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West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church

presents

# 100 Year Flood

BIBLE STUDY & VIDEO SERIES

By Rev. Ryan Grace





# A Word from the Director

In the summer of 2021, the people of Detroit were struck by a “100 Year Flood.”

The flood of 2021 was the city’s 2nd historic flood in just 7 years. During the night, an electric water pump failed in Detroit’s historic Jefferson Chalmers District, which contributed to the severity of the disaster. By morning, thousands of homes were flooded with a combination of storm and sewer water.

As a United Methodist pastor, I traveled to Detroit to witness the devastation firsthand. My eyes scanned a homeowner’s basement, and I tried to take it in: scattered items, patches of mold, sewer water standing in a small sink by the wall. Lives had been shattered by thousands of dollars of destroyed possessions, as well as homes that were unsafe to live in for months before the sewer backups could be disinfected.

While there, I filmed a United Methodist Early Response Team as they “mucked out” the house. Along with my wife - who coordinates disaster response teams for the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church - I spoke to local leaders to learn what steps they are taking to make the Motor City more resilient to future floods. And, I searched for examples of how the people of Detroit are working to build a more sustainable future.

During my time up north, the Bible story that weighed on my mind was the apocalyptic flood in Noah and the Ark. This 4-Session Bible Study invites you to read Noah’s story with new eyes; to examine the United Methodist Church’s teachings on Global Climate Stewardship; to explore the impact even one disaster can have on individual lives; and, to celebrate people who are coming up with creative ways to care for God’s Creation. More than anything, it is a call to recognize the role people are playing in the severe weather of our time...and what we can do to change it.

**REV. RYAN GRACE**  
Videographer & Director



Session 1:

# The Floods of Climate Change

Floods. Hurricanes. Droughts. Wildfires. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of severe weather events around the world. These days, just watching the news can feel apocalyptic, as though the sky is falling around us. The devastation caused by such events often prompts people to ask: Why does God allow disasters to happen when they cause so much human suffering?



## THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH VIOLENCE

The story of Noah describes a flood that covers the whole world - an apocalyptic global disaster. Biblical scholars debate whether Noah and the Ark is about a real flood that actually took place, or a general reflection on why God would allow natural disasters such as floods to occur. Whether you read this story as history or myth, it definitely raises the question: Does God cause human suffering for no reason, or do people bring suffering on themselves?

Read Genesis 6:5-8

### BIBLE NOTE:

There are two different explanations given for the Great Flood in Genesis. Genesis 6:5 attributes it to the "wickedness of humankind," while Genesis 6:13 indicates it is because "the earth is filled with violence." Both versions suggest humans brought the suffering on themselves.

### Discuss

- Do you believe people brought the Great Flood of Noah on themselves? If so, how?



## Is it God's fault?

Today, at first glance, the increasing severity of disasters around the world might look like the wrath of God. But scientists say the human suffering caused by these storms is not God's fault—by changing the climate of our planet, we are bringing this destruction on ourselves. The global scientific community overwhelmingly agrees that humans are driving climate change, which is creating “unnatural” disasters as earth's warming temperatures cause extreme weather events to become more common and more severe. The United Methodist Church does not deny the reality of climate change.

- **Read** the following excerpt from the United Methodist Social Principles, paragraph 160, on Global Climate Stewardship:
  - “We acknowledge the global impact of humanity's disregard for God's creation. Rampant industrialization and the corresponding increase in the use of fossil fuels have led to a buildup of pollutants in the earth's atmosphere.”
- **Watch** *The Floods of Climate Change*.
  - According to Shana, how are people bringing weather disasters on themselves?
- **Discuss**
  - How does climate change stem from “humanity's disregard for God's creation”?

## A unique ministry...


Climate change can feel overwhelming, like a global apocalypse no one can do anything about. But, because human action is driving the problem, changing our actions can help to solve it. In Detroit, Cass Community Social Services - a United Methodist non-profit organization - is working to care for God's Creation as well as the people of Detroit. They have constructed a small community of tiny homes, which provide environmentally sustainable housing to people who live in poverty. We met with Rev. Faith Fowler, the Executive Director of Cass, to learn more about the project.

>> **Watch *Tiny Homes***

### Discuss

- Compared to larger houses powered by fossil fuels, what makes Cass's Tiny Homes more sustainable for the environment? For the finances of their owners? For the community?





Why do you believe God is allowing so many climate disasters to occur?

Would you say disasters are the wrath of God or the result of natural processes?

Do you believe climate change is caused by human action?

What changes would you be willing to make to help prevent future floods like the one that hit Detroit in 2021?



## Did You Know?

Detroit's "100 Year Flood" of 2021 was the city's 2nd historic flood in just 7 years.

## Learn More...

- Read all of Genesis 6:1-12 to gain more context for the story.
- Learn more about the Tiny Homes project at [www.casscommunity.org](http://www.casscommunity.org).
- Check out the Energy section from *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably* to get ideas about practical ways to reduce your use of fossil fuels.
  - What is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?



## Footprint Fact

The average temperature in Detroit has gone up over 2 degrees due to climate change.





## Session 2:

# The Flood of 2021

On June 25, 2021, the residents of Detroit went to bed like any other night. The next morning, thousands of people awoke to discover their basements had flooded with up to 8 feet of stormwater and sewage. Furniture was destroyed. Washers and dryers were overturned. Family heirlooms had been ruined. Lives were disrupted as people were forced to move out of homes until they could be decontaminated - a process that took months for some residents. Across the country, United Methodists began to wonder: What could we do to help Detroiters rebuild their lives?



## LIVES MUST BE REBUILT

The rebuilding of lives after a disaster is a central theme in the story of Noah. In fact, the ark itself is a symbol of God's desire for lives to be rebuilt once the flood subsides.

### Read Genesis 6:13-22

#### BIBLE NOTE:

The word "ark" is not a common word for a boat. Beyond the story of Noah, the word is only used in one other story throughout the entire Bible. The other reference is also to a boat that was used to preserve life: the basket Moses gets placed in to save his life from Pharaoh.

### Discuss

- Why does God try to preserve human life in the story of Noah?
- Do you believe God wants people to rebuild their lives after disasters today?
- Noah's role in rebuilding lives was to build the ark, then gather both people and animals onto it. What is our role in rebuilding lives after disasters?



## What is our role?

The United Methodist Church has a global reputation for helping people rebuild their lives after disasters. From Early Response Teams to Volunteers in Mission, United Methodist volunteers are often the first to a disaster scene and the last to leave, and witness firsthand the damage caused by events such as floods.

- **Read** the following excerpt from the United Methodist Social Principles, paragraph 160, on Global Climate Stewardship:
  - "The United Methodist Church acknowledges that 'Greenhouse gas' emissions threaten to alter dramatically the earth's climate for generations to come with severe environmental, economic, and social implications."
- **Watch** *The Flood of 2021*.
  - In Detroit, what impact did the flood of 2021 have on the environment? On the personal finances of homeowners? On the community?
- **Discuss**
  - What are some of the environmental, economic, and social implications of the increasing number of disasters being caused by climate change?

### A different perspective...

It is one thing to hear about a disaster like a flood on the news—it is another thing to witness the devastation caused by floods firsthand. In Detroit, we followed a United Methodist Early Response Team on its mission to “muck out” basements following the Flood of 2021.

>> **Watch** *Early Response Team*

#### **Discuss**

- Why do you think it is important for Christians to help people rebuild their lives after a disaster?



An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Detroit, Michigan, featuring several prominent skyscrapers and a dense urban landscape. Three circular text overlays are positioned over the image: a dark blue circle in the upper left, a teal circle in the middle right, and a dark brown circle in the lower left. The sky is overcast with light clouds.

HAVE YOU EVER  
EXPERIENCED THE  
DAMAGE CAUSED BY A  
FLOOD?

HOW DO CLIMATE  
DISASTERS IMPACT  
THE ENVIRONMENT?  
PERSONAL FINANCES?  
COMMUNITIES?

WHAT CAN YOU DO  
TO HELP PEOPLE  
REBUILD THEIR LIVES  
AFTER EVENTS LIKE  
FLOODS?



## Did You Know?

The United Methodist Church deploys hundreds of ERT and VIM long-term recovery teams each year.

## Learn More...

- Read all of Genesis 6:1 - 7:24 to gain more context for the story.
- Learn about a local Detroit organization doing disaster response work in Jefferson-Chalmers area: [www.d4drg.org](http://www.d4drg.org)
- Check out the Early Response Team ([www.westohioumc.org/ERT](http://www.westohioumc.org/ERT)) and Volunteers in Mission ([www.westohioumc.org/VIM](http://www.westohioumc.org/VIM)) web pages on the West Ohio website.
  - Are you interested in being trained as an ERT or VIM Team Leader? If so, contact [mgrace@wocumc.org](mailto:mgrace@wocumc.org).



## Footprint Fact

In 2021, climate-related disasters caused over \$145 billion of damage.





## Session 3:

# A Flood of Aging Infrastructure

When you visit a city after a flood, you notice the signs of life: standing on rain-soaked streets that have since turned dry; volunteer teams cleaning out basements; piles of trash by the side of the road waiting to be collected while people make small steps to move forward and rebuild their lives. There is a peculiar calm - a stillness to the air in a place where disaster has come and gone. You look around and wonder: What are the signs that life is beginning to return to “normal?”



## FINDING SIGNS OF LIFE

There may be no such thing as a return to “normal” life after an event like the flood described in the Bible. Nevertheless, there are signs of life described in the story.

### Read Genesis 8:1-12

#### BIBLE NOTE:

In Genesis 8:1, the reference to God making the wind blow echoes Genesis 1:2. Just as God created the world at the beginning of all things, God is working to re-create the world after the cataclysmic flood.



#### Did You Know?

A single tree can absorb 500 to 1,000 gallons of stormwater each year.

### Discuss

- What are the signs that life is returning to the world?
- What does the branch from the olive tree mean?
- Do you believe God helps re-create life following disasters?



## Who is impacted most?

In the story of Noah, most of humankind is equally affected by the flood. But today, floods frequently impact different people in very different ways. Specifically, people who live in poverty are more likely to have their lives disrupted by disasters than people who are wealthy.

- **Read** the following excerpt from the United Methodist Social Principles, paragraph 160, on Global Climate Stewardship:
  - “The adverse impacts of global climate change disproportionately affect individuals and nations least responsible for the emissions.”
- **Watch** *A Flood of Aging Infrastructure*.
  - How do climate disasters compound the challenges for people who live in poorer areas with less money to update stormwater infrastructure?
- **Discuss**
  - Is it fair that people who are wealthy experience the floods of climate change differently than people who live in poverty?

Footprint Fact: The U.S. accounts for 14% of global carbon emissions but less than 5% of the world’s population.



## Planting hope...

In Detroit, the stormwater infrastructure for many suburbs withstood the flood of 2021. However, in the city’s historic Jefferson Chalmers District - an area of Detroit that has highly concentrated poverty - an electric pump failed, which contributed to the severity of the disaster. We visited Jefferson Chalmers to help with a volunteer tree planting day, and witnessed how trees have become a sign of life returning to Detroit.

>> **Watch** *Greening of Detroit*

### Discuss

- How does green infrastructure use natural systems to help life return to “normal” in urban areas?





## Learn More...

- Read all of Genesis 8:1-19 to gain more context for the story.
- Discover more about the Greening of Detroit at [www.greeningofdetroit.com](http://www.greeningofdetroit.com)
- Check out the Paper section from *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably* to get ideas about practical ways to protect trees and make the world a greener place.
  - What is one change you would be willing to make in your personal life? In your church? In your community? Are there any other ideas you would add?

## Consider this...

- Have you ever traveled to the site of a flood or disaster? What signs of new life did you see?
- Is it fair for nations and individuals who are wealthy to overuse fossil fuels when their effects are most felt by people and nations that live in poverty?
- Who should pay for the damage caused by climate-driven disasters?
  - The nations who create the most greenhouse gases?
  - The fossil fuel companies who profit from the creation of greenhouse gases?
  - The people who use greenhouse gases?
  - The people whose homes get destroyed by climate change?
  - Why?

Session 4:

## 100 Year Flood

The Flood of 2021 damaged thousands of homes. It was the 2nd historic flood to hit the city in just 7 years, and scientists expect more floods to come in the future. Residents who live in areas of concentrated poverty tended to be more impacted by the storm. So, what does all this mean for the future? Will people change their lives to reduce the likelihood of events like this for their neighbors in Detroit and around the world?



## NOT JUST A RAINBOW

In Sunday School classes, the story of Noah is often said to end on the high note of the rainbow, with God promising to never again flood the entire world. But, the end of Noah is more complicated than that. It ends on not just the promise of God's goodness...but also with the acknowledgment that human nature makes it hard for people to change.

### BIBLE NOTE:

The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church echo Genesis 8:21, stating: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually."



### Did You Know?

Scientists believe the next 10 years will determine whether or not humankind will avoid some of the most devastating effects of climate change.

Read Genesis 8:20-9:17

### Discuss

- According to the Bible, did humankind learn anything from the Great Flood?





# Who are we called to be?

The biblical Christian tradition views human beings as stewards of God's Creation, who are called to care for the earth and each other.

- **Read** the following excerpt from the United Methodist Social Principles, paragraph 160, on The Natural World:
  - "All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it."
- **Watch** *100 Year Flood*.
- **Discuss**
  - How many climate-driven disasters do you think it will take before humankind learns from its mistakes?

## The reality of climate change...

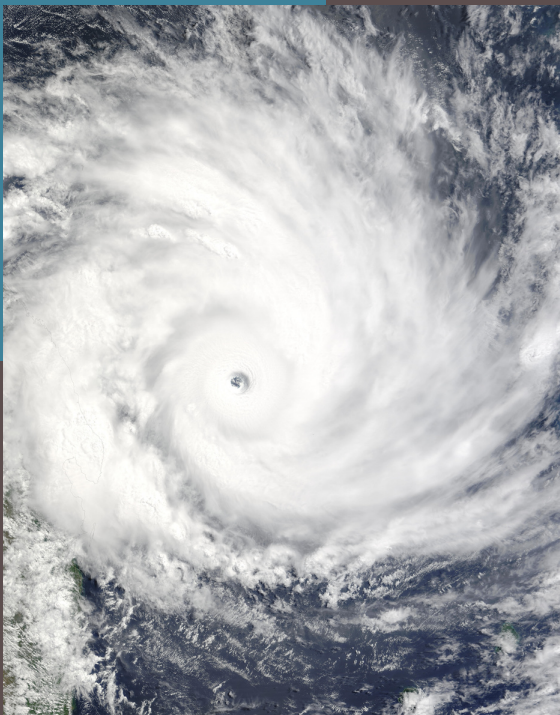
Climate change is not an abstract problem for the future. It is a concrete problem impacting the lives of real people today. Across the globe, the number of disasters occurring each year is on the rise.

### Discuss

- Do you know anyone whose life has been affected by a climate disaster?

Footprint Fact: 71% of millennials in the U.S. consider climate change the most important issue facing our nation.





## Learn More...

- Reread all of Genesis 6:1 - 9:17 to view the story of Noah as a whole.
- Find resources and information from the United Methodist Creation Care ([www.umccreationcare.org](http://www.umccreationcare.org)) and Creation Justice ([www.umcreationjustice.org](http://www.umcreationjustice.org)) networks.
- Check out *A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably* to get ideas about practical ways to practice local sustainability.

## Consider this...

- As our climate changes around us, why do you think so few people connect their own use of fossil fuels to the floods, hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires they see on the news?
- The United Methodist Church is a global leader in responding to disasters after they happen. Yet, many Christians are unwilling to make changes to their lives that could prevent future disasters before they even take place. Why do you think this is?
- Would you be willing to make changes in your life to create a world that is more just, more green, and more sustainable? Changes in your church? Changes in your community?





# RESOURCES

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| RESOURCE  | WEBSITE  |
|---|--|
| 100 Year Flood Videos                           | <a href="http://www.westohioumc.org/floodstudy">www.westohioumc.org/floodstudy</a>         |
| A Non-Expert's Guide to Living More Sustainably | <a href="http://www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy">www.westohioumc.org/footprintstudy</a> |
| 100 Year Flood West Ohio web page               | <a href="http://www.westohioumc.org/100yearflood">www.westohioumc.org/100yearflood</a>     |

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