

Leaders,

Congratulations on accepting the challenge of leading a group through *The Great Warming* and the change that it will make on the group’s understanding of the created world. This discussion guide will be easy-to-use and will provide more than enough material for your group to remain engaged and transformed by the end of your time together.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Each section has much more information, discussion questions, and Bible references than you will be able to fit into a single lesson. Hopefully that will give you the flexibility to shape your lesson to best meet the needs of your group. Preparation is important, so please take the time to look over the material beforehand—especially the Scripture—so you can decide how you are going to approach the lesson.
- Each section has an introductory overview which will introduce you to its goal. Don’t feel you need to push your group to a certain conclusion—these are general goals, and aren’t meant to control the discussion.
- This movie tends to generate a great deal of discussion, and you or your class may not feel that two lessons provide enough time to address all the issues raised in the movie and discussion guide. There is more than enough material provided in this guide for a third or fourth class on the subject, and so you may want to consider making this a 3 or 4-week course.
- If you’re going to try to tackle most or all the Scripture, consider assigning the different scripture readings to members of your group at the beginning of the lesson. This will save the time of everyone flipping through their Bibles, especially in sections where there are many verses that make one over-arching point.
- Enjoy yourself! We hope this is the beginning of a new era of creation care that permeates your whole congregation—and contributes in a small way to a very large and very real goal: participating in the renewal of God’s good creation.

Week One

1. Leader opens with prayer. Below is a prayer you may use, or create one of your own.

*Creator God,
those who know you, love you
because you are love.
We want to know you more
and to love you more.
We ask for your presence with us
as we discover what is happening to your creation
a creation which is so good.
We are sinful, and we confess to you
that we have contributed to harming what you love.
Forgive us.
Move our hearts that we might
become more like you—the sustainer of us and all of creation.
Be glorified in all we do.
In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Also, consider reading Psalm 104 as a prayer.

2. View the first half of the DVD (stop at the point when William Nitze says: *It is not going to be dollars and cents in the end that is going to move people on this issue, it’s going to be perception that their own short-term selfishness is destroying the world, and that as spiritual beings, they have a duty not to be so selfish.*
3. Ask if there are any initial reactions to the movie, and then move into a discussion of the themes below:

- i. **Enough is enough.** Goal: To discuss our sense of contentment in light of God’s great providence for us. Our environmental crisis has a lot to do with a culture of always wanting more.

The movie began with an image of a clean sky being more and more filled with smoke from smoke stacks. It said, “*We have been so successful that our factories, farms and cities have transformed Earth’s surface... and altered our atmosphere. The human legacy is measured in gaseous fumes – billions of tons of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and other compounds, pumped into what used to be a clear blue sky.*”

Clearly we can see that human progress—“success,” consumerism, technology—has largely shaped this problem.

1. Read 1 Tim 6:6, then reflect on this notion of contentment.
2. Think about the DVD—specifically the scene which discusses the use of water in Southern California. Read this quote, “*...in the residential areas of Southern California 55% of the water we use is used outside of the home, not inside, irrigation of yards, shrubs, plants, and so on, and much of it’s overuse, it’s causing problems even with runoff. So, we’re pushing a major educational program on, on conservation, if we could reduce the outside use of water, the needless outside use of water by fifty percent, we’ve saved twenty-five percent of our water supply overnight,*”

If we began to ration our use of energy—fossil fuels, electricity, water, etc.—what energy uses do you think are necessary and which are expendable in order for you to be content?

3. How does this desire for more than just contentment hinder our contentment?
4. Hinder our seeking God’s kingdom?
5. Hinder our relationships with people?
6. With creation?
7. Consider 1 Cor 10:26. How does this challenge your perception of your right to consume?

(Create some time for personal reflection. If people seem like they want to share their reflections after this exercise, create some space for that—otherwise allow this to be a personal thing.)

On a scale of 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent), how content are you?

Do your consumer choices model this contentment?

Does your work model this contentment?

Does your recreation model this contentment?

What are some things that get in the way of your contentment?

How does that affect you spiritually?

In what ways would becoming more content affect your efforts to care for creation?

- b. **Shalom** Goal: To consider the Biblical notion of shalom, and how our treatment of creation—our sin—has stolen its shalom. If we are truly “seeking first the kingdom of God,” we are working toward restoring this shalom for all creation, not just humans.

When we first were exposed in the movie to the carbon cycle, we saw footage of a pristine Vancouver island rain forest. Here’s a quote from that scene, “Every ecosystem depends on the equilibrium of the elements. This is one of the most sublime – a Vancouver island rain forest – a perfect illustration of the natural balance of growth and decomposition based on carbon: element 6 on the periodic table - element 1 in the laboratory of life.”

This scene—which demonstrated the way carbon *should* function as opposed to the role it *now* plays, we see an illustration of what was once a peaceful, well-balanced situation being spun out of control by human hands.

Consider this “way it ought to be” in light of the creation story, specifically Gen 1:31.

Shalom is a powerful word in the Bible, one with deep and broad meaning. Although we often translate this word as “peace,” the notion of peace doesn’t really do *shalom* justice.

“The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—as rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.” (Neal Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.)

What kind of connection do you see between this notion of *shalom* and the Vancouver rainforest?

- i. One definition of sin is human will in competition with the will of God.
 1. Do you see sin at play in our care of creation? How?

2. We often talk about Christ’s work having saved us from our sin, forgiven us for our sin. We often talk about Christ having reconciled our relationship to God. But read Col 1:20. How does this change your perception of the work of Christ? How does this contribute to your understanding of the role of humans in creation?
 3. We learn in Genesis 9 that after the flood, God chooses to make a covenant—a sacred relationship and promise—with humankind and every kind of animal on earth to preserve them. God gives this covenant a symbol which we still see in nature: the rainbow. In Hebrew, the word is simply “bow.” Think “bow and arrow.” God’s choice of symbol tells us that God is taking the instrument of death (the bow) and placing it in the clouds in an exalted form—it is now a sign of peace and life. If we recall that this covenant is with all created things—not just humans—are we now endangering this covenant by exploiting creation? Could we become the cause of the next great flood?
- ii. We are commanded to “seek first the kingdom of God,” and we can understand the kingdom of God as being characterized by this shalom.
1. Reflect on how we might seek God’s kingdom, God’s shalom, in our daily care of creation.
 2. How does seeking God’s kingdom differ from simply feeling guilty?
 3. How does it differ from simply feeling fearful of the effects of our abuse of nature?
 4. Remember this quote? *“Basically it’s the poor who are the ones who are going to pay first - people who can least adapt to these changes - people who don’t have access to air conditioning; people who don’t have access to clean water; the people who don’t often come to see a doctor... are the ones who are going to suffer first... ... the people who have illnesses already, the immuno-compromised, children with respiratory problems, the elderly with respiratory problems.”* How does this mesh with seeking the kingdom of God?
- c. **Creation as a means of experiencing God** Goal: Encourage people to make this issue one that is personal to them. It’s easy to leave the notion of creation care in the realm of “ought” and “should,” and to forget that this is something that affects us all in very personal ways. One way to recover our personal stake in this issue is to recall important spiritual experiences we’ve had in nature where God has communicated with us through the natural world.

Remember the brothers from New Orleans who, even before Katrina, lamented the change they’d seen in the world they loved so much? *“It really hurts you in the heart when you see land that you were raised in disappearing and changing like it’s doing now. We live here, we’ve been here for 18 years, my brother and I, and living here, you can see it day by day. It’s not a thing like, well, 10 years ago... no, it’s not like that... it’s year by year, it’s changing that fast, that quick”*

The natural world has been given to us for many things—but one important and often overlooked gift the Earth provides us is a means of experiencing God.

We are people who are not just physical, but also spiritual. We live in a culture that encourages, sometimes *demand*s us, to ignore our spirituality in favor of material or sensual experiences only. One of the roles of the church is to help human beings recover their comfort in talking about and experiencing the spiritual.

We have all had spiritual experiences with the natural world—whether we’ve evaluated or shared them. One way to recover our sense that God is alive and at work in our lives through the natural

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world is to share and remember these spiritual experiences.

Take some time to think to yourself about some of these questions, and then if you’re comfortable share them with the group.

- a. What is your favorite place in nature? Why is that place important to you? Has it remained the same since you first discovered it, or has it changed?
- b. What is one profound experience that you’ve had while in nature? How was it out of the ordinary? What did you learn from it?
- c. Has being in nature ever changed something about you or about your life? How did the natural world have an impact on that change in your life?
 - i. **Leader:** A discussion of experiencing God in nature may make some in the group feel uncomfortable because they may associate such conversation with pagan beliefs. Perhaps it will help to point out that many Christian theological traditions believe that we can see and understand God through nature.
 - ii. Ask your group to discuss how a Christian experience of God in nature is different from nature-worship.

(Some hints for getting your thoughts started: Many people have profound experiences associated with elements like water, mountains, or trees. Think about some of your experiences with each of those elements.)

Leader: This will be a difficult process for some. You, as leader, will probably have to set the tone for this time by sharing your own spiritual experience with nature. When considering what you will share, think about:

- i. An experience of renewal that you have felt when in nature
- ii. A sense of commonality with all of creation and understanding of the Creator during a particular experience
- iii. An epiphany (moment of realizing great truth) from nature
- iv. A sense of peace and presence of God while in nature.
- v. Also consider different parts of the natural world which may have impacted you in this way. Often these experiences occur in...
 1. Water
 2. Trees
 3. Mountains

Think about where people in the Bible tend to experience God. Why do you think certain places and settings allow us to experience God more clearly than others? Are there stories from the Bible that mirror any of yours? Share your story, and then encourage others to share theirs. Of course, don’t force it. The idea is that one of the ways God communicates with us and sustains us spiritually is through the natural world... and these experiences can deeply connect us to a feeling of care for God’s creation if we are allowed to share them and process them.

- vi. Some questions to spark discussions...
 1. What is your favorite place in nature? Tell us why it is important to you.
 2. What is one profound experience that you’ve had while in nature? Describe it.
 3. Has being in nature ever changed something about you or about your life? Describe that event.

Week 2

1. Pray as a group. Use one of the prayers listed for week one, or your own.
2. View the 2nd half of the DVD. (begin with Rich Cizik “...*It is real; climate change is real and human induced, number one. Number two, it calls for action soon. And we are saying action based upon a biblical view of the world as it’s God’s world.*”)
3. Discuss the following principles for Creation Care:
 - a. **Keep it, serve it.** Goal: To discover what God’s commandment to Adam in Genesis 2:15 means for us today. God blesses us and keeps us. And God has given us the means and the responsibility to bless and keep creation in the same way.

Last week, we ended with this idea from William Nitze, Chairman, The Climate Institute, Washington DC, who said: “*It is not going to be dollars and cents in the end that is going to move people on this issue, it’s going to be perception that their own short-term selfishness is destroying the world, and that as spiritual beings, they have a duty not to be so selfish.*”

Rich Cizik, VP of the National Association of Evangelicals, said this: “*So what explains the fact that they know this is important, and yet have largely sat on their hands? Well, environmentalism has a sort of a left wing tilt to it, in their minds. They haven’t had pastors who simply preached on the importance of creation care. Most have not had one sermon in their entire biblical life on this topic, if you can believe that.*”

So what is the Biblical basis for our caring for creation? Is it guilt that should move us to change? Is this issue simply a political one? Or is there a larger faith element to all of this?

- i. Read Gen. 2:4-17, especially note 2:15. (If you’re short on time, simply read 2:15.)
 1. Leader, point out that God expects Adam to *serve* (*abad* – “till, dress, or work” are more common translations, but *abad* is also the Hebrew word for “serve.”) the garden. Discussion questions:
 - a. Why do you think that your Bible has chosen to translate the word *abad* the way it has?
 - b. What are the implications of this?
 - c. Do you prefer its translation, or “serve”? Why?
 - d. Read Phil. 2:4-8. How might following this command affect your care, keeping, and service of creation?
 2. God also expects Adam to *keep* it (*shamar* - also translated “tend, take care of, guard, and look after”). *Shamar* has connotations of loving, caring, and sustaining—not just keeping track of something. It’s the same word used in the familiar Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24, “The LORD bless you and *keep* you.” Discussion questions:

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- a. When we ask that God *keep* us, as in this Aaronic blessing, what kind of keeping are we seeking? (Leader: Ask the group to identify some adjectives for God’s keeping or providence. Is it detached or interested? Aloof or intimate? Sporadic or constant? Compelled by guilt/responsibility or freely given?)
 - b. What are the implications, then, that the same word is used for our *keeping* of the earth?
 - c. Have we lived up to this?
3. Read Gen 2:7, 3:19; Ps. 104:27-30. When we care for creation, are we caring just for nature? Just for humans? (Leader: Scripture teaches that both nature and humanity are part of God’s creation. From a biblical standpoint, it is impossible to separate one from the other. After all, God did form humans from the earth itself. We are inextricably linked.)

Read I Cor. 15:35-44; Rom. 8:19-23; Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1. What will our relationship to creation be like in the life to come? (Leader: Humanity and nature will continue to be linked in God’s future when we will exist as resurrected bodies on a new earth.)

Does “creation care” mean just caring for nature—water, forests, etc.? Can one be caring for creation and by caring for the needs of humans? (Leader: “Creation care” means caring for both. If the Bible teaches us that Christ has created the universe [Col. 1:16b] gives it life and sustains it [Col. 1:17], and has reconciled everything to God [Col. 1:20], then following Jesus means participating in Christ’s creating, sustaining, and reconciling work.)

- b. **Do it.** (Leader: For some great ideas that may get the ball rolling, see www.creationcare.org/resources/small_group/actions.php) Goal: To capitalize on the energy that has been created in your group’s discussion to set real and manageable goals that will impact your personal lives, your families, your congregation, and your citizenship. To empower those whom God is now calling to action.

Last week, Dr. Gene Zigby said this, “*I’m worried that I’m going to have my daughter in 10 years from now, looking up at me and saying, ‘Dad, why didn’t we do anything? We knew it was coming... we had all the information. Why didn’t you do something?’ And I don’t have an answer to that.*”

And this week, Dr. Matthew Sleeth said, “*...An example I frequently give is that if every household in the United States changed five light bulbs to compact fluorescents, we could take twenty-one coal powered plants off line tomorrow, and that would be the same as taking eight million cars off the road, one trillion fewer pounds of greenhouse gases, and thousands fewer deaths, so we could save lives tomorrow just by changing light bulbs.*”

- i. Read Ezekiel 33:31-32
Luke 6:46.

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- ii. On some paper or a chalkboard, record the groups’ thoughts. What will you commit to do? Brainstorm steps you could take.
 1. as individuals
 2. as a group
 3. as a church
 4. as a nation (Leaders, remind your group of this Rich Cizik quote, “If we... were to say “This is important, we want you to take, as our leaders... leadership on climate change, on clean air, on pure water, on the stewardship of our natural resources”, if evangelical Christians were to say that, I daresay [they] will listen. ... It’s a courageous position to take, but Religion and Politics could become one solution for the Great Warming - there are many others.” Take some time to think about how Christians could engage the political process to make change on this issue.
- iii. “Millions upon millions of ordinary people do care, especially the young. Alongside The Great Warming,” they are going to change the world.”

Identify a few steps that your class could commit to taking. Set some goals together as to how you’d like to achieve these steps.

1. In what ways will you reach out to your church with what you’ve learned? Your family? Your community?
 2. How will you hold one another accountable to these goals?
 - a. Some ideas: you might start a creation care group at your church and seek new members.
 - b. You might seek ways to let your elected officials know what a priority creation care is to you?
4. Pray once more as a group to close, perhaps using the following prayer adapted from Ps. 65:1, 9-13

" O God, we praise you. We praise you because you care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. We praise you because the streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. The Psalms say that you drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing. We long for this vision of your creation, and we lament what creation is become due to our sin. Help to do your work, to work for shalom. Amen."

If you’re interested in further study, the following are recommended resources...

- www.thegreatwarming.com
- Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earth-Wise* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1996).
- David S. Koetje, ed., *Living the Good Life on God’s Good Earth* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006).
- www.creationcare.org
- en.arocha.org
- www.ausable.org