

Session 8

Mobilizing the Church Part II

Communities and Congregations

Session Goal: To develop an action plan for influencing your own church to respond to creation care

Key Passage: I Corinthians 1:26-31

Further Reading: *Our Father's World, chapters 8 -12*

***Note:** This session has been designed for a group where all the members are part of the same church congregation, but it will still work if you represent several churches, or if you are a group of students. In the latter case, just apply the principles to your college or university, or your student fellowship.

Warm Up

Bring out the list you made together at the end of last session. Go around the room and discuss how well you did. Don't expect 100% success, and don't give each other a hard time for what you didn't do, but talk about what you were able to do, and how it felt. How can you adjust to be more successful going forward?

Content

As we come to the end of this study, the obvious question is 'What do we do now?' If the things we have learned together are important for those of us in this group, they are equally important for the people we live with and worship with – and more so, because the problems are big enough that we can only respond effectively when a lot of us – entire churches and denominations, or college campuses or even small towns – respond together.

If your group is typical of those participating in studies like this, you feel probably are a minority sentence structure, needs something in your community. Not many others understand the issues as you now do. Some might even be hostile to or uncomfortable about the idea of Christians taking on environmental issues. How can you move forward effectively but lovingly to change attitudes and behaviors in your community?

Influence from within

We suggest that you plan to keep this group going as your church's "Green Team" (or pick another name that your congregation will understand and identify with). Then identify the areas of church life that the members of your group are already involved in – youth group? choir? worship? Sunday School? Missions? Help each other think of ways to move people working in these areas gently and patiently toward responsible and active creation care in whatever way is most appropriate.

Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 1:26-31 that we don't have to be "big people" to make a big difference:

²⁶Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Getting Specific

The following material is based in part on the second half of **Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation** as well as **EEN's small group development guide**.

Each of the following topics has a chapter devoted to it with more detailed suggestions as to how you can implement these ideas in your own church's life. In your group discussion time pick and choose from the following list those areas where group members are already involved and discuss them. Use the space below to write down some specific plans for your own congregation. You won't have time to cover all of these, so concentrate on those areas where members of your group are already involved in ministry.

Worship and Teaching (Our Father's World p 111 – 115)

Because this is the main family activity for most congregations, it is important to find ways to bring attention to God's creation into your church's worship experience on a regular basis. This positive emphasis on beauty and God's revelation to us is more beneficial than always emphasizing the problems, although there are times to do that too.

Some ideas:

- *"Bring creation into the worship experience..."* with music, windows, and lots of plants and flowers.

Your ideas:

- *“Take worship outdoors”* . Jesus did most of his teaching outdoors. Maybe we should follow his example!

Your ideas:

- *Prayer:* We need to thank God for creation, and pray to him about the problems in creation. There’s nothing like prayer to release the power of God on problems too big for us to handle. Think about joining EEN each May for the Day of Prayer for creation care. E-mail us at support@creationcare.org to be kept updated.

Your ideas:

- *Preaching and Teaching:* If your pastor is in your group, wonderful! He/she will have already learned enough to begin to bring creation care into the teaching on a regular basis. If not, see if you can work with him to begin to emphasize some of the things you have learned.

Your ideas:

Children and Youth (p. 123-127)

As with many other things, changing attitudes towards God’s creation is easiest when we are young. Some of your most satisfying and productive efforts in your church will be in getting the ‘next generation’ involved.

- *Take children outside.* The benefits of nature on children are well documented (see Richard Louv’s *Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin Books, 2005, an excellent resource on this topic.) So why should we keep kids indoors for Sunday School or Youth Group activities?

Your ideas:

- *Bring creation inside.* When taking the kids out isn't feasible, creative teachers can find ways to bring nature indoors. Plants, pets, people in your church who work with nature...

Your ideas:

- *Environmental service projects.* Projects to help people are a staple of youth programs and church outreach programs. Add to those projects that also help to heal and restore God's creation – cleaning up a park, building or restoring a hiking trail, working in a food pantry garden.

Your ideas:

Building and Grounds (p. 138-144)

Your church's physical structures – the building(s) and the grounds around them are how people see your church. In the case of the building, this is also where your church family spends most of its together-time, and where much of your energy consumption is. Making changes here is an effective way to accomplish real change, but also a way to show your congregation and your community that you care about God's creation.

- *Energy stewardship:* Talk to your church leadership about getting an energy audit done and acting on the advice you get from it. Whether your building is new or old, there are big savings to be made here.

Your ideas:

- *Natural areas rather than lawns:* Lawns are expensive and not at all kind to God's creatures. Talk to your leadership about reducing the amount of land that is devoted to lawn-scape and let it return to nature. Add some birdfeeders and watch the creatures arrive!

Your ideas:

- *Church orchard, forest or memorial garden:* If you have space, consider taking steps to make part of your church campus into an outdoor memorial area where church families can plant trees marking important life events – deaths of loved ones but also happy occasions like births and marriages. You will be restoring God’s creation while also creating a visible church family history rich with meaning and memories.

Your ideas:

- *Community garden to supply local food pantries:* Most food pantries supply their clients with nothing but cans and boxes of food. The people who need these pantries need vegetables, too. A not-very-big plot of land can produce thousands of pounds of food with very little cash – and a lot of opportunity for the young people to get their hands dirty!

Your ideas:

Outreach (p. 150-153)

Reaching out to a community through creation care projects is probably one of the most overlooked means of outreach. Many people in your community love God’s world even though they don’t know God yet. This is a perfect opportunity to make their experience complete, as long as it is done with sincerity and sensitivity.

- *Creation-appreciation:* Join in your community’s celebrations of God’s creation, whether it’s an Earth Day celebration or a Harvest Festival. And develop some of these kinds of events yourselves that you can invite your community to join in on.

Your ideas:

- *Creation-reclaimed:* From parks with trash in them to streams and watersheds that are damaged and degraded, your community probably has quite a few places where you can get involved in helping to reclaim and restore God's creation.

Your ideas:

- *Life-style transformation:* One of the things you have learned in this study is that all of us need to change how we live. Find ways that your church can work with others in your community to promote the kind of lifestyle changes that will make a difference, from recycling to 'bike to church' or other programs.

Your ideas:

Next Steps

We hope that this study has been profitable for you, and that it will lead to real and permanent change in each of the members of your group, in your lifestyles and in your church or other community. Here are a couple of ways you might keep this ball rolling:

- **Plan another study** with leaders of your church or community participating.
- **Keep up with each other** by planning periodical get togethers for prayer and encouragement.
- **Connect with other churches in your area** and plan some joint projects or public events, like cleaning up a park, volunteering with your local Department of Natural Resources, or even hosting a creation care concert (outdoors, of course!)
- **Share your story** be e-mailing us at support@creationcare.org and stay tuned for more resources and guides as you walk with the Lord in this area. Keep up by visiting us at <http://creationcare.org>

Prayer Time

End your session with some sharing and prayer, committing this project into God's hands – that's where it belongs, after all!

Our Father's World ends with three brief letters – to a pastor, a church member and a student (p 168-173). Read whichever one of these is most applicable to the majority of the members of your group, and use it to launch into your final time of commitment and prayer together.

Final Thoughts (letter from EEN staff)

Creation Care is a matter of life. Whether it's our life in Christ, our personal stewardship, corporate worship, or weighing in on matters of local and national importance creation care is a matter of life. John 10:10 "I have come that they might have life, and life in abundance."

Creation care means physical life for the least of these around the world. As this study has stated, the world's poorest people are suffering because of our poor stewardship. The question is, are we willing to live a transformed life to offer food, water, and survival to Christ's people? When Christ returns what will he say of our witness? Will we be counted among the faithful?

Creation care is a matter of future life for our children and grandchildren. We are here but for a moment, as the scriptures tell us our days are like the grass, the grass weathers and melts away. In light of that our consumerism has depleted much of the world's resources, and we have hitched our future economic progress with the degradation of the earth and its people. What a terrible choice to leave future generations, grow in prosperity or live in decay. Are we willing to change an economy based beyond fossil fuels to offer a healthier creation, new opportunities for employment, and abundant life for all God's creation?

In addition to this bible study we would encourage you to stay connected with our ministry. Every week EEN produces compelling podcasts which feature the Green Doctor, the Green mama, theologians, scientists, culture makers, and much more. You can check out the podcasts at <http://creationcare.org> or by looking us up on itunes under "creation care podcasts." In addition to the podcasts check out our blog and feature commentaries page at <http://creationcare.org>.

Our hope and prayer is that you will take this small group study and run with it. When you do be sure to tell us by e-mailing us at support@creationcare.org

If you were blessed by this study please consider supporting the work of this ministry by visiting us at <http://creationcare.org>.

May the Lord bless you and keep you and may his face shine upon you in the weeks and months ahead!

Blessings,
The EEN Staff