



EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

Why Christians Should Care about God's Creation

EEN Adult Study Guide Final

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Leader's Guide

Why this study?

The earth is the Lord's and all that's in it. We live in a time when our poor care for God's creation now affects each person on the earth. Millions are suffering the impacts of our poor stewardship. Now is the time for the Church to roll-up its sleeves and follow our Risen Lord to care for the least of these and the creation. Our prayer is that this study will lead you to a place of Holy Spirit transformation where with God's help we may change our lifestyles and return to living in a God-centered sustainable fashion in the image of our Creator.

We hope this study lead's you closer to God. Be sure to pass it on to others.

In Christ,

The EEN Staff

General Outline for Each Session:

1. Warm Up. The first session will involve introductions. In each following session, there will be a time for sharing and review of the previous meeting and for reports on the previous week's reflection exercises. (10-15 mins. Max)

2. Content. Open each study in pray. The lessons in this study vary quite a bit because of the different kinds of material we need to study. Some sessions are straight Bible study, with a format that will probably be familiar to you. Others deal with potentially confusing scientific evidence of environmental problems, and you may need to stick close to the outline in this guide. However, each lesson has some combination of the following three elements:

- understanding the lesson.
- suggestions for demonstrating or visualizing the principles you are studying.
- questions for group discussion.

In several lessons this cycle is repeated. You will want to watch your time. In fact, you may need to pick and choose from the topics offered to you in a lesson, or you may even want to split some of the lessons into two or more meetings. Don't hurry – it is important to be sure that all your group members gain an understanding and appreciation for the topic before moving on.

The key here is to get the group engaged and talking.

a. Understanding the Lesson. Each participant should already have read through the current session's material. The leader should summarize the main points from the guide material,

including reading the Bible passages and in Sessions 4 & 5 in particular going over the scientific and technical material to be sure everyone understands what is being said. Discussion should be focused on understanding at this point. We have tried to keep this kind of material accurate but understandable. If any members of your group have professional expertise in any of the topical areas you are discussing, be sure to use them to help the rest of the group to understand the material better.

b. Demonstrations, visualizations and Internet resources. In several instances, we have suggested simple object lessons or other exercises (like going outdoors for 5-10 minutes in the middle of your session) that you can use to help each other understand what is going on. The group leader should be sure to study these suggestions ahead of time to decide what you have time for and to have any required materials available. There will be links in this material to internet resources including videos that you may use to enhance your lesson time.

c. Discussion questions: Exploring the Implications. Each explanatory section is followed by two or three suggested discussion questions in order to get the group thinking beyond the facts of what is being studied to the implications for yourselves as individuals, for your community and for all of God's creation. Remember to be respectful and loving as you dig deep into these important issues.

4. Exercise and Reflection assignments.

Every session includes suggestions for exercise and reflections to be accomplished before the next meeting. These include some combination of reading, outdoor time and observation. The **outdoor time** is very important – we cannot gain an appreciation for God's creation from books, a classroom or a circle in a living room. It will be helpful to emphasize over and over again to the members of your group that spending time in God's creation is an essential part of this study.

Suggested Additional Readings

- 1) **Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation** by Ed Brown,
- 2) **Global Warming and the Risen Lord** by Jim Ball
- 3) **A Climate For Change** by Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley.

5. Prayer. It is easy sometimes to start to focus on technical things like light bulbs and gas mileage. But we will accomplish nothing of real value without prayer. We strongly suggest you end each group session with a time of prayer that includes both **praise and thanks** to God for the world that he has given us, **confession** for our part in doing damage to his world, and **intercession** for the world and the people in it who are suffering because of that damage.

Session 1: Introduction and Getting Acquainted



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Session Goal:

- a) To get to know each other and start understanding that creation care is a matter of life. (i.e. why is it important to you?)
- b) To explore the basic concept of “dominion” – that human beings are in charge of God’s creation.

Key Scripture Passage: Psalm 8

Suggested Background Reading: *Our Father’s World*, p. 28 -30

Warm Up

Get acquainted with each other by introducing yourselves (if you don't know each other) and share why you're interested in creation care. .

Content

This entire study rests on two foundational principles we are made in the image of God and we are to tend the creation. In this first session, we will briefly explore and discuss these, with scripture passages on which they are based.

[A note: Throughout this study, we have provided the relevant biblical texts from the NIV translation of the Bible.]

God made us in his image.

A simple statement, but profound in its implications for understanding our relationship to both God and to his creation. This principle comes out of the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

What the "image" consists of has been debated by theologians for thousands of years – and that is beyond the scope of our discussion here. What is important to note is that a)human beings are "creatures" – made by God and therefore part of the "creation", but b)we are like God in ways that no other creature is like him – we reflect his image.

God wants us to tend his Creation.

In the passage above, being made in God's image is directly tied to a task – "ruling over" the other creatures in creation. This "ruling over" is sometimes called \dominion and it shows up repeatedly in the Bible in different ways:

For example, In Genesis 2 the same task is described in language a gardener can understand and appreciate:

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

“To work it” translates as the Hebrew word “abad” (עבד), and the general meaning is to cultivate, tend, care for. Interestingly, it is also related to the Hebrew word for worship. “Take care of it” translates “shamar” (שמר), with a meaning of to protect, preserve, or watch over something. These words will appeal to anyone who is a gardener we pull weeds, we watch for pests, we cultivate the soil and water the plants in order to provide maximum opportunity for growth.

The entire concept is unpacked for us in Psalm 8 (see below). Take a few minutes to study and reflect on this psalm.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



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Let's Discuss

- a.** Verses 6-8 confirms Genesis 1: We are, in fact, rulers over God's creation. Note the interesting progression from "flocks and herds" (animals close to home) to "all that swim in the paths of the sea" (creatures we may never even see). Our rulership extends to all of them. Discuss what this means and how extensive this rulership is.
- b.** Verses 3-5 put this rulership in perspective: We cannot claim dominion as a right but only accept it as a gift. Discuss what you think "crowned with glory and honor" (verse 5) means?
- c.** A common understanding (or misunderstanding) of dominion is that it means we can do anything we want with God's creation. But look at verses 1 and 9. These two verses are identical. Now notice that there are two words for Lord here: The first "LORD" refers to the personal name for God, Yahweh (see Exodus 1:13-15 for the origin of this name), but the second "Lord" translates the Hebrew word "Adonai" which means ruler or sovereign. The psalmist is beginning and ending this psalm by reminding us that God is the one who rules over us. Discuss how should God's dominion over us affects our dominion over God's creation?

Dig a little deeper



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One way to understand the biblical concept of dominion is through the lens of “servant leadership”. God calls people to lead – Kings in the Old Testament, bishops (overseers), elders and deacons in the New Testament. But the leadership model that God chooses is that of a shepherd. If you would like to explore this idea in a bit more depth, review these passages and think or discuss how the ‘shepherd’ language determines what would God’s expectations be for a shepherd leader? Then think about how we ought to relate to the rest of God’s creation if we were really thinking of ourselves as shepherds:

King David as a shepherd:

¹ All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood." ² In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.' "

³ When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. [II Samuel 5:1-3]

⁷⁰ He chose David his servant

and took him from the sheep pens;

⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.

⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them. [Psalm 78:70-72]

Self-Serving Shepherds:

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the

shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. [Ezekiel 34:1-3]

Jesus our Savior as a shepherd:

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young. [Isaiah 40:10-11]

⁶" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel. ^[a]" [Matthew 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2]

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. [John 10:11 – but read the whole passage.]

Church leaders expected to be shepherds:

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. ^[a] Be shepherds of the church of God, ^[b] which he bought with his own blood. [Acts 20:28]

¹To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [I Peter 5:1-3]

Prayer Time

Spend some time in prayer as a group thanking God for the special place he has given us as reflectors of his image, and for the special privilege and responsibility of caring for his creation. Ask for wisdom to do this task well.

Preparing Ahead

Read next week's study material ahead of time, and include some of the scripture passages in your devotional reading.

Outdoor Time: You have a standing assignment for this entire study – to spend at least an hour outdoors once or twice a week. We suggest you pick one area – a walking route, a park, a bike trail – and go back to it repeatedly during this time. Use this as an opportunity to observe God's creation. Look for seasonal changes as the weeks pass, watch for signs of life and of human influence. As you walk, think about the topics you will be learning about. And bring them to God in prayer and worship.

This week, in keeping with Psalm 8, try to **spend some time under the stars**. Think about God, his creation, and your own tiny part in it. When you come back in, make some notes on your thoughts that you can share with the group at your next meeting. If you're in a major city consider going for a short drive to see them or spend time in a local park.