Every Creature Singing

Embracing the Good News for Planet Earth

Participant Guide:

Unit 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

MENNONITE CREATION CARE NETWORK

Session 1: Don't Be Afraid

Knowing Your Faith

Jump to: Discussion Questions Knowing Your Place Practices Resources

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25, Revelation 5:11-14
Ecological Lens Questions: Find a copy here.

This curriculum is for people who want to connect their faith with the places where they live and the environmental crises that dominate our times. For many of us, the words of a 2,000-year-old book and the rivers in our state or the garbage dumps in our town are not well connected. Do they have anything to say to each other?

In the Mennonite Church, we believe that the Bible has generative power and can speak to our times in unexpected ways. "Is the Bible green?" is not really the right question for us. A far more interesting question is, "What will happen when we place our sacred texts and the cries of our corner of the planet, side by side and listen to them together?" When people gather to hear the Word, Christ might just appear among us to lead us toward transformation.

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I had one such encounter while working on this curriculum. As I considered human pigheadedness and its effect on places I knew and loved, there was much cause for despair. But at the time, I was also part of a group of people who were praying their way through the Gospel of Matthew together. Each of us had committed to spending at least an hour a week in this practice. My approach was to pray by writing out or drawing each text.

Eagerly, I opened the Gospel of Matthew, only to come face to face with a long list of Hebrew men. I had forgotten that my first prayer was going to be a genealogy! I traced my finger across the page of ancient names. All were long dead. A few were saints, some were real stinkers and many had left nothing behind but their names. Even some of the saints were stinkers.

I chose to draw this text as a mausoleum with shelves of burial urns. I drew urns of all shapes and sizes, placing a name on each one. By the third set of 14 names, I was running out of shapes and beginning to feel like the urns would go on forever.

Then, abruptly, I came upon a living, breathing man, asleep under all those shelves. He was a young carpenter beset by a vexing personal problem: his fiancé was pregnant with a child he knew wasn't his. The man was dreaming, and in his dream, an angel came to him with a message:

Do not be afraid.
This child is of the Holy Spirit.
God is with you.

The text trembled and cracked open. I gaped open‐mouthed. Never had I heard this familiar Christmas story in quite this way before. Never before had I seen the Christ child emerging with such drama from the failures of the past, his birth itself a resurrection.

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I begin with this unlikely scripture because it highlights three affirmations of the Christian tradition that are relevant to our work on creation care.

God embraces the material world.
A central tenet of the Christian faith--known as the Incarnation--suggests that God's goal is not to pluck human souls out of a world damned to destruction. Rather, God is heavily invested in the material world. So much so that God became human. According to John 1, the Word became flesh and camped out with us here in the mud of earthly existence. As theologian Norman Wirzba puts it, "God became a human creature so that in Jesus God could show us how to better imagine and fully become creatures ourselves."

This is our story: God came at a particular time in history, among a particular set of people with a particular family tree, living in a particular watershed. Did God really love first century Palestinians and olive trees more than all the rest of us, or was the whole point that God loves intimacy with creation, not just the whole world in a vague and general sort of way? Might such a God take an interest in our part of Planet Earth too?

God promises to stick with us no matter what.
If you believe that environmental problems are important and perhaps the most pressing issues of the 21st century, why choose a Christian worldview to confront them? For one thing, Christianity promises solidarity and outside help. Left all alone with our bickering Congress and a ticking clock, the weight of mountaintop removal, soil erosion and species extinction is a crushing burden of responsibility. Who doesn't fear for our children, our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews and little neighbors?

Thankfully, saving the world is ultimately God's problem. Along with nearly every call to action in the Bible come the words, "Do not be afraid. I am with you." God‐with‐us is the central affirmation of the Christian faith. The good news for Christians is that God is already at work ahead of our humble efforts, birthing new life out of despair and inviting us to join in. To some people, reliance on God is a cop‐out and an excuse to ignore environmental problems. We say the Holy Spirit is our source of energy and hope.

God is at work through weakness, vulnerability and suffering
In Matthew 1, Christ appears as a fetus. Dare we say an unwanted fetus? What could be more powerless than that? The end of the story isn't much better for those of us who might prefer a God that would blow in like a storm cloud and fix climate change with mighty acts of power. In

the book of Revelation, Christ is not portrayed as "the lion of Judah," but as a lamb that was slaughtered. The Greek suggests a translation something along the lines of "a little lambkin." In between, there was the cross, rejection, failure, death.

What does this version of God-with-us have to say about our time and the environmental issues that dog us? New Zealand theologian Andrew Shepherd puts it this way:

> To walk in the steps of the suffering Savior will surely involve coming face to face with degradation and pollution . . . the polluted stream, the toxic waste dump, the rubbish - filled gully. . . .Inevitably, these places of environmental destruction will often be the places where those less fortunate, those blessed by God, also reside. A characteristic mark therefore of Christian ecological living will be an acceptance of and experiencing of suffering and pain.

This willingness to be touched by the earth's pain is not without its rewards. You might, for example, discover that this planet—maybe even your neighborhood—is more intricate and magical than you ever dreamed.

God loves the world in all its particularity and is here with us. God does not give up on us. God wears the wounds of places that are hurting. That might just be enough to enable us to open our eyes to what is happening to our planet and move forward.

Discussion Questions

Introductory:

1. What place do you know and love best?

2. Think about decisions you make that affect the health of other creatures or landscapes. Are there parts of biblical faith that have shaped your choices? What are some ways you have connected your faith with the places you love?

3. Does your congregation have good news to offer the surrounding community? What about for non-human creation?

4. Which environmental issues are you most directly connected to or most concerned about?

About the Essay:

5. Eco-lens questions A and C: The geneaology that precedes the birth story in Matthew 1 is shorthand for Israel's entire history. In what ways does the land play a role in this story?

6. Does God with us as fetus and slaughtered lamb comfort you or trouble you? What kind of Divine help are you hoping for?

7. Are you familiar with the Every Creature Singing text that this curriculum is named for? How do you imagine the vision that John describes?

Knowing Your Place

Place Questions

1. Do you think the map area your Place Question leader presented is the best choice for your group? Does it include your home? How would you tweak the boundaries?

2. What towns, rural areas and bodies of water are within the area you are studying? Within the broader region?

3. Which parts of the area do you frequently visit? Which parts do you ignore or know little about?

4. What aspects of your community are you curious about? Scan the Place Questions covered in this unit of the curriculum. Mark the questions that are of particular interest.
Unit 2 Unit 3 Unit 4

Practices

Spiritual Practices

1.Adopt a prayer of intent: Begin each spiritual practice you try with a prayer that names why you are doing it. Here are three possible intents, drawn from the prayer suggested for classroom use. Use one of them or better yet, write your own that expresses your hopes.

- Jesus Christ, Creator and Redeemer of all things—I long to meet you: in the scriptures, in our community, in creation.
- I ask for a heart open to beauty, joy and awe.
- I ask for courage to witness the world's pain.

2. Familiar scriptures: Think of a favorite scripture passage and apply one or more of the Ecological Lens Questions to it. Does this approach help you hear the text in a new way?

Household Practices

1. Plan Your Time: How will you find time to make the questions and practices that in this study a priority? What would you gladly (or sadly) give up to do so?

2. Reflect on Household Practices suggested in this unit of the curriculum. Mark the practices you want to be sure to do. Is there one you want to focus on throughout the study instead of trying a new one each week? Unit 2 Unit 3 Unit 4

Additional Resources

"What is Watershed Discipleship?" Ched Myers of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries coined the phrase, watershed discipleship. Here, he makes the case for focusing our creation care efforts on the communities we inhabit.

Habel, Norman C., David Rhoads and H. Paul Santmire, eds. *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.
Pages 54 - 65 of this book inspired the ecological lens questions used in this curriculum.

Horrell, David G., et. al, eds. Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives. New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2010.
The introduction to this book (pp. 1 - 11) will introduce the academic reader to the texts and ideas commonly discussed in this area of biblical studies.

Shepherd, Andrew. "Christ and Creation: The Ecological Crisis And Eschatological Ethics." Stimulus 18.4 (2010): 51-57.
"Çhrist and Creation," quoted in the essay above, is available on the MCCN website through the link provided.

Wild, Jeff and Peter Bakken. Church on Earth: Grounding Your Ministry in a Sense of Place. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
This book looks at how we are called to care for our specific places. Where has God placed your congregation for wonder and obedience?

Session 2: Jesus and Creation—In Search of a Whole Gospel

Knowing Your Faith

Jump to: Discussion Questions Knowing Your Place Practices Resources

Scriptures: Colossians 1:15-20, John 3:16, Luke 9:58
Suggested Eco-Lens Questions: Try A and E with Colossians 1:15-20.

Most people think that the New Testament focuses on humans. They also assume that Jesus' work of preaching the reign of God, healing the sick, driving out demons, finding the lost, getting crucified and rising from the dead pertained mainly to humans also. But is that the *whole* Gospel?

"What we are trying to do here is engage people with the whole gospel," Luke Gascho insisted as our writing team wrestled with this crucial session on Jesus and creation. As he spoke, he was drawing a circle on scratch paper with a jagged chunk cut out of it. As I looked at his sketch, I thought the circle needed to be much bigger, and the jagged chunk looked sharp and dangerous. I pictured us each walking around clutching our own jagged chunks of the gospel, sometimes spearing each other.

Some of us wield a Jesus-as-my-personal-savior fragment. This broken piece understands Christian faith as an otherworldly commitment with an end-of-life benefit that enables us to float off to some other existence in a disembodied state when we die. Since God is only interested in souls, what happens *on* earth or *to* the earth is of little consequence. Others are busy with a social-cause-as-gospel fragment. This group sees religion primarily as a tool to tackle peacemaking or climate change or some other issue, discarding all that does not serve their cause. God, Jesus, the Bible and other Christians with different priorities sometimes embarrass them.

"Do any of us really grasp the *whole* gospel?" I wondered as I imagined a circle as wide as the horizon, pulsating with life. One bright side to the environmental crisis is that it forces us to confront the holes in our gospel and to seek an understanding of Jesus Christ adequate to the 21st century and its troubled ecosystems.

Numerous scriptures extend salvation to all of creation, not just humans. From Noah's ark to the cattle of Nineveh, from John 3:16 and Job to Romans 8, it appears that human beings and the earth are a package deal. In Genesis 6-9, God saves both humans and animals from the flood, and the earth is washed clean in the process. In Jonah 3 and 4, God saves Nineveh partly because of the animals it contains. In John 3:16, the Greek word for world is *kosmos*—God loves the *world,* not just humans. In Job 38-42, Job gets a private audience with God and is reminded that even human suffering does not trump the integrity and beauty of creation. In Romans 8:18-25, all of creation groans, waiting for redemption.

In our search for a complete gospel, we might need to develop a Christology both higher and lower than the one we've been using. What follows is a starting point. The two quick portraits below depict a Jesus that one might meet at a nature center, or on a garbage dump, or while lying awake at night worrying about the future. May they patch a hole in your own Gospel, or smooth a jagged edge.

Portrait 1: Jesus the Hiker[1], Luke 9:58

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," Jesus once warned a follower. When Jesus chose a nomadic lifestyle in order to preach the reign of God, he chose a life lived outdoors, sometimes without shelter. His vocation committed him not only to "the lost sheep of Israel" but also to blisters and dusty feet, to considering lilies and watching sparrows; to stunning lake views and outdoor classrooms.

It is easy to miss Jesus-the-hiker in a world filled with cars and airports, so try imagining these Bible stories in their geographical context:

- **Preaching at Nazareth:** (Luke 4) The 38-mile walk from Nazareth to Capernaum following Jesus' inaugural announcement of his ministry offered ample time to reflect on how that sermon was received. Forest scenery, stunning mountain overlooks and views of the Sea of Galilee may have been a comfort.
- **Jesus cleanses the temple:** (John 2:12-16) The annual Passover hike from Galilee to Jerusalem was over 100 miles one way, through rolling hills and olive groves. Fortunately, it took place during peak wildflower season.

[1] Portions of this section of the essay first appeared among the Bible essays for teachers in *God's Good Creation,* in the Summer 2013 Good Ground series.

- **Healing the blind men at Jericho** (Matthew 20:29-21:1): This was the beginning of a rugged 11-mile uphill climb to Jerusalem. The path led through steep canyons, some of which are now bird sanctuaries.

These interludes, chosen at random, are just a tiny fraction of the time Jesus spent outdoors. There's a hike hiding between nearly every story in the Gospels. Jesus' travels extended at least 150 miles north to south and 50 miles east to west. He appears in a variety of ecosystems: with the wild beasts in the Judean wilderness during the temptation; calling disciples along a lakeshore; plucking grain while walking through farmers' fields; rock-climbing to the site of the Transfiguration and routinely escaping to remote places for prayer and for safety.[2]
With this lifestyle, how could Jesus *not* have had an intimate relationship with the natural world? While Jesus' preaching appears to focus on human concerns rather than creation, he spoke many of those words on trails and hillsides. His parables suggest he was familiar with the plants and farming practices of his day, and he also had a keen eye for good fishing spots.

What would happen if we took time to know this outdoorsy side of Jesus today? How would it reshape our relationship with our own towns and local flora and fauna? "No one can truly know Christ except by following him in life," Hans Denck, an oft-quoted Anabaptist once said. If we take Denck literally, we might want to walk in our communities more often.

Portrait 2: Christ, the Center of All Creation, Colossians 1:15-20

Christ is the creator as well as redeemer in Christian theology. One text that emphasizes this role is Colossians 1:15-20, a hymn sung by the early church. If you sit with this hymn to Christ the Creator for any length of time, you will soon feel the weight of *all things* bearing down on you. Those two words occur six times. *All things* were created with, in and through Christ; in him *all things* hold together; through him, God is reconciling *all things*. Here, Jesus the crucified one is the center and source of the entire cosmos, from snails to whales to galaxies. He is what J. Philip Newell calls, "a presence of love at the heart of creation."[3]

Some early Christian writers understood Christ as one of God's two hands forming creation.[4] "How can this be?" we might wonder, just as Jesus' mother, Mary once asked about him. One way some theologians make sense out of texts such as Colossians 1 and Christ's involvement in creation is to understand the creation of the world as an act of God's self-limiting. God makes

[2] For help visualizing Jesus' landscape, see the Jesus Trail or Walking with Jesus in the Galilee.

[3] Phillip J. Newell, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008) 96.

[4] Irenaeus, a second-century theologian, says this in *Against Heresies*, 4.20.1.

room for something other than Godself to exist, and doing so requires limiting God's own freedom and power. By giving human beings the capacity to think, reason and choose evil as well as good, God submits to suffering with us and our foolish choices, thus choosing the cross even in the act of creation. Naming Christ as creator need not bog us down in metaphysical speculations of the sort that kept fourth century Christians at each other's throats. Rather, it affirms that the capacity to suffer with us in an intimate way is part of God's nature—past, present and future. It is part of what enabled creation; it was made manifest most fully in Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection and it is ongoing today and into the future.[5]

Another way to make sense of this text is to recognize its concrete, political edge. Walsh and Keesmaat call it subversive poetry, aimed at reshaping the imagination of early Christians. To call *Christ* the image of God and the center of all things in an empire that called Caesar the image of God and saw *itself* as the center of all things was nothing short of treasonous.[6] What gods would we dethrone today if we took the Christ hymn in Colossians seriously? Is it oil that holds our world together? The global economy? If God is in the business of reconciling all things in Christ (1:20), dare we say that the crucified Christ suffers with a mountain shattered by mining?[7] And if we do say that, how does it change our assumptions about a practice like mountaintop removal?

Finally, we may simply need to admit that this highest of Christologies defies rational explanation. It is a song to sing during worship, not a treatise to dissect. It helps to remember that the Apostle Paul was a mystic. Pauline thought is grounded, not in miles logged with the earthly Jesus, but in a vision Paul had of the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. All of Paul's work building bridges between Jews and Gentiles and coaxing and counseling fledgling congregations grows out of that numinous encounter. Likely, he struggled the rest of his life to put his vision of Christ into words. I read the expansiveness of Colossians 1 in that spirit and take comfort in the fact that there is "deeper magic" than what we can know or master.

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[5] Thomas Finger takes this line of thought in "An Anabaptist Mennonite Theology of Creation," *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 164-165. Other theologians for whom both the trinity and creation are important include Jurgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf and Norman Wirzba.

[6] Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 83-84.

[7] See Christians for the Mountains to learn more. Or see the documentary, *Mountain Mourning.*

Philip Yancey has written a book entitled, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. I think we should all write that book—every ten years. Fragmented gospels are dangerous, and the Jesus we need most at this juncture in history is the savior of the whole world, not just human beings.

Discussion Questions:

Key ideas

1. If you had to state your understanding of the gospel in seven words, what would you say? Is creation in any way represented in your seven-word gospel?

2. According to the essay for this session, good news that does not include the earth is a fragmented gospel. Do you agree or disagree? Support your argument. How is creation part of the holistic good news of Jesus Christ?

3. Do you feel that you know Jesus, the hiker? Does the cosmic Christ mean anything to you? Which one of these versions of Jesus is most familiar to you? Least familiar? Are you interested in knowing either of them better?

4. How would you title the Jesus that your congregation preaches? If your congregation shifted its understanding of the good news to include good news for creation, how would your worship services and congregational life change? Your mission statement?

5. In what ways is your congregation an outpost of good news for the area your group mapped?

Supplementary Questions

6. According to Colossians 1, it is Christ that links all created beings to each other and to God. How might this understanding shape your relationship with creation?

7. Ponder this question from the essay: What gods would we dethrone today if we took the Christ hymn in Colossians seriously?

8. Christians interpret the crucifixion to mean that God is with us in human suffering. Do you believe God is also present and grieving when the land or animals suffer? How have you experienced this?

Knowing Your Place

Place Questions

1. What watersheds are part of your region? Are there other natural dividers such as mountains or changes in vegetation?

2. What roadways and bike paths connect or sever communities in your area? Whom do they serve best? How do they affect wildlife or natural areas?

3. How well does your community serve bikers and walkers? How might you make better use of the pedestrian options that are there?

Practices

Spiritual Practices

1. **Walk your community** with an eye to the landscape, its inhabitants and how they interact. Walk in a part of your mapped region that is new to you, or walk a distance you commonly drive, such as the distance from your home to church. Did this practice enable you to connect with Jesus and his ministry or with your community in a new way?

2. **Bible study:** Apply the ecological lens questions to one of these texts mentioned in the essay: John 3:16, Romans 8:18 – 25, Genesis 6 – 9.

3. **Pray, sing or chant** the Christ hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 outdoors this week, pausing on the word, ALL each time you come to it. What aspect of "all" is God inviting you to see right now?

4. **Choose a natural object** you can hold, or an animal it is easy for you to watch. Imagine God's love extending to this creature.

5. **Find a photograph** related to a current environmental issue and hold it while you pray for this troubled corner of the world. Imagine God's love extending to this place, including the landscape, plants and animals involved.

6. **Meditate on this quote:**
   "[The cross] is a revelation of the Presence at the heart of the universe. It reveals the greatest truth, that we will keep our heart only by giving our heart away, that we will find ourselves only by losing ourselves in love, that we will gain salvation only by spreading our arms wide for one another and for the earth, and that we will be saved together, not in separation."
   - J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, p. 104

Household Practices

1. **Plan ways to walk, bike or carpool more often.** This could include examining your schedule, repairing a bicycle, getting reflectors, trying out biking or walking routes, etc. Of the energy that U.S. individuals and households consume, 43% is devoted to transportation.

2. **Avoid aggressive driving and idling your car**. Gas guzzling driving habits include rapid stops and starts and driving over 60 mph. Avoid braking whenever possible by slowing down gradually at stoplights. For more information, see Fuel Efficient Driving, Earth Easy Solutions for Sustainable Living. For information on why it is both unnecessary and damaging to the air to idle your car, see Attention Drivers! Turn off your idling engines, Environmental Defense Fund.

Additional Resources

Bergen, Wes. *You are NOT Going to Heaven (and why it doesn't matter)*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.

"God will take care of heaven," Bergen writes. "Our task is to take care of the earth." This saucy book will offend some with its cavalier dismissal of the importance of life after death, but others can benefit from its dogged pursuit of what salvation looks like here and now.

Bredin, Mark. *The Ecology of the New Testament: Creation, Recreation and the Environment.* Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica Publishing, 2010.

We must care for creation because we are called to love what God loves, Bredin says. He asks ecological questions of many familiar parts of the New Testament, such as the Lord's Prayer, the beatitudes and Jesus' temptation. He shows how the New Testament speaks to "the life-threatening, violent imperialism and tribalism lying at the heart of the ecological crisis."

Jones, James. *Jesus and the Earth.* London, England: SPCK, 2003.

In this brief book, Jones works with Jesus' identity as the Son of Man. In Hebrew, this phrase means, Son of Adam, or more literally, Son of the one made out of earth. Writing as an urban bishop, Jones' interests are practical and pastoral.

Redekop, Calvin, ed. *Creation & the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

See especially:

Weaver, "The New Testament and the Environment: Toward a Christology for the Cosmos."
Finger, "An Anabaptist Mennonite Theology of Creation."

Newell, J. Philip. Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

Who is Christ for us today? Might the Celtic tradition, which was less influenced by the Roman Empire than other parts of the Church, have insights to share? Christ and creation intersect in this brief and poetic book.

Session 3: Biblical Views of Nature

Knowing Your Faith

Jump to: Discussion Questions Knowing Your Place Practices Resources

Scripture: Psalm 104
Related Texts: Psalm 19, Psalm 50:10-11, Psalm 65, Revelation 5:13-14, Job 38-41, Leviticus 25:1-28
Suggested Eco-Lens Questions: Try A and D with Psalm 104.

Creation care materials often begin by reflecting on the unique role of human beings as caretakers of the planet. This is like handing high school seniors medical degrees. Shouldn't they first know something about the human body and its systems? Likewise, we cannot understand our unique niche on this planet until we have a sense of the whole we are a part of. Let's consider what our faith teaches about **nature** and then rush out and take a few environmental science classes.

Suppose Mary and Joseph had a home school curriculum. What might it have looked like? While it would be naïve to assume that the son of a carpenter never thought of trees in terms of board feet, this is not the only perspective he would have learned. In fact, Jesus inherited a profound ecological ethic through his Jewish ancestry.[1] Here are a few key points:

- Live as if the Earth belongs to God.
- Value all parts of nature.
- Listen for creation's voice.
- Discern what nature has to teach us about God.
- Embrace creation as community and covenant partners.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

The Earth belongs to God.

Psalm 24:1 is perhaps the most familiar assertion of God's relationship with the earth:

> "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it;
> the world and those who live in it."

[1] Vernon Visick, "Creation's Care and Keeping in the Life of Jesus," in Calvin B. DeWitt, ed. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991).

But there are many similar statements. In Psalm 50, where God pleads for offerings of gratitude rather than burnt animals, the claim is more specific:

> For every wild animal of the forest is mine,
> The cattle on a thousand hills.
> I know all the birds of the air,
> And all that moves in the field is mine. (vs. 10-11)

However, it is Psalm 104—with its roaring lions and frolicking sea monsters—that provides the most vivid picture of what God's ownership of the earth looks like. Here, creation has its own relationship to God that is independent of humans. God is no absentee landlord, but rather a homemaker, engaged moment-by-moment, breath-by-breath in the affairs of creation. God discerns what habitat is right for each creature and offers food and abundant water for all. "Novel to this biblical psalm is the claim that creation is sustained not by God's covenantal commitment but by God's unabashed joy," William Brown remarks in his book, *The Seven Pillars of Creation.*[2]

The idea that the earth is ultimately God's is not just the stuff of poetry and song, however; it is a pragmatic and political assertion also expressed in biblical books of law and history. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, land is a gift that is God's to give and that binds the receiver to the giver. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants," Leviticus 25:23 cautions. This is in a passage legislating Sabbath years and the year of Jubilee. The laws granted the land proper rest, and ancestral property that had been sold was supposed to revert to its original owners every 50th year. Even kings were not free to use the land however they wished, as I Kings 21 illustrates. In this story of a covetous ruler and his neighbor who refused to sell ancestral lands, the Hebrew King Ahab can only sulk. It is his Phoenician wife who executes the lies and murder necessary to gain the desired garden: acts that the Prophet Elijah roundly condemns. If God is still present and engaged with creation, then there are limits on how human beings may live on the land.

Value all parts of nature.

If God created nature, pronounced it good and remains in constant relationship with the earth, then all of nature has value, even if humans don't find it useful. The rock badgers, lions and

[2] William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141-143.

wild donkeys mentioned in Psalm 104 did not have economic value to ancient people. Dangerous animals like sea monsters didn't either, but in God's eyes in verse 26, they are playful pets. When a commercial timber species does appear in verse 16, it is as a habitat for birds. Certainly the Psalmist knew that empires fought their way to the cedars of Lebanon and then carted them off by the thousands for building projects. Forests were strategic military sites, like oil fields are today.[3] Here, however, their role within their ecosystem takes center stage.

Listen for creation's voice.

In her book, *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*, Elizabeth Tova Bailey writes about the year she spent watching a snail. One day while bedridden with a debilitating illness, Bailey received the gift of a potted violet with a woodland snail tucked under one leaf. The snail-like pace of her own life allowed her the time to observe this tiny invertebrate and even value it as a companion. She was intrigued by the care her snail took in tending its eggs and its selection of different spots to lay them, depending on the moisture level of the terrarium. Bailey mourned when the snail disappeared and rejoiced when she found it again. She became so attuned to her snail that she could hear the tiny sounds it made when it was eating. It sounded like "someone very small munching celery," she said.

The voice Bailey reports hearing is a tame little voice compared to the bold rumbles and roars, the dancing and clapping that biblical texts attribute to nature as it both praises and laments. The praise of non-human creatures occurs 50 times in 25 contexts, mostly in the Psalms and Isaiah.[4] Some of them, such as the vast choir of singing creatures that John hears in Revelation 5, describe an end-time redemption and new creation. Others are descriptions of the world as we know it. In Psalm 65:13, meadows clothe themselves in flocks and valleys dress up in grain, shouting and singing for joy. In Psalm 98:7-8, seas roar and floods clap their hands. In Job 38, stars sing for joy and Psalm 148 exhorts everything from sea monsters to snow to praise God. Meanwhile in Genesis 4, the earth cries out when it is stained with Abel's blood, and in Jeremiah 4 and Hosea 4:3, the land mourns.

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[3] Ched Myers, "The Cedar has Fallen: the Prophetic Word Versus Imperial Clearcutting." *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet,* ed. by David Rhoads (Continuum, 2007) 211-223.

[4] Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005) 267-268.

Perhaps we cannot go back to a view of nature that is quite as alive as the ancients saw it. All the same, we can recognize that nature praises God by being what it was intended to be. A healthy prairie dotted with coneflowers honors its creator. We can also listen to those able to interpret the language of the earth. Watch a farmer examine a field and tell what nutrient his soil is lacking. Walk in the snow with a naturalist and a scuffle in the snow becomes the print of an owl's wing, snatching up a squirrel. Those who pay attention know that the earth *does* speak. It is responsive and able to communicate its activities and needs. With their help, we can learn to hear the praises and laments of other creatures and respond in appropriate ways.

Discern what creation has to teach us about God.

Throughout history, Christians have understood God's revelation as coming to us in two ways: through scripture and through nature. This is sometimes called the "two books" theory or the dual view of revelation. Texts commonly used to make this point are Psalm 19, where the heavens declare God's glory and Romans 1:19-20 where Paul argues that what can be known about God is plainly seen in the created world. One could also point to the many nature metaphors used to speak about God and Jesus—rock, wind, water, lamb, for example. Their use implies that we can indeed encounter God through the world outdoors.

People believe that nature reveals a great variety of things about God. Matthew Sleeth's collection of "Teachings on Creation through the Ages" in *The Green Bible* yields such jewels as:

> There is no creature so small and abject, but it reflects the goodness of God.
> *- Thomas a Kempis (1380 – 1471)*
>
> One blade of grass or one speck of dust is enough to occupy your entire mind in beholding the art with which it has been made. *– Basil the Great (329 - 379)*

Jonathan Edwards thought that the blue sky spoke of God's mildness and gentleness. The oft-quoted 19th-century naturalist J.B.S. Haldane claimed, with tongue in cheek, that God had "an inordinate fondness for beetles" because there were so many of them. Nature writer David Quammen wrote a sarcastic essay wondering what the mating habits of bedbugs might reveal about the divine. Physicist Stephen Hawking has gone a step beyond Psalm 8's musings about our place in the universe. He says, "We are such insignificant creatures on a minor planet on a very average star in the outer suburbs of one of a hundred thousand million galaxies. So it is difficult to believe in a God that would care about us or even notice our existence."[5] On a more

[5] Quoted in Michael White and John R. Gribbin, *Stephen Hawking: A Life in Science* (London: Viking, 1992) 166.

hopeful note, The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) weighs in with the conviction that, "the universe has been called into being as an expression of God's love . . ."

While we might feel all of these things at one time or another, from wonder to puzzlement, it is difficult to spend much time in nature without being overwhelmed by a sense of intricacy, interdependence and—love. These are also the qualities that the Christian tradition attributes to the trinity: God the Father, Son and Spirit as a community of beings that indwell each other in mutuality and love.

Embrace creation as community members and covenant partners

A persistent streak of rebellion in the Bible refuses to see other creatures as merely commodities. In Job 38-42, this sentiment emerges as a divine rant against the self-centeredness of human beings. In Psalm 104, it bubbles forth in a fountain of joy. In Psalm 19, the human delight in scripture is placed side by side with the sky's wordless declaration of the glory of God. In several texts, including Psalm 148, human praise and nature's praise complement each other. Perhaps most striking of all, in Genesis 9, all living things are included in the covenant God makes with Noah and the other flood survivors. Such texts depict other creatures as companions, covenant partners and mirrors of God's goodness.

Cherokee theologian Randy Woodley suggests that the phrase, "community of creation" would be an appropriate contemporary translation of the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached. Today, most of us have no connection to kings and associate them with an archaic and hierarchical form of government. "Community of creation" emphasizes Jesus' continuity with the shalom traditions of the Hebrew Bible and hopefully leaves behind the blasphemous military directions that "kingdom" inspired at some points in Christian history. It also alludes to Christ's role as creator as well as redeemer. In addition, for Woodley, the "community of creation" is an important conceptual bridge between Christianity and the emphasis on harmony that is part of Native American traditions. [6]

Many faith communities are proud of their potlucks, their support of the sick among them and their sense of community. What would happen if we enlarged this vision to include the trees that suck up our storm water and the moles that aerate our soil? What if we thought in terms of our church property and its non-human inhabitants as part of the congregation and the

[6] Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012) 39.

community? Damaged rivers and declines in songbirds would suddenly become matters of urgent concern. A broken relationship with nature would occasion visits to the pastor, just as a broken relationship with a sibling or parent might. People would study ecology in seminaries and farmers would be commissioned with laying on of hands services. May it be so!

Discussion Questions

Key Ideas

1. How do you most often experience the natural world? Is it:
   - An enticing place of wonder or a bug-infested wilderness that is too cold or too hot?
   - A warehouse of natural resources or a gallery of old friends and happy memories?
   - A backdrop for human activity or a revelation of God's love?

2. What parts of the natural world do you connect with? This could be a place, a plant, an animal, a view or something else. What actions are needed to sustain the parts of the natural world that you value most?

3. How might the idea that the Earth belongs to God guide us in our relationship to the natural world today?

4. If we view the natural world as fellow creatures loved by God, how do we balance that with the reality that we need other species for food, shelter, clothing and medicine? What are appropriate ways of "using" other species?

5. Do you agree with Woodley that "community of creation" is an appropriate contemporary translation of the phrase, "kingdom of God?" How do you respond?

Supplementary Questions

6. How can ecological learning become part of Christian discipleship? What kinds of ecological learning are available in your area? In what ways might your congregation grow in its wisdom and delight regarding creation?

7. In what ways has creation taught you about God? Are you open to learning from this source? What nature metaphors for God or Christ are meaningful to you?
8. Is praying with, for or within creation part of your spiritual life? Why or why not?

Knowing Your Place

Place Questions

1. What biome[7] is your community in? Where else in the world is this biome found?

2. To what extent are the plants and animals characteristic of this biome present and healthy in your community? Where would you look for them?

3. What natural areas are present within your area of focus? What do you know about them? What do you wish you knew? Which of these do you use?

4. What plant and animal species inhabit your church property? Learn their names and a little bit about them.

Practices

Spiritual Practices

Remember to use a prayer of intent such as the one provided in Session 1 to help you focus as you begin.

1. **Select your favorite sections of Psalm 104** and rewrite them, replacing the species and ecosystems the psalmist knew with those found in your area. How does this change your understanding of the text?

2. **Find a "waste space" in your area** and pay attention to it, using a camera or nature journal. What surprises emerge?

3. **Visit a natural area** within your area of focus that you have never been to before.

4. **Memorize** one or more of the scriptures listed for this session.

[7] Biomes are large geographical areas of distinctive plant and animal groups, such as grasslands, deciduous forests, deserts, etc.

5. **Spend time with nature images for God or Jesus**: rock, wind, water, lamb, pathway, etc.

6. **David Kline, an Amish bishop and writer**, reports that the most commonly used prayer book in Amish homes contains "an evening prayer to be read daily." The prayer includes the line, "Help us not to harm your creatures and creation."[8] Make this your own daily prayer.

Household Practices

1. **The monarch butterfly** is in serious decline. Factors include increased pesticide use and loss of hedgerows and other wild spaces that include milkweed (*Asclepias*). This is the only genus of plants that monarch caterpillars can eat. Add some milkweed to your lawn or garden. If you can't find wild seed, native plant catalogs carry varieties of milkweed. Make sure you plant a variety native to your area.
   See milkweed species list and ranges. Read more: Tracking the Causes of Sharp Decline of the Monarch Butterfly

2. **How can you make your home or church property hospitable to other species?** Insects serve as the base of the food chain, and 90% of them are like monarch butterflies in that they require a specialized diet. They cannot eat peonies from China or zinnias from Mexico any more than we can eat nightshade or poison ivy. While monarch butterflies are popular and easy to see, what is happening to them is happening to many other insects as well, and the birds that feed on them. Learn more about gardening with native plants and shape your garden accordingly.
   Resources:
   - Native Plant Database
   - Native Plant Societies See a list by state.
   - Bringing Nature Home Insights from Doug Tallamy, a Delaware entomologist
   - *Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of our own Backyards* by Sara Stein

3. **Make a list of household items or foods** that you use daily. Choose one that came from a living thing and trace it back to the creature and ecosystem it came from.

[8] David Kline, "God's Spirit and a Theology for Living, in *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 61.

- Learn about this species, independent of its usefulness to humans. What does it need to flourish? What might the author of Psalm 104 have said about it?
- Research the production practices or environmental issues related to this product. Can you lessen your impact by buying fair trade or organic, or making do with less?

Additional Resources

Anabaptist Bestiary
This alternative rock group writes original songs that reflect on earth's creatures and give them a voice. Hear from bees, sloths, beavers and other animals not often featured in popular music. Religion Professor Trevor Bechtel anchors this group.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven. ***For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision of Creation Care.*** **Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.**
See chapter 1, "Where are We? An Ecological Perception of Place" and chapter 4, "What is the Connection between Scripture and Ecology?"

Brown, William. ***The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science and the Ecology of Wonder.*** **New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.**
This is an academic book by a biblical scholar who loves science. While some Christians pit the two ways of knowing against each other, Brown sees the sense of wonder that both scientists and theologians share.

Woodley, Randy S. ***Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision.*** **Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.**
This author brings together the harmony traditions of his Cherokee heritage and the *shalom* traditions of the Hebrew Bible in ways that embrace all of creation.

Session 4: Finding Our Place in Creation

Knowing Your Faith

Jump to Discussion Questions Knowing Your Place Practices Resources

Scripture: Genesis 1 - 2
Also Recommended: Genesis 3 – 11
Suggested Eco-Lens Questions: Try C and D with Genesis 1.

Scriptures are like medicines. Carefully applied, they can heal and save lives. The wrong remedy, however, or even an overdose of the right one can be toxic. You wouldn't want to pass out nitroglycerin o a street corner.

Genesis 1:26-28 is a particularly potent scripture. Over the past 50 years, it has become one of the most controversial texts in the Bible. Some say that the Christian belief that human beings have been given dominion over the planet is the root of all environmental destruction.[1] The assumption that dominion is our right has indeed been absorbed into the Western bloodstream along with a dose of imperialism, technical know-how and greed. It has helped to raze forests and prairies, enslave Africans and push Native Americans off their lands.[2]

This session offers four suggestions for reading Genesis 1 and 2 in ways that lead to wholeness. Several of them are based on our ecological lens questions from the introductory material.

Consider time and place. *(Ecological Lens Question B)*
Genesis 1:26-28 is a problematic text because of the force of the two Hebrew words used to describe the human role: *radah* and *kabash*. Critics of these verses point to the fact that *radah* (have dominion) and *kabash* (subdue or conquer) are forceful words in Hebrew, usually referring to conquest of land. *Radah* has the connotation of putting your foot on something. It is important to realize that the original hearers of this text were operating in a very different context than we are. Technologically, their idea of dominion would have involved farming, fishing, herding livestock and building towns. Daily, they lived with a sense of dependence on the natural world and were keenly aware of their vulnerability in the face of

[1] In 1967, the historian, Lynn White, published a landmark article entitled, The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis, in the journal, *Science.* In it, he argued that Christianity's understanding of dominion helped create the Western thought world that fueled modern environmental destruction. The article has played a significant role in discussions of faith and the environment ever since then.

[2] See the leader's guide for examples.

drought and diseases. Today, our population is over seven billion and our inventions range from open-heart surgery to atom bombs. We are even capable of venturing into space and altering the composition of the atmosphere.

Old Testament scholars consider this context when discerning whether having dominion is an appropriate self-understanding for our times. "Is this image of dominion a legitimate and appropriate one for a society that sees itself as powerful rather than powerless, for a society whose sense of its own power is decidedly different from the biblical society within which this image of dominion arose?" asks Ted Hiebert, writing in a North American context.[3]

In contrast, Anthony Ceresko, a Catholic priest who taught many years in developing countries, imagines how empowering this text might have been for the Israelites returning to rebuild their broken city following the experience of conquest and exile. He finds it equally appropriate for a developing nation today. "It represents a powerful statement about our potential as individuals but more especially our possibilities as a community blessed by and invited by the Creator to share in the work of establishing and ordering the created world," he says.[4] An teenager who lives in a downtrodden neighborhood in America, meanwhile, might build a sense of self-worth on these verses as she realizes that she can make a difference in her community.

The radical equality proclaimed in Genesis 1:26-28 is also lost on us today. In the Ancient Near East, people believed the gods created humanity to serve as their slaves. Only kings were understood to be images of the gods, ruling in their stead and making laws that represented the will of the gods. Genesis 1 plays off of this idea with a shockingly democratic turnabout. *All* people serve as the image of God? *Women* are made in the image of God? One wonders if copies of this text didn't land in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that despite the rich meanings these dominion verses may have in certain contexts, they are likely to be misunderstood and abused in others.

Read Genesis 1 in the context of the larger biblical story.

We do not have just one creation story; we have two, and they function as complements. Genesis 1 is regal and liturgical; Genesis 2 is earthy and smells like a campfire. In Genesis 1, humans are told to rule other creatures; in Genesis 2, humans are made out of the soil like everything else and are told to serve the earth. Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis points out

[3] Ted Hiebert, Rethinking Dominion Theology, *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum.* Fall 1996, Vol. 25, #2, 16-25.

[4] Anthony Ceresko, *Ecology and Genesis 1:26-28: An Interpretative Strategy*, *Trends in Biblical Studies*, 2005.

that the Hebrew words used here, *ebed* and *shamar*, translated "till and keep," are not really agricultural words. The former means to work for someone as a servant or worshipper; the latter can mean *observe* or *watch* as well as *keep*. One keeps flocks, households and laws. To keep a garden is to observe it, learn from it and respect its limits.[5] Taken together, the biblical creation stories present a view of human identity that is truthful about our giftedness and the power we wield but tempered by an emphasis on humility and service.

Secondly, if one reads past Genesis 2, the rest of the Hebrew Bible is clearly a story of *failed* human dominion. Go no further than Genesis 1-11, and it soon becomes clear that Plan A didn't work. Why celebrate human beings as noble rulers or even dedicated servants of the earth when as early as Genesis 3, Adam and Eve exercise dominion by taking bad advice from a snake? By Genesis 6, the entire earth is a violent mess. Davis says the word *dominion* must be heard not as "triumphalism but a poignant irony."[6] Claiming that Genesis 1 gives human beings license to do whatever they want to the planet is a bit like reading the first page of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and concluding that the author was pro-slavery. Genesis 1 is only the beginning of an intriguing dialog on failure and hope; the set-up for a 66-book exposition on dominion disasters and what God did about them.

Emphasize our place as fellow members within the web of creation. *(Ecological Lens Questions A and C)*

The Bible says we are made in the image of God. It also says we are like sheep. While commentators have drained rivers of ink pondering the former identity, much less has been written about our sheep-hood. This is a human bias we should be aware of. We human beings *love* to think about how god-like we are! Just because we have always read the creation of humans as if it were the climax of the creation story doesn't mean that this is the only reading of the text. It may not even be the best reading for our times.

What if we bracket the human verses for a moment and attend to the rest of the passage? We might notice, for example, that this creation story devotes only three out of the 35 verses to human beings. A fisherman in the congregation might point out to us that God speaks to the *fish* before God utters a word to *us.* We might even realize that we share the sixth day of creation with—cows.[7]

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[5] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 29-30.

[6] Davis, 62.

[7] Barbara Brown Taylor makes this point in a delightful sermon entitled, "The Dominion of Love," pp. I-87 to I-90 in *The Green Bible.*

We are also not the only beings given special roles. The earth is called to bring forth plant and animal life, and the sun and moon are told to rule the sky and seasons. Together, humans and animals are given plants for food. We and the animals share the same sustenance and are made from the same substances—God's breath and soil. Recognizing our place as dependent members within a complex web of relationships is an important antidote to human arrogance.

Seek to know God. *(Ecological Lens Question E)*

Finally, it is important to hear the invitation in these verses that name us as created in the image of God. They are not a license to pillage; they are a call to practical theology and relationship. If human beings are to serve as representatives of God, it is imperative that they know and understand who this God is and what God values.

If seeking a relationship with God is not for you, neither is this text. If you are not yoked to a worshipping community at present, and if you are not committed to practicing the disciplines that lead us to a fuller knowledge of God, please do us all a favor. Run to the nearest scissors and cut Genesis 1:26-28 out of your Bible. Better a maimed Bible than some of the atrocities committed in the name of God in the past. If, however, you are accountable to a community that is committed to spiritual formation—through worship and study, through service and self-giving love—make the image of God your key to the environmental crisis. Your most important creation care task is to seek to know the character of our Creator.

To be a Christian is to be constantly on a journey toward a more mature vision of who God is and what it means to be the face and hands of God for other people and the planet. Genesis 1:26-28 asserts that the *only* form of dominion that will work and enable us to keep the planet is one that truly reflects God's intentions. What kind of God are we representing? This question is of utmost importance for any Christian concerned about climate change or soil erosion or pollution.

After Genesis 1-11, the term “image of God” disappears. While “image” is used negatively plenty of times to refer to idols, never again in the Hebrew Bible are human beings referred to as the image of God. No king, no priest, no nation is named as such. This striking phrase does not reappear until the Apostle Paul uses it in Colossians 1:15 and I Corinthians 4. “Christ is the image of the invisible God,” he says, quoting a hymn sung by the earliest churches.[8]

I had difficulty sifting through the many competing ideas these rich chapters suggest. One

[8] Davis, 55.

main point eluded me: they were all so important and so interconnected! In frustration, I grabbed my journal and wrote, “What matters most?” at the top of the page. I scribbled random shapes and keywords around the page, closed the notebook and went to bed. The next day, when I looked at the page again, I was startled to see that the way I had written the words “dominion” and “image of God” formed a cross.

Discussion Questions

Key Ideas

1. How and when do the creation stories come up in your congregation? Have you found them helpful in thinking about your identity and sense of purpose? Have they shaped your relationship with creation? Have any of your past interpretations ever caused harm?

2. What points from last week's session on biblical views of nature seem important to remember as you think about your role on the planet?

3. The last point in the essay for this session implies that worship and Christian education are important for Christians concerned about creation care. What kind of God does your worship reveal? Has worship nourished your desire to care for the earth?

4. The last line of the essay for this session describes a vision of the words, “image of God” and “dominion” in the shape of a cross. What would cruciform earth-keeping look like, practically speaking? Have you ever seen it?

5. Is caring for the Earth found in the core values of your congregation? Is it mentioned in missional action plans? Why or why not?

Supplementary Questions

6. What do humans need to be saved *from*? According to Genesis 1-11, the answer is a.) our violence and b.) our broken relationship with the earth. Do you agree? Support or argue against this statement.

7. Does your community have a vision for keeping the local/regional land healthy? How do you define this health?

8. What kinds of information are needed today in order to serve and keep the land? Is that information available in your community? How can discipleship incorporate ecological learning?

9. Which of the following would you see as an appropriate use of your congregation's time and resources? Why or why not?
   - Spending money on land preservation or restoration
   - Calling, blessing, and funding a student interested in the intersection of ecology and Christian faith
   - Protesting environmental abuses
   - Adopting a river and holding regular clean-ups
   - Holding a blessing of animals
   - Your idea(s)

10. What sources other than the Bible do you draw on when you think about human beings in relation to nature? Do you think modern science's story of origins has wisdom to offer?

Knowing Your Place

Place Questions

1. Where, within your map circles do participants exercise "dominion" over the land or other natural resources?

2. What entities (i.e. landowners, county commissioners, developers, city planners, etc.) within your circle exercise the most decision-making power over the landscape? What do they do?

Practices

Spiritual Practices

1. **Bible Study:** Choose one of the four points in the essay or discussion question 6 and follow up with study and reflection.

2. **Keep the Sabbath:** Along with the responsibility implied in Genesis 1 and 2 is the gift of a day in which we are to let go of duties. We are to simply be in the presence of God and creation. How do you think our environmental predicament would be different if the whole world practiced the Sabbath?

3. For further reflection, read *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, by Norman Wirzba. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.

4. **Learn about a creature** that shares your backyard or church grounds. How does it interact with humans and other species? Give thanks for God's unique creation. Electronic field guides such as E-Nature enable you to quickly limit your search to a particular region or search for an unknown species based on a description.

5. **Add a Season of Creation** to your yearly worship cycle. Like Advent and Lent, this is a regular four-week series that focuses on God as creator and our relationship with the Earth. See the Season of Creation web site for ideas. A related resource is *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary,* by Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads and H. Paul Santmire, eds. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010. This book explains the idea behind the Season of Creation and includes thoughtful theological essays on how including creation reshapes the various parts of a worship service. The second part offers brief commentaries on the texts that are part of the creation lectionary cycle the authors have developed.

Suggested Household Practices

1. **Make your Sabbath a Carbon Sabbath.** This means eliminating or reducing use of fossil fuels one day a week and living within whatever limitations result.
   For additional resources, see:

   Carbon Sabbath
   Kairos Canada's Re-energize: Time for a Carbon Sabbath

2. **Exercise dominion** over an area of your household that you have neglected, such as:
   - finding air leaks and weather stripping
   - checking to make sure your tires are properly inflated
   - setting up a recycling system if you haven't already

Additional Resources

Resources on the creation accounts abound, but these authors are particularly helpful.

Fretheim, Terence. ***God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation.*** **Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005, pp. 29-67.**
Fretheim emphasizes the character of God as exhibited in Genesis 1 and 2, and the ways in which God involves humans, earth and other animals in the creative process.

Davis, Ellen. ***Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*****:** ***An Agrarian Reading of the Bible.*** **New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009.**
Davis begins with the premise that the Hebrew people were small farmers and that their writing reflects this. She is also in dialog with contemporary sustainable farming efforts.