



CHOOSE

Who Are We?

Like most peoples, the people of Israel wondered who we humans are, where we come from, and where we are going.

In the first book of the bible, called Genesis, the people of Israel express their faith that we come from God. The word *Genesis* means *origins*.

At our beginning Genesis pictures God as Spirit or wind, moving over the deep like a mother bird hovering over a nest.

“In the beginning when God made the heaven and the earth, the earth was formless and empty and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep” (Genesis 1.1-2).

The word *ruah* in Hebrew means both *spirit* and *wind*. Like wind, the Spirit is invisible, powerful, and free to move anywhere. Genesis pictures the Spirit of God moving like an invisible wind over the deep of chaos, stirring nothingness into being.

Then in the Genesis story God begins to speak. Creator God speaks each day for six days, calling light, sky, sea and dry land, plants, sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, and lastly humans into being. Each day God declares these new creatures good. On the seventh day God rests from all the work of creation.



Ansgar Holmberg

Scientists today tell a creation story that begins with a big bang rather than the Spirit stirring the deep. Our cosmos unfolds over 13.8 billion years rather than six days. Our genes hold the memory of this whole, slow unfolding of life, in which we humans become conscious beings who ask, “Who are we?”

In both the biblical story and the scientific story, we live in a long, evolving history of God’s creative and sustaining love.

The sacrament of confirmation seals us with the gift of the holy, creative Spirit of God.

Close your eyes, and feel your pulse beat. Breathe in deeply. Breathe out. Remember a time when you felt glad to live, move, and have being—glad to be alive. Describe it to a partner.

**In the beginning
God created
the heavens and
the earth.
The earth was
a formless void,
and darkness
covered the face
of the deep.
The Spirit of God
hovered
over the waters.**

Genesis 1.1-2





Life Is a Love Plan

The Lord God shaped a human from the earth and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

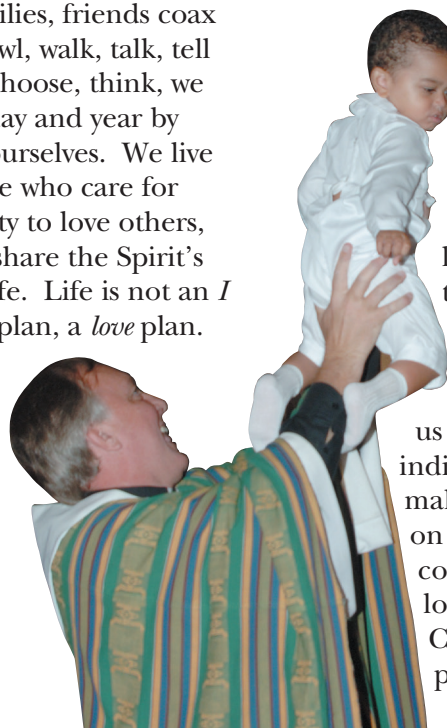
Genesis 2.7

At birth each of us breathes, cries, and takes a first cross-eyed stare at the world. The doctor cuts the umbilical cord, and from that moment we are on our own. No one will be just like us. Each of us is special. Each of us will be free to choose and act, to shape our lives, to go for the gold, to make a difference.

Life is more than an *I* plan. If, as infants, no one surrounds us with love and care, we will die. Parents or someone who chooses us specially must feed us, rock us, change and bathe us, call us by name, and sing us to sleep if we are to flourish. We learn to recognize the faces of those who keep coming to care for us. We smile at their smiles and respond to the name they call us.

As parents, families, friends coax us to creep, crawl, walk, talk, tell stories, laugh, choose, think, we unfold day by day and year by year fully into ourselves. We live because of those who care for us. In our ability to love others, human beings share the Spirit's power to give life. Life is not an *I* plan. It is a *we* plan, a *love* plan.

Each of us is born not only into the love of those who care for us but also into their faith.



When parents ask the Church to baptize a child, they promise to share with this child the faith they share with the Christian community.

Just as families coax us to walk and talk, the Christian community with our parents awakens us to our existence in God. At baptism the community welcomes us as new members and professes its faith in God, the Source of all that is, the Son who becomes one of us, and the Spirit who gives us life in every breath.

At our baptism a priest or deacon calls us by name and baptizes us, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We become children of God.

As children of God we share the life of Father, Son, and Spirit—the life of three persons in one love. The Spirit is the love between Father and Son. The Spirit acts in us to urge us beyond our individual selves into making community on earth like the community of love that is God. Christian life is a *we* plan, a *love* plan.

Who are the people who have called me forth to

walk? _____

talk? _____

ride a bike? _____

pray? _____

participate in the life of my parish? _____

Who gives me my reasons for wanting to belong actively to my parish community?

What if I imagine my life as six days of creation? What happens on day one, day two...? . . .?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

We Can Choose

God makes us freely out of love and makes us free and able to love in return. We are

made in God's image. We can remember and think, speak and laugh, choose and plan, befriend and support. But we are also free. We can forget God. We can harm others and ourselves. We can live off the air and water of Earth without sustaining it. We can live off the families who love us without returning their love.

Genesis 3 tells a story about how the first man and woman discover they are free. The man and woman live in a garden God has made for them to cultivate. God tells them not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.

A sly serpent suggests to the woman that she sample the fruit on the tree. "The rule is to prevent you from becoming like God, knowing good and evil," says the serpent. The fruit looks delicious. Becoming wise like God seems a good thing, so the woman and man eat the fruit.

As their punishment for breaking God's rule, they must leave the garden. They have eaten

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3.6



Schultz took the dog's paws in his hands and danced with him, but he noticed the dog didn't like to stay upright too long. It hurt its hind legs.

The next day Schultz couldn't resist keeping the dog upright until it yelped. Day after day he kept the dog on its hind legs until finally it lay still and cowered when he got home, hoping he would not hurt it.

William Schultz became executive director of Amnesty International, a human rights organization founded to protect prisoners from cruel and harsh punishments in prison. "It is impossible to separate good people from evil people," he says. "The capacity for cruelty is in all of us. Why was I cruel to the dog for no reason?"

Human beings can choose. Each of us is free to be responsible and free to be foolish, free to hurt and free to heal, free to create and free to destroy.

from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They must learn from experience what gives life and what destroys life. The story of the man and woman eating the fruit tells us everyone is free and must learn what is good and what is evil.

As a boy William Schultz got an amazing new dog. To welcome him home from school, the dog stood on its hind legs and danced in delight.

Give your own examples of using your freedom to be cruel to an animal or mean to a person.

Give your own examples of using your freedom to act with love toward an animal or toward another person.



Photos Courtesy of Bobbie Gottschalk

Free to harm or to love

Choices

Describe choices you have made this week in each category. Write these choices on the arrows. Where do the choices take you?

EATING _____

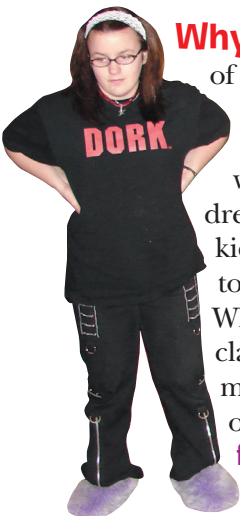
EXERCISE _____

STUDY _____

FRIENDS _____

FAMILY _____

FUN _____



Why make fun of a classmate's clothes? Why drop a friend who doesn't dress like the cool kids we want to hang with? Why phone a classmate to make fun of him or her? **We are free to harm one another.**



Why talk to a classmate others don't bother with? Why organize a food drive? Why stand by a friend when others make fun of him or her? **We are free to love one another. We have a capacity for compassion, for putting ourselves in others' places.**



Why recycle? Why eat simply? Why learn about needs in our world? **We have a capacity to participate in God's work. We have a capacity to give life.**

In confirmation the bishop extends his hands and prays that each Christian receive the gifts of the Spirit. The bishop marks each person on the forehead with holy oil to seal him or her with the Holy Spirit. This seal marks Christians as persons committed to use their freedom to love God, their neighbors, and themselves as Jesus taught.

In the ten commandments God calls the people of Israel to be a covenant community that worships God and respects one another. Jesus teaches both these commandments and his own. Read Jesus' teachings below.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12.29-31

If I, your Lord and master, have washed your feet, so you ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13.14

Love one another as I have loved you.

John 13.34

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Matthew 7.12

What you do for the least of my brethren, you do for me.

Matthew 25.45

Forgive seventy times seven.

Matthew 18.23

Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.

Luke 6.27

Do

Don't

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What does Jesus teach us about how to live in relationship with one another and with God? Write on the lines verbs that state do's and don'ts.