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LIVING YOUR FAITH

IN A MESSED UP

WORLD

**A LOOK AT
THE CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONY**

JANE VOGEL & MARY SYTSMAN

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Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Jane Vogel and Mary Sytsma for writing and pilot-testing this course. Mary has taught English at the high school and college levels. She has served with Jane Vogel as a volunteer youth worker at Wheaton (Illinois) Christian Reformed Church for many years. Jane completed her Master's degree in church education at Calvin Theological Seminary and has since served as a full-time church staff member, a writer of youth ministry resources, and a volunteer youth leader.

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Session 1

CT Paragraphs 1-6

Preamble

1. As followers of Jesus Christ,
living in this world—
which some seek to control,
and others view with despair—
we declare with joy and trust:
Our world belongs to God!

For God's ownership of all things, see Psalm 24:1 (quoted in 1 Cor. 10:26); Job 41:11; and Deuteronomy 10:14. That this is also "our world"—given to the human race to keep and care for—is one of the themes of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2.

2. From the beginning,
through all the crises of our times,
until the kingdom fully comes,
God keeps covenant forever:
Our world belongs to God!
God is King: Let the earth be glad!
Christ is victor: his rule has begun!
The Spirit is at work: creation is renewed!
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

For God's faithfulness, see, among many passages, Psalm 89, 117, 145; Romans 8:31-39; and Hebrews 10:23. For the victory of God in Christ and the rule of Christ, see 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Philippians 2:9-11; and Revelation 1:13-18. For the Spirit's work renewing creation, see Genesis 1 and Romans 8.

3. Still, despair and rebellious pride fill the earth:
some, crushed by failure
or broken by pain,
give up on life and hope and God;
others, shaken,
but still hoping for human triumph,
work feverishly to realize their dreams.
As believers in God,
we also struggle with the spirits of this age,
resisting them in the power of the Spirit,
testing them by God's sure Word.

Psalm 2 expresses the rebellious spirit of the human race. See also Romans 1-3. Ephesians 6:10-17 describes the struggle of believers with the spirits of the age. On testing the spirits, see 1 John 4.

Psalm 142 (The Message)

I cry out loudly to God,
loudly I plead with God for mercy.

I spill out all my complaints before him,
and spell out my troubles in detail:

“As I sink in despair, my spirit ebbing away,
you know how I’m feeling,

Know the danger I’m in,
the traps hidden in my path.

Look right, look left—

there’s not a soul who cares what happens!

I’m up against it, with no exit—

bereft, left alone.

I cry out, God, call out:

‘You’re my last chance, my only hope for life!’

Oh listen, please listen;

I’ve never been this low.

Rescue me from those who are hunting me down;

I’m no match for them.

Get me out of this dungeon

so I can thank you in public.

Your people will form a circle around me

and you’ll bring me showers of blessing!”

4. Our world, fallen into sin,
has lost its first goodness,
but God has not abandoned the work of his hands:
our Maker preserves this world,
sending seasons, sun, and rain,
upholding all creatures,
renewing the earth,
promising a Savior,
guiding all things to their purpose.

See Genesis 3; 9:8-16; Psalm 104, especially verse 30; Matthew 5:45; and Acts 14:17. For the promises of a Savior, see Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 11:1-5; 42:1-7, 53; and Micah 5:2.

5. God holds this world
with fierce love.
Keeping his promise,
he sends Jesus into the world,
pours out the Holy Spirit,
and announces the good news:
sinners who repent and believe in Jesus
live anew as members of the family of God—
the firstfruits of a new creation.

For God's fierce love, see Hosea 11, especially verses 10-11. For statements of the gospel message, see John 3:1-21; Acts 2:36-39; Romans 10:7-11; and Ephesians 2:1-10. For "firstfruits," see Leviticus 23:9-14 and James 1:18.

Things I wonder about...

Psalm 119:169-176

(The Message)

Let my cry come right into your presence, God;
provide me with the insight that comes only
from your Word.

Give my request your personal attention,
rescue me on the terms of your promise.

Let praise cascade off my lips;
after all, you've taught me the truth about life!

And let your promises ring from my tongue;
every order you've given is right.

Put your hand out and steady me
since I've chosen to live by your counsel.

I'm homesick, God, for your salvation;

I love it when you show yourself!

Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well,
use your decrees to put iron in my soul.

And should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek
me!

I'll recognize the sound of your voice.



6. We rejoice in the goodness of God,
renounce the works of darkness,
and dedicate ourselves to holy living.
As covenant partners,
set free for joyful obedience,
we offer our hearts and lives
to do God's work in the world.
With tempered impatience,
eager to see injustice ended,
we expect the Day of the Lord.
We are confident
that the light
which shines in the present darkness
will fill the earth
when Christ appears.

Come, Lord Jesus.
Our world belongs to you.

Among the texts referenced in this paragraph, see Matthew 5:17-20, 48; John 1:1-5, 9-13; 3:19-21; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:11; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2:7-11; and Revelation 22:20.

reflections



journaling options

1. Write a “diamond poem” by filling in words or phrases from the Contemporary Testimony in the pattern below, one word per blank.

Despair

Our world belongs to God!

Hope

2. Draw or doodle a picture that illustrates the message of these paragraphs of the Contemporary Testimony.

3. Write a brief summary of your worldview—whether or not you agree with the Contemporary Testimony. Feel free to use song lyrics.