

CARING FOR CREATION



A Bible Study

Leader's Guide

Creative
Communications
Sample

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Introduction

We are a thoroughly “plugged in” people. Laptops, smartphones, and tablets give us the download on local and global news. We are constantly plugged in to the virtual world of email and social media. Yet there is a problem: Although we are thoroughly connected to cyberspace, we are utterly disconnected from the physical space in which we live. We know cyberculture better than agriculture. We know more about Twitter than the birds twittering about on tree limbs in our backyard. We contemplate the World Wide Web far more often than an actual spider web. We are offline to the wonders of God’s creation.

Though we do not always recognize it, we live amongst creatures with unique capacities, personalities and needs. This study challenges participants to rediscover the wonders of God’s creation and renew their connection to the created world. To help us get back online with creation this study will examine what Scripture teaches about caring for creation. Each session begins by exploring key Scripture verses in context. Then we discuss how these verses might be applied faithfully in our modern context. Each session concludes with a prayer that God might help us reconnect and better care for his creation.

Tips For Using This Study Guide

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand the prayer with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. Have your Bible handy for referencing verses in this study guide. It may also be interesting to have a different translation of Scripture than you are used to using to get a fresh perspective and perhaps broaden your understanding.
4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion.
5. Throughout each session, think about ways in which you could apply these issues about creation to your daily life. The section entitled "Discussion/Application" will help you focus your reflections on this. If there is not time to get to that section, it would be ideal for use in your personal devotional time during the week.
6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning Bible verses to various people in the class to look up and read aloud at the appropriate time, rather than having everyone look up every verse. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from everyone else's, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong.

A Leader's Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish (Code CRL).

SESSION TWO



Crisis in CREATION

Sin and the Land

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, you lovingly formed your creation out of nothing. Although you made it entirely good, your creatures dragged sin into its midst. We thank you for not giving up on your creation, but rather sending a Savior into our midst to do what we could not. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Leader's Guide For Session 2

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Look up the Bible readings and become acquainted with them. If you plan on having members of the group read the Bible readings from their own Bibles, put the citations on note cards to hand out prior to class.

READ: Have someone read the Opening Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

SING OR SPEAK: Sing or speak the hymn in unison.

Hymn

(Tune: Old Hundredth)

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with fear, his praise forth tell;
Come ye before him and rejoice.

The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
Without our aid he did us make;
We are his folk, he doth us feed,
And for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise;
Approach with joy his courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless his name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good;
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
The God whom heaven and earth adore,
From men and from the angel host
Be praise and glory evermore.

Background Information on the Issue

Reaching for that fruit meant that Adam and Eve had overreached their creaturely boundaries. Their actions put them out of bounds and caused them to fall. And when they fell, they fell hard. Yet, their fall impacted more than just themselves: They dragged all of creation down. Death and decay ravaged the land. Change rapidly occurred as order turned to disorder, harmony turned to disharmony, and peace turned to pestilence. Their rebellion metastasized through the entirety of creation. God, however, began to repair creation at the source of the problem: His human creatures!

Topic for Sharing/Icebreaker

Is it better to treat a symptom or to treat the cause of the problem? Which is easier to treat? Which is more effective?

Context Questions

1. Identify how judgment and the land are interconnected. See Genesis 3:17-18, Genesis 7:11-12, and Jeremiah 12 in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, see Matthew 21:19 and Luke 23:44.

READ: Read or have someone read the background information on the issue.

SHARE: Allow participants to share with one another about their thoughts on which is better and more effective: treating the symptom or treating the cause.

Context Questions

1. God's judgment on rebellious human creatures involves dismantling creation. As a result of sin, crops ceased to grow, springs dried up, and the putrid smell of decaying animal carcasses filled the air.

The overstepping of boundaries by God's human creatures wreaked havoc on the land. In Genesis 3:18 we are told that the land will produce mere thorns and thistles where bountiful produce once sprang forth. However, the woes of the land do not end there. In Genesis 7:11-12 we hear of the land being swamped with a watery flood. As the result of sin, the land is described as "a desolate wilderness" in Jeremiah 12.

God's judgment is connected to the land in the Gospels as well. Jesus curses the fig tree (Matthew 21:19) and it withered and died. Darkness filled the land at Jesus' crucifixion (Luke 23:44). Jesus' death was the Day of the Lord, the judgment day about which Zephaniah and the prophets spoke (Zephaniah 1:15). The key point here is to realize that judgment and the land are intimately related.

2. Sin impacts more than just the land. All creatures felt the impact of Adam and Eve's plummet into rebellion. In order to clothe human creatures, garments of animal skin were crafted for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). These garments of skin required creaturely blood to be shed as a result of human sin. Animal sacrifices begin immediately following the onset of sin (Genesis 4). Fear of human creatures is placed onto the hearts of animals as a result of sin (Genesis 9:1-3).

Sin caused an unnatural rift between human creatures and all other creatures. What was intended to be Godly dominion over creatures became ghastly domineering. For instance, Proverbs 12:10 is a concrete example of the creaturely rift (animal abuse) created by sin. Notice the implication of this verse: The wicked do not have regard for the life of animals.

Text Questions

1. In war, the highest-ranking officer often has the highest bounty on his head. It is the same with Satan: The highest-ranking creatures have the highest bounty on their head. God created his human creatures in his own image (Genesis 1:26). This makes humans entirely unique compared to all other creatures. Furthermore, God placed the authority to rule (dominion) into the hands of Adam and Eve, making human creatures veritable representatives of God himself. It is no wonder then why Satan might target God's human creatures—Since he could not attack God directly, attacking God's representative was the closest Satan could get.

We see another example of Satan attacking God's representative in the wilderness temptations of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13). As God in human flesh, it seems natural that Satan would attack Jesus just as he attacked human creatures made in God's image. Nevertheless, there is one massive difference between the temptation of Adam and Eve and that of God's Son—Jesus was faithful to the end!

2. This is one of the great mysteries of life! God, the all-powerful creator of the universe, could have healed his fallen creation in any number of ways. However, he chose to come into human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. This is a mystery indeed!

To be certain, probing the hidden recesses of God's mind is hopeless. However, God has revealed why he went about restoring his fallen creation the way he did. Romans 5:12-17 explains that since human creatures were

2. Identify how sin and creatures are interconnected. See Genesis 3:21, Genesis 4:1-4, Genesis 9:1-3, and Proverbs 12:10.

Text Questions

1. Of all the creatures God created, why might the serpent target God's human creatures specifically?
2. Of all the ways God could have healed his broken creation, why might he have chosen to become a human creature?

For Discussion/Application

1. How are sin and the land still connected today?

2. How are sin and creatures still connected today?

the source of the problem, God himself went to the source to fix the problem. God did not just tend to the symptoms of sin by excusing death and decay; instead, God went to the source of the problem by becoming a human creature himself. Rather than look away from the problem or sidestepping the issue, God rolled up his sleeves and went to work restoring his creation.

For Discussion/Application

1. Although Christ has destroyed sin and its power, the full impact of his work is yet to be realized. Creation is still groaning in the wake of sin. Creation is still awaiting the full restoration of Christ's work.

To be certain, there is nothing natural about what the world calls a "natural disaster." These horrific events are the unnatural consequences of sin. Floods, tornados, droughts and earthquakes are examples of the land reeling in the wake of sin.

Nevertheless, one must be careful not to equate specific sins to catastrophic events. Without God's revelation, we cannot be certain that a disaster is God's judgment for a specific sin. For instance, one should resist saying that a flood is God's judgments on a city for building a new casino. Unless God somehow indicates that the two are connected, we must resist the urge to equate specific sins to specific catastrophic events. However, based on Scripture, one can be certain that there is a loose connection between sin and the land. An example of the

interconnection between God's judgment and the land can be seen in 2 Chronicles 7:11-22. In this text, drought is the direct consequence for idolatry. Similar instances appear in Genesis 7:4-5, Exodus 9:22-24, and Jeremiah 3:2-4. Note how Psalm 147 depicts God's mercy with the land being restored to its original beauty.

2. The destructive power of sin plagues all creatures yet today. Sadly, sin has created an environment in which creatures must battle against other creatures merely to survive.

For instance, a bizarre type of parasitic fungus (*Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*) growing in Thailand reproduces by infecting the brains of carpenter ants. The parasitic fungus turns its carpenter ant victim into a veritable zombie by controlling the movements of its host. Once infected, the ant is forcibly compelled by the parasitic fungus to travel a long distance during the last hours of its life. The fungus forces the infected ant to leave the high canopy of the forest to instead die where the parasite prefers to be, the underside of leaves on the forest floor. Finally, with the ant dead, the fungus spores and blooms forth from the ant's carcass.

Less bizarre, but perhaps closer to home, other instances of sin infecting the lives of creatures can be seen. Animal abuses such as dog fighting, owner neglect, oil spills, or cruel slaughterhouse treatment are all instances of sin plaguing creatures. Furthermore, occurrences of animal attacks on humans are yet another example of the adversity of sin amongst creatures. Ezekiel 5:16-17 and Ezekiel 14:21-22 are instances in which wild beasts are associated with sin and death. Note that the vision of the restored creation in Isaiah 11:6-9 is marked by creaturely harmony

SING OR SPEAK: Sing or speak the hymn in unison.

Hymn

(Tune: Ar Hyd Y Nos)

God, who made the earth,
The air, the sky, the sea,
Who gave the light its birth,
He cares for me.

God, who made the grass,
The flow'r, the fruit, the tree,
The day and night to pass,
He cares for me.

God, who made the sun,
The moon, the stars, is he
Who, when life's clouds come on,
He cares for me.

God, who made all things,
On earth, in air, in sea,
Who if I lean on him,
Will care for me.

When in heav'n's bright land
I all his loved ones see,
I'll sing with that blest band,
"God cared for me."

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, at the sight of Jesus the mountains and trees rejoice! At the sight of Jesus the wolf will lie down with the lamb in harmony. We thank you that you have gone to the source of sin—human creatures—and that you have resolved the problem through your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray this in his name. Amen.

Assignment for Next Week

- Read Luke 3:23-24, 37-38:

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph ... the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

READ: Have someone read the Closing Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

ASSIGN the Bible reading and questions for the next session.

Ask Yourself:

1. Is the genealogy of Jesus mere record-keeping or something more?

2. Why might Luke's Gospel track Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam, the first human creature?

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A Bible Study



This four-week Bible study for the summer or any time of the year looks at the topic of environmentalism from a Christian perspective. Each session in this Bible study includes Bible readings, prayers, hymns, questions, an ice breaker and discussion starters related to God's design for his creation. Topics for each week are:

Session One: Community of Creation

Session Two: Crisis in Creation

Session Three: Cultivation of Creation

Session Four: Culmination of Creation

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