let them share their thoughts one-on-one, and then have them report back to the group what their partner said—not what they personally said.)

NOTE: If you go with the pairs option, it can really help build listening skills. It's important not to warn the students ahead of time that that's how they'll be asked to report what was shared. Part of the impact is the "Oh shoot, I didn't really listen" realization. Obviously, you'll also want to make sure that partners give permission for their responses to be shared with the whole group.

1. By drawing it as you listened to the creation story, did anything jump out to you that you hadn't noticed previously?
2. Your artistic skills (or lack thereof) aside, how does your literal drawing compare to the world as we know it today? What does that mean about how we take Genesis 1?
3. How would a Hebrew understanding of science (i.e., they thought the world was flat, that the sky was originally a dome, and that the sun revolved around the earth) impact the creation account in Genesis 1? Would you have drawn your pictures any differently if you'd known that? Why or why not?
4. Compare your drawing to other people's drawings. How do all the drawings compare and contrast? How do you explain the fact that a group of people can listen to the exact same Bible verses, draw what's being described, and yet their drawings look very different/very similar? (*You should tailor the wording of this last question to your group and the outcome of the activity.*)

Diving In

Just in case you skimmed the Before Your Meeting section, this lesson is written as a group debate. Make sure you have your room divided in half using duct tape, a rope, or whatever else you want to use, and your room halves labeled as YES and NO.

For those who need a transition prompt, you could go with something like the following:

For the rest of our Science vs. Creation conversation, we're actually going to have a debate. Most of you noticed the piece of tape on the floor that's dividing the room into two halves, and now you finally get to know why! Here's what's going to happen: I'm going to pose a certain question, and I'm going to ask everyone to take a position on the question—literally. Those who feel the answer is YES are going to sit over here where it says YES; those who feel the answer is NO are going to sit over here with the NOs. Once everyone is in position, we'll have a few people from both sides explain why they're answering the way they are.

As people share, feel free to directly respond to something. The only rule is that everyone must communicate respectfully. The other element here is that as you listen to your peers explain their positions, you're allowed to switch sides if someone says something that changes your opinion. After you switch, I'd love for you to share with the group exactly what changed your mind and why. So before we dive in, let's take a few minutes to get on the same page and define some terms we'll be hearing and using during our conversation.

Defining Some Terms

Specifically with this topic of science versus creation, I've found it's very important to take a moment to define a couple terms. Definitions can vary, and because you'll likely have varied backgrounds and educational levels represented in your meeting, it's helpful to get everybody on the same page right from the start. Rather than defining the terms yourself, put the questions or terms up on a PowerPoint slide (or write them on a white board) and ask your group to formulate the definitions together. (Use the overviews below to make sure your group is on the right track, but give them time to define things themselves before you offer additional info.)

What exactly is the theory of Darwinian evolution?

Overview: This theory is focused around two main ideas. First, all life and the organisms we see have descended from a single common ancestor. Second, the process of natural selection (survival of the fittest) has the power to produce brand-new species and life through random mutations. These two ideas suggest that creation happened slowly over millions of years.

What is the definition of intelligent design?

Overview: This simply states that certain features of the universe and living things are best explained by an intelligent designer and not by chance. This view isn't solely limited to that of God being our Creator, but is open to other theories, including aliens seeding our planet and leaving us on our own.

Now that everyone is working from the same set of definitions, get ready to move...

Debate Question 1

Should intelligent design and Darwinian evolution have equal voices in public school science classes and textbooks? Yes or no? Pick a side...

Video Option

If you have time and the right setup, consider using one or both of these video clips to introduce this first question to your group instead of simply asking it.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dO6VBymZUU0

Google Video Search: *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* trailer

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHbYJfwFgOU

Google Video Search: *Bill Nye: Creationism Is Not Appropriate for Children*

After the video, say something like:

The first question we're going to debate is whether or not intelligent design and Darwinian evolution should have equal voices in public school science classes and textbooks. If you think, "Yes, they should," head over to the side marked YES. If you think, "No, intelligent design doesn't belong in a science classroom," head over to the NO side of the room.

Debate

Once everyone has taken a position, ask for at least one person (from either side) to explain his or her position. Once this person shares, ask if there's someone on the opposite side who wants to respond. Repeat this, going back and forth, until time requires you to move on to the next question or the debate looks like it's about to run out of steam.

Questions to Take This Deeper

1. How do freedom of speech and separation of church and state play into this conversation?
2. Have any of you ever had an experience where you or someone else in your science class brought up the biblical account of creation when discussing the origins of the earth? What happened?

Debate Question 2

Can the two explanations of our origin—intelligent design and Darwinian evolution—coexist? Yes or no?

Video Option

After you ask this question, play the creation scene from the *Noah* movie, which visually combines both of these theories to help paint a visual of the question.

Say something like:

The next question we're going to debate is whether or not the theories of intelligent design and Darwinian evolution can coexist. If you think, "Yes, they

can both be right and don't have to contradict one another," head over to the YES side of the room. If you think, "No, by definition they have to contradict one another," head over to the NO side of the room.

Debate

Just as you did before, once everyone has taken a position, ask for at least one person (from either side) to explain his or her position. Once this person shares, ask if there's someone on the opposite side who wants to respond to what was just shared. Repeat this, going back and forth, just as you did before.

Questions to Take This Deeper

1. Is it possible to be a Christian and at the same time believe in evolution? Why or why not?
2. Photo Option: Show either of these photos to your group and ask either of the following questions. (If you prefer to find different pictures, do a Google Image Search of "human evolution" or "the missing link.")

<http://livinghealthyguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/body-Evolution.jpg>

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/images/cave/humanEvolution.jpg>

- a. Does the lack of a missing link prove the theory of intelligent design? Why or why not?
- b. If scientists found the missing link tomorrow—proving humans evolved from monkeys—and you knew with complete certainty it wasn't a gimmick, what would that do to your faith in God? Why?

As students express their opinions, watch for ways to reiterate the definitions of your terms into the conversation—or define new terms. Honestly, every time I do this discussion, the students usually bring up additional theories or ideas on their own. And for me, it's as simple as just jumping in and saying, "Good thought. That's actually known as..." Or, better yet, "Great thought. Does anyone know the term that describes what was just explained?"

Here are some questions (and potential answers) you can throw in or watch for to help expand the vocabulary of the discussion:

What is the theory of creationism? What is meant by "young earth"?

Overview: The theory is built on the idea that the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 is a literal, historical narrative and that each "day" mentioned in the account is a literal, 24-hour period. This reading would indicate the age of the earth is relatively young at about 6,000 years old, with a maximum of around 10,000 years old. Someone who holds this view of creation would argue that intelligent design and Darwinian evolution *cannot* coexist.

What is the theory of theistic evolution?

Overview: This theory combines certain elements of evolution with elements of creationism. The idea is that an intelligent designer (i.e.,

God) initiated all of creation and then used some level of evolution to bring everything about. Someone who holds this view of creation would most likely say intelligent design and Darwinian evolution *can* coexist. (Though I've actually had someone in favor of this view argue that purely by definition, intelligent design and Darwinian evolution can't coexist and that theistic evolution is actually a third option, not a meshing of the two.)

What is the difference between macroevolution and microevolution?

Overview: Macroevolution suggested that changes have occurred on a large scale from species to species (e.g., fish became frogs, which then became lizards, etc.). Microevolution suggests small-scale changes over time within a species (e.g., when a great granddaughter's skin tone is vastly different from her great grandmother's because one or more individuals in the bloodline between them were of a different race than the great grandma). Proponents of Darwinian evolution would say macroevolution and microevolution are interrelated—microevolution simply being the microscopic view of what happens to get to the point of macroevolution. However, many who support a theistic evolution view of creation embrace microevolution, but draw the line at macroevolution.

Debate Question 3

Can the creation account in Genesis 1 and the Big Bang theory coexist? Yes or no? Go ahead and choose your side.

Or you could say something like:

The next question we're going to debate is whether or not the biblical account of creation and the Big Bang theory can coexist. If you think, "Yes, the Big Bang theory could explain what God did," head over to the YES side of the room. If you think, "No, they can't both happen, it has to be one or the other," head over to the NO side of the room.

Just as you did before, once everyone has taken a position, ask for at least one person (from either side) to explain his or her position. Once this person shares, ask if there's someone on the opposite side who wants to respond to what was just shared. Repeat this, going back and forth, just as you did before.

Questions to Take This Deeper

Give or read this quote to your group and then use the discussion questions below to stimulate your conversation.

The following is taken from Lee Strobel's *The Case for a Creator* (Zondervan, 2004) as he shares one person's opinion of how the world began and the Big Bang theory. It goes like this:

In the beginning was an explosion. Not an explosion like those familiar on earth, starting from a definite center and spreading out to engulf more and more of the circumambient air; but an explosion which occurred simultaneously everywhere, filling all space from the beginning with every particle of matter rushing apart from every other particle.

Within the tiniest split second, the temperature hit a hundred thousand million degrees Centigrade. “This is much hotter than in the center of even the hottest star, so hot, in fact, that none of the components of ordinary matter, molecules, or atoms, or even the nuclei of atoms, could have held together,” he wrote.

The matter rushing apart, he explained, consisted of such elementary particles as negatively charged electrons, positively charged positrons, and neutrinos, which lack both electrical charge and mass. Interestingly, there were also photons: “The universe,” he said, “was filled with light.”

1. What are your initial reactions to this quote? How does it make you feel?
2. Now explain to the group that Lee Strobel was actually citing Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg and his book *The First Three Minutes*. Does hearing the context of this quote and understanding the man’s scientific credentials change any of your responses to the first two questions?

Debate Question 4

Are the creation days in Genesis 1 literal 24-hour periods of time? Yes or no?

Or you could say something like:

The next question we’re going to debate is whether or not the creation days in Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days. If you think, “Yes, a day means 24 hours,” head over to the YES side of the room. If you think, “No, if the timeline in Genesis is literal, the earth is only 6,000 to 10,000 years old, and there’s no way that’s true,” head over to the NO side of the room.

Just as you did before, once everyone has taken a position, ask for at least one person (from either side) to explain his or her position. Once this person shares, ask if there’s someone on the opposite side who wants to respond to what was just shared. Repeat this, going back and forth, just as you did before.

Questions to Take This Deeper

1. Have two students look up Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 and read them to the group. How do these two passages impact the implications of how the word *day* is to be understood in the Genesis creation account?
2. When you compare Genesis 1 to Genesis 2, the order of creation is actually different in each chapter. How does that impact the conversation? Does this mean the Bible is contradicting itself right from the beginning?

NOTE: There are a few different views of the differences between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Creationists argue the verb tense of the Hebrew word *formed* in Genesis 2 in regard to the animals and the garden of Eden is actually supposed to be in past tense. In other words, they were made before God created Adam, exactly as the order explains in Genesis 1, and now God is referencing them in regard to Adam naming them and taking care of the garden. Others would argue that the differences here are all about the writing style because Genesis 1 is actually a Hebrew poem, not intended to be taken literally, while Genesis 2 transitions into a more narrative style.

Closing Out Your Meeting

Just as it was important to set a good tone as you started the dialogue, it's equally important to set a good tone as your meeting comes to a close. As a reminder, your goal here should not be to jump in and tell your group the “correct” answer, but encourage teens to continue wrestling with Scripture and questioning Jesus about his opinion on this issue.

I've provided a Going Deeper handout you can give to students as they leave. It's purposefully in a Word document format so you can add or subtract suggested resources—ending up with whatever is most applicable and challenging for your specific group. Again, your goal with these is to push, question, and stretch your teens' viewpoints; so don't just play it safe.

Beyond the handout, here are a couple of closing activities you can use to bring the current conversation to an end. To transition into the closing time, you could say something like this:

I hope everyone has enjoyed the debate format and learned something new about the different perspectives on our origin. [It would be great to summarize a few key points from the night here.] I want to challenge you all to keep asking questions and stretching yourselves in how you think about this issue when it comes to your faith. As you leave, I have a handout I'd like to give you that lists the Scriptures we discussed, along with some websites, videos, and a book suggestion, to help you continue to think through the issue. If any of you would like to talk with me—or any of the other adult leaders—about this, please just ask! We'd love to take you out for coffee or a slice of pizza and talk more with you and help you process. Before we close in prayer, though, I'd like to... [Choose one of the following.]

One Final Question Option (5-10 minutes)

*...ask one final question. Before you respond to it, I'd like you all to just take a minute or two to sit and process the question. So here it is: **If we establish that “GOD CREATED the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), does it even matter HOW God did it?** Or asked a slightly different way, is it okay if we allow the Bible to answer the who and why questions about creation...and let science answer the how and when questions?*

Allow students to sit and process this question for a minute or two in silence. After a moment to think, invite students to respond in the same way they have all night.

So if you think, “Yes, it matters! We have to allow the Bible to answer all of those important questions,” move to the YES side. If you think, “Nope! God could have created the world any way he wanted and it doesn't matter,” move to the NO side.

Then ask for a couple students on each side to share their opinions, just as you have with each debate question. After a little bit of conversation, ask for a volunteer to close in prayer.

A Bible Passage, Video & Questions Option (10-15 minutes)

...take a few more minutes to explore one more Bible passage. And at the same time we look at that, I'd like to have this video playing up on the screen.

You can choose whether to have the sound on the video playing softly or not at all.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v2L2UGZJAM

Google Video Search: Planet Earth: Amazing nature scenery

As the video plays, invite students to turn in their Bibles to Romans 1:18-25 and ask for a volunteer to read the passage.

Discussion Questions

1. What does this passage suggest about nature's relationship with God?
2. Do you think nature points to the existence of God? How?
3. As expressed in verse 25, what does it mean to worship and serve the "creature rather than the Creator" (NES)? What's included in the term *creature*? And which one do you more regularly serve and worship yourself, the creature or Creator?

Going Deeper Handout: Science vs. Creation

As you utilize the following resources to further educate yourself in this issue, don't just read the things you know will support your current opinion. Instead, purposefully read some things from different viewpoints that will help refine and challenge what you currently believe.

Here is a list of the main Scripture passages that address the issue of creation. Read them in your own Bible and wrestle through them. Look them up on Google and find some articles to see what others think about them. A great website is BibleGateway.com, where you can find links to articles (as well as commentaries and other resources) to help you think through the passages more deeply.

Scripture Passages

Genesis 1–2
Exodus 20:11
Nehemiah 9:6
Psalm 90:4
John 1:1-3
Romans 1:20
Colossians 1:16
Hebrews 11:3
2 Peter 3:8

Helpful Websites

<https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/>
www.answersingenesis.org/cec/creation-evolution-report
www.expelledexposed.com
www.theisticevolution.org
www.talkorigins.org

Videos You Could Watch

[Bill Nye Debates Ken Ham](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI) YouTube Version (Answers in Genesis, 2014)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI>

Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed DVD (Premise Media Corp., 2010)

If you're looking for something a little more in-depth and are going to read one book, read this one: *The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2004).