FOUNDATIONS · COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY · GENESIS 9

The Covenant of Grace

A guided conversation from the November 8, 2026 sermon by Kent Keller

SUMMARY

Week nine of Foundations opens the world on the far side of the flood, and Kent Keller read Genesis 9 as the founding charter of God's covenant with Noah — a pledge about the kind of world He hands us. Kent gave it four marks. The first is blessing: before a single instruction about surviving a scoured planet, "God blessed Noah and his sons," reissuing the creation mandate — be fruitful and multiply — as sheer grace over a new beginning. God still wants His covenant people filling the world He loves rather than retreating from it in fear.

The second mark is order. The seasons that "always follow in their turn," the orderliness written into the universe — the thing Kent traced from Galileo to Isaac Newton to Stephen Hawking — is God's fingerprint, the lawful design that let modern science get off the ground at all. Into that ordered world God sets Noah as a steward: the animals are given for food and use, but "into your hand they are delivered" is the language of a trust, and we answer to God for how we manage His creation.

The third mark is justice. Kent stopped on a question most of us never ask: where did we ever get the idea that life is supposed to be fair? This is the only world we know, and it runs on injustice — yet something in us rebels at cruelty. "We get it from God," Kent said. He read Genesis 9:6 as a chiasm, an X-pattern that means pay attention: to take a human life wantonly is to assault the One whose image that person bears. The dignity of every image-bearer — the victim and the hard-to-honor person in front of you alike — is rooted right here.

The fourth mark is hope, and that is where the rainbow comes in. The Hebrew word is a warrior's bow; when a soldier came home at peace he would unstring it and hang it over his door so everyone knew the fighting was done. God hangs His bow in the clouds to say, "I'm no longer at war with my creation." And it points past itself to a sign only God could give — "this one's shaped like a cross." There the Son of God took upon Himself the curses of every covenant we had broken, and in His own blood satisfied the judgment of God, so the peace declared to Noah was made unbreakable in Christ.

PRAYER OPENING PRAYER

> *Father, before we study a word, remind us what kind of God You are — the One who meets a ruined world with blessing, orders it so we can trust it, defends the dignity of every person in it, and hangs up His bow to make peace. Quiet the part of us still bracing for Your wrath. Open our eyes to the grace running through this whole chapter, from Your first word of blessing to the cross the rainbow points toward. Amen.*

START ICE BREAKER

A rainbow after a storm makes almost everyone stop and look up. Tell us about a small, ordinary sign — in nature or in a hard season — that once reminded you God had not forgotten you.

SCRIPTURE KEY SCRIPTURES

GENESIS 9:1 (ESV)

Genesis 9:1 (ESV) And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

GENESIS 9:2-3 (ESV)

Genesis 9:2-3 (ESV) The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

GENESIS 9:6 (ESV)

Genesis 9:6 (ESV) "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

GENESIS 9:12-13 (ESV)

Genesis 9:12-13 (ESV) And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

GENESIS 9:16 (ESV)

Genesis 9:16 (ESV) When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

DISCUSS DISCUSSION

01 HE BLESSED THEM FIRST

Read Genesis 9:1. The first word God speaks to a world washed clean is not warning but blessing — "And God blessed Noah and his sons" — before a single rule about surviving it. Kent said God still wants His covenant people filling the world He loves rather than retreating from it in fear. Where are you living as if you first have to earn God's favor, instead of starting the day from the blessing He has already spoken over you?

02 A WORLD YOU CAN COUNT ON

Read Genesis 9:2-3. Kent called order the second mark of the world God gives — the seasons that always follow in their turn, the ordered universe that runs from Galileo to Hawking. Into that world God hands Noah the animals, but "into your hand they are delivered" is the language of a steward who answers to God, not an owner. What has God placed into your hand this week, and are you managing it as its owner or as someone who will answer to Him for it?

03 WHERE DID WE GET THE IDEA IT SHOULD BE FAIR?

Read Genesis 9:6. Kent asked where we ever got the idea that life is supposed to be fair, when the only world we know runs on injustice — and his answer was, "We get it from God." He read the verse as a chiasm, God's way of saying pay attention: to take a human life wantonly is to assault the One whose image that person bears. Who is the one person you are most tempted to treat as less than an image-bearer — and how would remembering whose image they carry change the way you speak to them?

04 THE SIGN GOD KEEPS FOR HIMSELF

God says the rainbow is a sign for himself — "I will see it and remember." Why do you think God gave himself the reminder instead of giving one to us?

05 THE WARRIOR'S BOW, UNSTRUNG

Read Genesis 9:12-13. Kent explained that the Hebrew word is a warrior's bow; when a soldier came home at peace he would unstring it and hang it over his door so everyone knew the war was over. God hangs His bow in the clouds to say, "I'm no longer at war with my creation." Where are you still half-expecting God to be at war with you — bracing for His wrath when the clouds gather — instead of living under the peace He has already declared?

06 A SIGN SHAPED LIKE A CROSS

Kent followed the rainbow past the clouds to "another covenant sign that only God could give — this one's shaped like a cross," where the Son of God took on Himself the curses of every covenant we had broken and satisfied God's judgment in His own blood. The flood could cleanse the earth but never the human heart; the cross could. How does it change the way you face your own sin this week to know your peace with God rests on His blood, not on your record?

07 FILL THE WORLD, DON'T RETREAT FROM IT

Read Genesis 9:1 again — "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Kent heard in it a call for God's people to move toward the world He loves rather than hide from it. Where is fear quietly pulling you to retreat — from a relationship, a calling, a hard place — and what would it look like this week to step toward it instead, trusting the God who blessed you first?

08 HIS FINGERPRINT ON THE WORLD

Kent pointed to the sheer orderliness of creation — the design that even Hawking admitted science can describe but cannot explain the reason for — as God's fingerprint on everything. Where have you stopped noticing the order and beauty around you and begun treating the world as ordinary or accidental? What is one place this week you could look again and let it move you to worship?

APPLY THIS WEEK

Pick one. Do it before you meet again.

1. **Start the day from the blessing** One morning this week, before you check a task or a phone, say out loud: "God blessed Noah first — and He has blessed me." Then name one thing you were about to try to earn from God and receive it instead as already given. Tell one person in this group what it was.
2. **Honor one hard-to-honor image-bearer** Name the one person you are most tempted to treat as disposable — the critic, the stranger, the one whose politics you can't stand. Do one concrete thing this week that treats them as made in God's image: a kind word, a real conversation, a prayer by name.

3 **Look for the bow** The next time the clouds gather over your week — bad news, a hard day — stop and remember God has already hung up His bow. Write down the worry, and underneath it write, "He is not at war with me." Come back ready to say what changed.

Come back next week ready to say what happened, not what you intended.

REMEMBER REMEMBER

- God blesses first. His opening word to a ruined world is blessing, not warning — you start the day from His favor, not from your record.
- The world is ordered, and you are a steward in it. What God hands into your care is a trust you answer to Him for, managed gently, never as if it were yours to use up.
- Every person bears God's image. Our very sense that life should be fair comes from Him — and to dismiss anyone is to forget whose likeness they carry.
- God hung up His bow. The warrior's weapon is unstrung over the door — He is no longer at war with His creation — and the sign points to a cross, where His peace was made unbreakable in the blood of Christ.

Genesis 9 is God's charter for the world He hands us — blessing, order, justice, and hope — and it lands at the rainbow: a warrior's bow unstrung to say He is no longer at war with us, pointing past itself to a cross where that peace was sealed forever in the blood of Christ.

PRAYER CLOSING PRAYER

> *Father, thank You for the kind of world You hand us — blessed, ordered, dignified, and held in hope. Thank You that You hung up Your bow and made peace with a creation You could have left in ruins, and that the rainbow pointed all along to a cross. Teach us to start from Your blessing, to steward what You trust us with, to honor Your image in every face, and to stop bracing for a war You have already ended. We rest in the blood of Christ, where Your peace was made unbreakable. Amen.*

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