



### **Preface**

This guide for group discussion of *From the Dust: Conversations in Creation* is presented here as a six-week study, with the middle four weeks focused on the four sections of the film. An optional 'Week 0' is presented as a chance for your group to get to know each other and set expectations. A supplemental essay is suggested for each of the six sessions as optional reading before the session. The worship / reflective suggestions could be implemented at the beginning of each meeting, at the end, or both. We encourage you to use this guide as best fits the needs and personalities of your group. The dynamics and personalities surrounding this topic are many and varied, so flexibility and openness are key ingredients to a fruitful discussion.

Questions or suggestions regarding the content of this guide may be directed to David Vosburg, Associate Professor of Chemistry, Harvey Mudd College (vosburg@hmc.edu).

### **Week 0 (optional organizational meeting to set expectations)**

Find a time to meet with potential discussion group members and share a casual meal. Decide as a group what the expectations and ground rules for the group should be.

Examples:

- Any question is ok.
- Listen respectfully when others are speaking.
- Being a Christ-follower is not a prerequisite for the group.
- None of us has everything figured out—establish a posture of learning and growing together.
- Everyone is different. It's ok if Christians have different opinions on certain issues.
- There is no expectation that you will change your mind, faith, or beliefs as a result of the study. It is simply meant to explore the issues raised in *From the Dust*.

Decide on a time, place, and frequency of meeting (i.e. once a week for 90 minutes each). Consider a meal or snacks together each week as a group. If the group will be large, decide whether you'll need to break into smaller groups for certain discussions. If so, determine whether it would be helpful to assign leaders for each small group. It is often best to begin each time of discussion in groups of 2-4 people for 5-10 minutes before transitioning to a larger group dialogue so that everyone has a chance to speak (often people are more comfortable sharing in a smaller group). If you've already decided on a general structure for each meeting (e.g., song, article, discussion, film clip or Genesis reading, discussion, prayer), you may wish have the group be a part of that decision process. If you decide to include music or worship, identify one or two volunteers to lead that portion of each meeting.

Week 1 “In the Beginning”

1. Worship often creates a posture of humility—an appropriate starting point when considering how God created the universe. Sing a song or two together that establishes God’s sovereignty over us.  
(Examples: “God of Wonders”, “How Great Is Our God”, “We Bow Down”, “You’re Beautiful”, “Cannons”, “Starry Night”, or “Your Beloved”)  
(Possible Hymns: “How Great Thou Art”, “For the Beauty of the Earth”, “Morning Has Broken”, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty”, “We Sing the Greatness of our God”, “All Creatures of Our God and King”, “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”, or “Let All Things Now Living”).  
Alternatively, read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation.  
(Examples: 8, 19, 65, 96, 98, 104, 136, or 148).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading following the meeting):*  
Joseph Lam “The Biblical Creation in its Ancient Near Eastern Context”  
[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam\\_scholarly\\_essay.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam_scholarly_essay.pdf)  
*Sample discussion questions for Lam article:*  
Does the article add to your understanding of Genesis 1 in any way? How?  
Does it challenge the way you view God or creation?  
What do you think about the idea of humans created *in* God’s image and *as* God’s image?  
Does the article make you want to read Genesis, or examine it more closely?
3. Consider printing a manuscript of Genesis 1-2:3 for each member of your group, using a common translation such as NIV or NRSV. If desired, omit the chapter and verse numbers, as they are not part of the original text and may distract the reader. Double-spacing the document may make it easier for people to highlight and annotate their manuscript (a recommended practice for a Bible study).
4. Read Genesis 1-2:3 aloud. It may be helpful to distribute the reading roles into eight sections among four readers (A-D) in the following way to illustrate the structure of the text:  
A: Introduction (Gen 1:1-2, “In the beginning...”)  
B: Day 1 (Gen 1:3-5, “And God said, ‘Let there be light...’”)  
C: Day 2 (Gen 1:6-8, “And God said, ‘Let there be a vault...’”)  
D: Day 3 (Gen 1:9-13, “And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky...’”)  
B: Day 4 (Gen 1:14-19, “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault...’”)  
C: Day 5 (Gen 1:20-23, “And God said, ‘Let the water teem...’”)  
D: Day 6 (Gen 1:24-31, “And God said, ‘Let the land produce...’”)  
A: Day 7 (Gen 2:1-3, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed...”)
5. Sample discussion questions:  
What repeated words do you notice in the text?  
Do you notice anything significant about the order in which God organizes the universe (day / night, sea / sky, and land) and the order in which he populates those realms?  
Which aspect of creation seems most important to you in this story?  
How do you imagine ancient Israelites would have interpreted this story?

6. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.

**Week 2 “Faith and Science”**

1. Worship together or read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation (see Week 1).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading after the meeting):*  
Tim Keller “Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople”  
[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller\\_white\\_paper.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf)  
*Sample discussion questions on Keller article:*  
What would you say to an agnostic friend who asks you, “How can I believe the Bible if that means I have to reject science?”  
Which of Keller’s “Three questions of Christian laypeople” do you personally find most challenging (perhaps a question that you are asking yourself)? Why?  
Which of Keller’s answers to those questions do you find most satisfying? Why?
3. If the leader of the group has an interesting personal story or testimony of his or her own journey reconciling science and Christian faith, this may be a good time to share it.
4. Explain to the group that today you’ll be watching the first part of a four-part film called *From the Dust: Conversations in Creation*. Here is an excerpt from the film’s website ([www.fromthedustmovie.org](http://www.fromthedustmovie.org)):  
The question of where we come from is a mystery man has explored throughout human history. [Highway Media](#) has partnered with [The BioLogos Foundation](#) and director Ryan Pettey ([After the Last Round](#)) to create a documentary that seeks to reopen the dialogue between science and faith. With fresh insight from some of the great theological minds of our day, and a candid examination of the Biblical creation narrative, *From the Dust* creates an unflinching context in which to interact with new ideas and ancient narrative. Our goal in crafting the film was not to ignite the classic creation / evolution contest, but rather to frame the story of man’s origins in a larger dialogue of how we read the scriptures, how we regard scientific discovery, and how man’s search for his place in the universe often leads down the narrow road of absolutes.  
Our hope is that *From the Dust* stirs a renewed vigor in the search for truth—both scientific and spiritual—and that fruitful conversation and spirited dialogue will result from your viewing of the film.  
Remind your group that the documentary contains voices from different perspectives, and to be patient and listen to what each person has to say without prejudging them. You may wish to have pen and paper handy for participants to jot down notes or questions they’d like to address after watching this 18-minute section.
5. Watch the first section of *From the Dust* together (00:00 to 18:10). Tell participants to take notes if desired.
6. Sample discussion questions:  
What are your initial reactions to this segment?  
Rick Colling says: “A college student is taught for their entire life by their parents and their pastors that believing in evolution is sort of like denying the Christian faith. So then they come to college and in that setting they learn that evolution is real, it’s part of God’s grand design.”  
Have you or a friend of yours ever experienced this? How should college students react?  
Why is this important?

What reactions do you have to the views presented by Jason Lisle or Terry Mortenson from Answers in Genesis, or by James Gardner, Clay Brinson, or James Denton from Canopy Ministries?

Why are Christians nervous about evolution?

What is the difference between proximate and ultimate explanations? Why is that an important distinction?

What do you think of the following view? *“So, the options are, look, be pre-modern, go live in a cave, believe in God or embrace reality, welcome the new world and be an atheist.”*

What do you think of this idea John Polkinghorne attributes to Charles Kingsley? *“Darwin has shown us that God had done something cleverer than producing a ready-made world with a snap of the divine fingers. God had brought into being a world so full of fruitfulness and potentiality that creatures could be allowed to be themselves and to make themselves.”*

What kinds of truth can we expect to come from science, and what truth originates from other sources?

James Gardner says, *“If you can’t trust Genesis, beginning with the very first verse, the question then becomes, okay, when can you trust it?”*

How do you respond to this? What does it mean to trust Genesis and the Bible?

[More on this topic next week!]

7. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.

**Week 3 “Divinely Inspired”**

1. Worship together or read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation (see Week 1).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading after the meeting): Ernest Lucas “Interpreting Genesis in the 21st Century”*  
[www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/resources/faraday\\_papers/faraday\\_paper\\_11\\_lucas\\_en.pdf](http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/resources/faraday_papers/faraday_paper_11_lucas_en.pdf)  
*Sample discussion questions for Lucas article:*  
*Does anything surprise you from the Lucas article?*  
*Did you learn anything new?*  
*How do you approach Genesis? As Lucas does, or differently?*
3. Watch the second section of *From the Dust* together (18:10 to 28:35). Tell participants to take notes if desired.
4. Sample discussion questions:  
What are your initial reactions to this segment?  
What does Genesis say about the material origins of the universe? Why do we feel this is an important question?  
What is the difference between the Bible being written *to* us versus being written *for* us?  
How can we enter the world of the ancient Hebrews in understanding Genesis 1?  
Does reading science into or out of the Bible damage the meaning of the text? How does the Bible relate to science?
5. Read Genesis 1-2:3 aloud again (if you used printed manuscripts in week 1, use them again). It may be helpful to distribute the reading roles into eight sections among four readers (A-D) as was done in week 1:  
A: Introduction (Gen 1:1-2, “In the beginning...”)  
B: Day 1 (Gen 1:3-5, “And God said, ‘Let there be light...’”)  
C: Day 2 (Gen 1:6-8, “And God said, ‘Let there be a vault...’”)  
D: Day 3 (Gen 1:9-13, “And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky...’”)  
B: Day 4 (Gen 1:14-19, “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault...’”)  
C: Day 5 (Gen 1:20-23, “And God said, ‘Let the water teem...’”)  
D: Day 6 (Gen 1:24-31, “And God said, ‘Let the land produce...’”)  
A: Day 7 (Gen 2:1-3, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed...”)
6. Follow-up questions: *Does the text of Genesis read differently now? How does that make you feel?*
7. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.

**Week 4 “The Conversation”**

1. Worship together or read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation (see Week 1).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading after the meeting):*  
Ian Hutchinson “*Warfare and Wedlock: Redeeming the Faith-Science Relationship*”  
<http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2007/PSCF6-07Hutchinson.pdf>  
*Sample discussion questions for Hutchinson article:*  
*How have you viewed science and faith personally?*  
*How does this article challenge or enrich your views?*  
*What surprises or interests you in this article?*  
*If “science is discovering deep truths about the natural world” and “constructing a picture of our world in which the God of the Bible is not plainly revealed,” why is that so?”*  
*What is the difference between science and scientism?*  
*How good is the analogy of wedlock in describing science and Christian faith?*
3. Watch the third section of *From the Dust* together (28:35 to 52:01). Tell participants to take notes if desired.
4. Sample discussion questions:  
What are your initial reactions to this segment?  
How do you feel about Rick Colling’s story? How do you hope things might be different in the future for people like him? What part can we play in making things better?  
How would you respond to April Maskiewicz’s questions to her class of students: “Is there a difference between saying that God creates each star and each tree, and saying that God creates the process by which each star and each tree is created? ... Is there a point at which this sort of approach takes away from the specialness of creation for you?”  
April said she became an atheist in college because she couldn’t reconcile faith and biology. Do you know anyone like that? What could be done to help students in that situation?  
Michael Lloyd says “Every concept of God is inadequate. Every view of God is too small.” Do you agree? Why or why not?  
What do you think “random” means? How is randomness relevant to the God and evolution conversation?
5. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.

**Week 5 “Truly Human”**

1. Worship together or read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation (see Week 1).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading after the meeting):*  
Dennis Venema “Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Sizes”  
<http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2010/PSCF9-10Venema.pdf>  
*Sample discussion questions on Venema article:*  
What surprised or interested you in this article?  
What do you think of the evidence presented for common descent?  
What do you think of the criticisms presented of common design?  
What implications would a large population of human ancestors have for your faith?  
Does it change the Adam and Eve story or other parts of the Bible for you?  
How do you relate to the terms “ratcheting concordism” and “evolutionary creationism”?
3. Watch the fourth section of *From the Dust* together (52:01 to the end). Tell participants to take notes if desired.
4. Sample discussion questions:  
What are your initial reactions to this segment?  
What is the significance of the final quote from Colossians 1:7 to you in this conversation: “In Him all things hold together”?  
In what ways does Jeff Schloss’s comparison of God using history to gradually achieve his purposes (as in Jesus coming long after Genesis) and the idea of God using evolution to gradually achieve his purposes make sense to you?  
Respond to April Maskiewicz’s questions: “Has your view of how God created the universe, including life, influenced your view of God himself? Could he be the very same God you personally know and love and worship, if his method of creation was in fact different that what you believe it to have been?”  
Terry Mortenson cites evidence that 88% of children raised in evangelical homes leave the church at age 18 and never return. Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) is an evangelical institution. Listening to the PLNU classroom conversation, are you concerned that most of the students in that class will also leave the church? What might be helping them keep their faith?  
What do you think about Peter Enns’s term “a spiritually beneficial unsettledness”?  
Do you agree with Enns that “the purpose of this conversation is actually truth, and connection with God, and not maintaining paradigms or systems of thinking that may not do a good job of handling everything”?  
How would you respond to Rick Colling’s concern: “As individuals or as denominations or as Christian communities, if we are requiring people to deny what they obviously know to be real, how can we seriously expect them to take us seriously on matters of faith? And why should they?”  
Do you agree with N. T. Wright that “the purpose of humankind in the first place was to look after God’s world, to reflect his glory into the world, and to reflect the praises of the world back to God”?
5. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in

your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.

*[Note: The group may want to watch the whole film through in one sitting together at some point. One option would be to do that in Week 6 and delay the next session (“Back to Genesis”) to Week 7.]*

Week 6 “Back to Genesis”

1. Worship together or read a Psalm aloud that rejoices in God’s creation (see Week 1).
2. *Optional reading before the group meets (or for individual reading after the meeting):*  
 Ard Louis “How Does the BioLogos Model Need to Address Concerns Christians Have About the Implications of its Science?”  
[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/louis\\_white\\_paper.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/louis_white_paper.pdf)  
*Sample discussion questions on Louis article:*  
 What surprised or interested you in this article?  
 How does the Leibniz-Newton exchange relate to God’s method of creation (pp. 1-2)?  
 Should an unbiased observer “be able to use science to find unambiguous evidence for God’s existence” (p. 2)?  
 What is the difference between mechanism and meaning? Between natural laws and miracles?  
 How are the two different descriptions of why the kettle is boiling helpful for the consideration of mechanism and meaning (pp. 7-8)?  
 Discuss the difference between the Dawkins and Noble quotes on page 12.  
 Discuss the difference between the Gould and Morris quotes on pages 12-13.  
 Why are “evolution”, “creation”, and “random” potentially loaded words?
3. Consider printing a manuscript of Genesis 1-2:3 for each member of your group, using a common translation such as NIV or NRSV. If desired, omit the chapter and verse numbers, as they are not part of the original text and may distract the reader. Double-spacing the document may make it easier for people to highlight and annotate their manuscript (a recommended practice for a Bible study).
4. Read Genesis 1-3 aloud. If desired, distribute the reading roles among the group. For example, use the same roles as week 1 and 3 for Genesis 1-2:3. After that, separate roles could be assigned for the narrator, God’s voice, Adam, Eve, and the serpent.
5. Sample discussion questions:  
 What do you feel are the central messages of the passage?  
 Does anything new stand out to you?  
 What new questions does the passage raise for you in light of our past discussions?  
 Does the passage make you think differently about God? About what it means to be human?
6. Ask members whether they would be interested in additional exploration on topics of faith and science as a group. Recommended resources include:
  - \* <http://biologos.org/blog/a-leap-of-truth-the-fall> (7 min clip, could be watched now)
  - \* <http://biologos.org/blog/a-leap-of-truth-pauls-adam> (5 min clip, could be watched now)
  - \* Denis Alexander “Models for Relating Science and Religion” (Faraday Paper #3)  
<http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/Papers.php>
  - \* Dennis Venema “From Intelligent Design to BioLogos”  
[http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/venema\\_id\\_to\\_biologos.pdf](http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/venema_id_to_biologos.pdf)
  - \* Denis Lamoureux “Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution”  
[http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Lamoureux\\_Scholarly\\_Essay.pdf](http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Lamoureux_Scholarly_Essay.pdf)
  - \* R. J. Berry “Creation and Evolution Not Creation or Evolution” (Faraday Paper #12)  
<http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/Papers.php>

- \* various blog posts at <http://www.biologos.org>
- \* Ruth Bancewicz's Science and Belief blog: <http://scienceandbelief.wordpress.com/>
- \* ASA website, especially: <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/origins/index.html>
- \* *From the Dust* bonus footage: <http://www.fromthedustmovie.org>
- \* John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*
- \* Darrel Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science*
- \* Karl Giberson and Francis Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith*
- \* Daniel Harrell, *Nature's Witness*
- \* Ruth Bancewicz, ed., *Test of Faith: Spiritual Journeys with Scientists*
- \* *Test of Faith* documentary film: <http://www.testoffaith.com>
- \* any other recommended resources at <http://www.biologos.org>

7. As appropriate for your group, close the meeting in prayer. Praise God for his awesome nature, and how amazing his creation is. Pray for a spirit of unity, humility, and openness in your group as you continue the study in future weeks. Pray through any issues that arose in your discussion, and address any personal prayer requests (joys or concerns) that group members may have shared.
8. Consider asking your group whether some of them would want to lead (or co-lead) a similar group for other friends. Ask them what would be helpful to facilitate other discussion groups (e.g., a *From the Dust* DVD, this study guide, a co-leader, consultation with you). This could be a good way for them to continue learning, to share their excitement with others, and to feel that they are making a difference.