



Session 4: Environment

Caring for creation is an integral part of discipleship and worship.

As we come to know God better, our concerns begin to reflect his, and he loves and cares for the whole planet, not just human beings. Today we'll be looking at the Christian responsibility to steward the environment.

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Genesis 1.24–2.3

God said, "I command the earth to give life to all kinds of tame animals, wild animals, and reptiles." And that's what happened. God made every one of them. Then he looked at what he had done, and it was good.

God said, "Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures." So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. God gave them his blessing and said: Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth.

I have provided all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes. These will be food for animals, both wild and tame, and for birds. God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good! Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day.

So the heavens and the earth and everything else were created.

By the seventh day God had finished his work, and so he rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it special because on that day he rested from his work.

Setting the scene:

- The story of creation is not meant to be a scientific account of the origins of the universe, but a poetical reminder that everything is dependent upon a sovereign God.
- Whilst the word 'environment' is not found in the Bible, but the call to care for creation is explicit throughout.
- The idea of 'like us' probably includes the role of looking after the creation for the creator: the way we do this, for better or worse, reflects back onto God whose image we represent!
- To bless someone is not only to give them a gift but also to give them a function. The function of humans is to be fruitful and multiply and also to subdue and rule the earth and its animal inhabitants (cf. Psalm 8.6-8; James 3.7).
- Subduing and ruling does not mean exploiting. Although subject to people, animals are also their companions.
- Noah was the prototype conservationist when he built an ark to protect the animals from being destroyed in the flood (Genesis 6.19-20; 7.3).

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

- Q1.** How committed are you personally to environmental issues?
In what ways?
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- Q2.** In what ways might caring for the environment and worship be linked?

“Our relationship with the rest of creation is intimately bound up with our relationship with God. The Bible offers “an ethical perspective based on reverence for the whole of life.”

*Dr Rowan Williams
(former Archbishop of Canterbury)*

Respond

Environment challenge: As a group, create a challenge to help you get more involved with creation care, stewardship and the environment or choose from the following.

Challenge ideas:

1. Going Greener

If your church does not often focus sermons and services on environmental issues – why not get the ball rolling? Actively engage leaders in conversations about the environment and your church's response. Plan an outdoor service, provide environmental information, do a church eco-audit, take the church out on a walk through a local beauty spot, commit to Fair-trade products. There are loads of great fun ideas. You could also encourage your church to try for an Eco Church Award.

Check out www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk for more information.

2. Declutter

Spend time this week going through your possessions and clearing out things you no longer require. You could give to charity shops, join your local free-cycle scheme or sell it at a car boot sale (and give the proceeds to an environmental organisation). Or bless others with a gift – if you know someone who would like something you have and no longer need, just give it to them.

3. Enjoy Creation

Plan to spend some extensive time just enjoying God's earth. You could walk through a forest with children (take a guide book to identify trees, plants and animals), go camping, surfing or cycling. You could do some gardening or local litter picking. Even visit a garden centre as an act of worship. Try looking round your own garden or local park and thanking God for everything from the soil to the trees – and don't forget the worms and the birds!

Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group this week as you explore ways to become more environmentally aware and active.