

Session 6

Consumption – What’s Driving the Storm

Session goal: To understand the connection between our daily choices and their impacts on God’s creation.

Key Scripture: Isaiah 5:8-10, James 5:1-6, 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Background Reading: *Our Father’s World, chapter 1 (p. 27-42)*

Warm Up

Take some extra time today to share your thoughts as we’ve journeyed together through this study. What’s worked, what hasn’t worked? E-mail us at support@creationcare.org. Today’s session marks a turning point as we move from understanding what the problems are to beginning to work toward solutions. Think back to how you understood and looked at the world – and the Bible – before this study began. Have things changed? Why?

Optional:

Pop some popcorn while you are getting started, but don’t eat it yet. (You will need this in a few minutes.)

Content

We’ve been describing the environmental situation as if it were a storm – but this is a storm with a big difference. When we experience a hurricane or a tornado, we don’t have any idea of what forces might have come together to cause that storm to form. But in this case, unfortunately, we do. The storm in God’s creation is being driven by people and stuff... Let’s figure it out:

Too **Much Stuff?**

There are more people on earth right now than ever before in history, and because of this, the problems we are facing are often framed as a “population problem”. But that is not really the issue. It isn’t how many of us there are – it’s how we are living now that is causing the problems in God’s creation.

Try this simple demonstration with popcorn to understand why this is so.

Demonstration: It’s not how many there are, but how much space each one takes up!

You will need a batch of popped popcorn (see above), and about a cup of unpopped popcorn kernels. Set out two mixing bowls of the same size (any size will do). Assign one person to the first container, and give them a tablespoon measure and the unpopped kernels. Assign a second person to the other container, and give that person a one-cup measure and the popped corn. Explain to the group that **1 tablespoon of unpopped corn as in one cup of popped corn.** Unfinished sentence ? The difference in volume is analogous to how people live in the US, for example, compared with how people live in a less-developed country like Ethiopia, or even how people lived in the US 200 years ago.



My Ecological Footprint - Quiz Results

If everyone on the planet lived my lifestyle, we would need:



Now pretend that each measure of corn (1 tablespoon unpopped, 1 cup popped) is one million people. Start filling each pitcher with “people”, keeping the number of measures the same. Stop when the pitcher of popped corn is full – and observe how much room is still left in the other pitcher. Big difference? This is the effect of increased consumption – the world fills up a lot faster!

Video Resources:

- a) The “Story of Stuff” is a good overview of the consumption problem driven by prosperity. You can find it here: <http://www.storyofstuff.com> The entire video takes about 20 minutes, but the chapter called “Consumption” is only about 5 minutes, and is well worth watching together.

- b) “Affluenza” is a PBS documentary several years old that captures this problem with an analogy to disease – we don’t have influenza, we have “affluenza”. The film is 60 minutes and may be available in your public library (it is not available online). You might check it out and find one or two brief sections to share with the group.

This was the result of my Ecological Footprint Quiz – even though I do “a lot of things right”. What about you? [[Take the quiz here](#)]

My Ecological Footprint - Quiz Results

If everyone on the planet lived my lifestyle, we would need:



= 4.09 Earths

How big is your footprint?

One way to quantify this question of consumption is to study what is known as the “Ecological Footprint”. This concept is a way of measuring the size of your particular kernel of popcorn, essentially taking into

account how much of the earth (space and resources) is necessary to provide you with the food, energy and stuff you use. You can find a quiz to calculate your footprint and more information here: <http://www.myfootprint.org/en/> Take a few minutes to do this with one or two members of your group.

The important conclusion from the Ecological Footprint concept is to consider how many earths it would take to support us if everyone lived like you do.

Does God Care?

.Read the Scriptures for today.

Look at these verses from Isaiah in light of what you have already talked about in this session:

- ⁸ Woe to you who add house to house
and join field to field
till no space is left
and you live alone in the land.
- ⁹ The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing:
"Surely the great houses will become desolate,
the fine mansions left without occupants.
- ¹⁰ A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine,
a homer of seed only an ephah of grain." [Isaiah 5:8-10]

Many of the effects of the “environmental storm” the world is now experiencing are a result of the fact that we human beings are using so much of the earth’s resources that we are using them all up. More than that, some of us are using more than our share, and together we are using so much of the earth’s space and resources that little is left for all the rest of God’s creatures. In the passage above, verses 9 and 10 describe an agricultural collapse that inevitably follows abuse of the land. This suggests that the punishment God has in mind for this kind of behavior is the kind of ecological disaster that is already happening in many parts of the world.

Let’s Discuss

The problem of consumption affects us on many levels:

- a) How can we live more sustainably for the sake of our children, grandchildren, and the rest of God’s creation? Justice: The James passage referenced above causes us to examine our lives in terms of our wealth. Consider that we use more energy per person than any other nation on earth, what can we do to become less consumption oriented?
- b) Obedience: Are we following God’s commandments for caring for each other and the earth? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper: The Food We Eat

One of the areas where consumption and God’s creation inevitably collide is in the food we eat – how it is grown, processed, delivered to us and eaten. In the US and Europe we are ‘blessed’ with abundant and cheap food – more abundant and less expensive than at any time in human

history. Unfortunately, that blessing comes to us at a cost – to the land, to animals raised for food in enormous “confined animal feeding operations”, and to people.

Take some time to study this situation by reading a book or an article or two from the list below, or watching all or part of one of these documentaries. You will not agree with everything you read or watch – but these are issues that you and I need to face, because we participate in the food ‘system’ every time we eat.

- In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan (Penguin 2008)
- The Omnivore’s Dilemma by Michael Pollan (Penguin 2006)
- Documentary Film: Fresh

Then think about or discuss ways that you can begin to shape your part – by shopping more carefully, getting your food from a farmer’s market in your community, or even growing some of your own. Check out what you can do and print out a shopping guide at <http://creationcare.org>

Prayer Time

As much as any topic we have covered, the one we have been wrestling with today demands wisdom. Spend your prayer time asking God to help you understand these issues, and commit to doing one thing differently in light of this discussion.

Prep work

Read next sessions material carefully – there is a lot to cover in our next session as we begin to get practical and work on a response to the issues we’ve been learning about.

Outdoor time: Spend your time in a park or other natural setting. If it is spring, but even if not, take note of all the ways in which God has made creation – plants and animals – to reproduce and “fill the earth” themselves. Notice how creation tends to get crowded out by human development. Think about it.