

Every Creature Singing Ecological Lens Questions

A. Noticing nonhuman elements

- Name the species or ecosystems mentioned or implied in the text.
- Are we stressing the importance of humans in this text at the expense of the rest of creation?
- What is the spiritual significance of the nonhuman entities in this scripture?

B. Where are we?

- How does our location in time and space affect how we hear the text?
- What might the original writer have seen outdoors? How is our view different?
- How might the text speak in light of current environmental issues?

C. Including creation in our community

- How are humans, land and other living things in this text interconnected?
- If the other-than-human beings in this text could speak, what might they say to us? Can we empathize with a river or a bird?

D. How is God at work through creation?

- How is creation involved in God's redemptive work?
- Can we see God at work in creation's ability to generate life, provide for its inhabitants and heal itself?
- Have we over-emphasized God's redemption in human history at the expense of recognizing God's sustaining presence in nature?

E. Connecting with Christ:

- How is Christ involved in creation?
- In the restoration of creation?

F. Human justice and ecological justice

- Does this passage show a connection between injustice to humans and damage to the Earth?
- Does it offer guidance in caring for the most vulnerable people?

These questions are adapted from *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*, by Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads and H. Paul Santmire, Fortress Press, 2011. Intended for use with MCCN's *Every Creature Singing*.

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Prayer of Intent

(Use at the beginning of each session)

ALL: Jesus Christ, Creator and Redeemer of all things—we long to meet you.

Voice 1: In the scriptures.

Voice 2: In our communities.

ALL: In creation.

Voice 1: We ask for hearts open to beauty, joy and awe.

Voice 2: We ask for courage to witness the world's pain.

ALL: We invite your Holy Spirit to breathe and move among us. Amen.

Ordnance Plant

for use with Session 5

Two miles east
the road came to a T.
Straight ahead
there was a chain-link fence
ten-foot high, barbed wire at the top.

It kept us from the ordnance plant,
a place they built
the bombs
they dropped
in World War II.

My parents never knew
about the other things that killed:
the chemicals
left over from the making of the bombs
that leached down to the aquifer,
the one from which the farmers pulled
the water for their corn
they used to feed the cows
that gave the milk
their babies drank.

In war our boys at church
chose another path
than neighbor youth.
Peace and love
was to rule our lives.
And yet ten miles away that plant
spewed out weapons every day
and wheat we grew
and cream we sold
went to feed the makers of those bombs,
a topic that the preacher
never talked about.
Nor of the raping of the land.

Instead they preached
about the sins
of wearing wedding bands
and women shearing off their hair.

By Joseph Gascho
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Carbon Footprints

for use with Session 6

What is a carbon footprint?

Your carbon footprint is the amount of greenhouse gas your lifestyle emits in a year's time. Individuals, organizations, cities, nations and products all have a carbon footprint that can be calculated, or at least estimated. This measure includes heating and cooling, transportation, diet and other purchases. Some aspects of your carbon footprint are direct and easy to calculate, such as how many kilowatts of electricity you use in a year. Others are indirect, such as the amount of carbon emissions required to make your computer. Even if the emissions took place in another country, they were made for the buyers' benefit, not the workers' benefit.

Why calculate your carbon footprint?

Doing the math can help you see what changes would lead to the most significant reductions in your contribution to climate change. For a typical U.S. household, transportation is the single largest source of emissions, followed by housing, food and goods consumed. Meat contributes the highest carbon footprint within the food category. The average U.S. household is responsible for about 50 tons of carbon per year. This is about five times the global average of 10 tons per household.¹ The per capita carbon footprint for the U.S. is around 17 tons per person.²

How do I calculate my carbon footprint?

Below are two of the many carbon calculators available on the web. You provide answers to a series of questions about miles traveled, energy used, income and lifestyle, and the calculator crunches the numbers for you. Most carbon calculators also provide concrete tips on how to reduce your footprint. Play around with different answers to the questions to see which changes would make the most difference.

[Cool Climate Network](#)

This site gives you simple and more advanced options for figuring out your footprint.

[Carbon Footprint Calculator](#)

This site is easy to use, but you need to have your utility records nearby. It also has a tab for businesses.

See a [product life cycle assessment](#) for a pair of jeans.

That's when a business does a detailed analysis of all steps in the life cycle of a product, from raw materials to waste disposal in order to determine how best to save energy and water. See the summary on page 12 of this link.

¹ Christopher Jones and Daniel Kammen, (2011). "Quantifying Carbon Footprint Reduction Opportunities for U.S. Households and Communities". *Environmental Science & Technology* 45 (9): 4088–4095.

² Data from the [United Nations](#), the U.S. Department of Energy's [Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center](#) and the [World Bank](#) are all in the 17-ton range.

Household Food Sheet – Living with Limits

For use with Session 10

Eating is not optional. Most of us do it at least three times a day, every day, and the average American eats almost a ton of food per year.¹ That would be over 70 tons of food for the average lifetime. It takes a massive amount of land to feed seven billion people. In the U.S., for example, 45% of land area is under cultivation. That means how we choose to grow our food and spend our food dollars is a major creation care issue. Examining our food choices is one of the most important steps toward a sustainable lifestyle.

Discuss at home:

- **What food choices is our household able to make? What things that currently limit our food choices could be changed?**
Some of us are living on very limited budgets. Some of us need to shop at the nearest convenience store because we don't have transportation. Some of us have plenty of money but are limited by our lack of knowledge about farming, nutrition or the food system. Some of us can't cook, or don't have time to cook. Some of us are trapped in bad habits we can't imagine living without. Many of these things can be changed; others cannot. Identify the choices you do have.
- **How can we structure our household to encourage healthy eating in modest quantities?**
Throughout history, most people's diets were limited by the seasons, by lack of refrigeration, by poverty and by rituals such as feasting and fasting. Today, the eating opportunities in North America are almost limitless. What limits do you need for the sake of your own health and to support food justice? For example, many calories are munched in front of the TV or computer. A simple rule limiting eating to the kitchen can make a difference.
- **How much meat does our household consume and what kinds of meat do we eat? What alternative sources of protein can we draw on?**
Meat has always been regulated in the Christian tradition. The Old Testament offers few opinions about how to cook a turnip, but many laws dealt with butchering and eating meat. Most species of animals were off limits. In later times, Lenten practices and other fast days also limited meat eating. For monastics following the Rule of St. Benedict, meat was a medicine for the weak and the sick, not an ordinary food.

Today, the North American lifestyle consumes animal products at a rate that requires mass production of meat and dairy foods. Habitat destruction, cruelty to

¹ Allison Aubrey, ["The Average American Ate \(Literally\) a Ton this Year.](#) The Salt, NPR, 12/31/11.

animals, inefficient use of calories and the challenges of concentrated animal wastes are among the issues that call us to reconsider limits on meat-eating. Christian vegetarians have a strong case. For those who eat meat, the price of pastured, organic and humanely raised meat can quickly limit consumption.

- **What agricultural practices are best for the long-term health of the land? How can our household reward farmers who use these practices?**
- **How can we be sure that the workers who grow, pick and prepare our food are paid fairly and have safe working conditions?**
- **What opportunities do we have to advocate for justice with our dollars?**

[The Sustainable Food Purchasing Guide](#) is a very helpful resource for those trying to answer these difficult questions. It reviews the rationale for sustainable food choices, describes the issues related to different food groups and suggestions questions to ask local farmers.

Your place leader may be able to advise you on farms in your community that are worthy of your support. If budget is an issue, begin by researching just one product you commonly buy and find a brand you feel good about. Stay loyal to that brand.

These difficult questions may nudge us to consider the food system as a whole, not just our own cupboards. They may send us to the voting booth or to our political leaders as well.

Overview of Knowing Your Place Questions

Session 1

1. What towns, rural areas and bodies of water are within a 5-mile radius of your church building? A 25-mile radius?
2. What urban areas do your members draw upon for goods and services? What rural areas provide for urban areas?
3. Which parts of these areas do you visit frequently? Which parts do you ignore, or know little about?
4. What aspects of your community are you curious about?

Session 2

1. What watersheds are part of your region? Are there other natural dividers such as mountains or changes in vegetation?
2. What roadways connect or sever communities in your map 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, or what adaptations are needed?

Session 3

1. What biome 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 map area? What do you know about them? What do you wish you knew? Which of these do you and your class members make use of?
4. What plant and animal species inhabit your church property? Learn their names and a little bit about them.

Session 4

1. Where, within your map area, do participants exercise “dominion” over the land, water or other natural resources in any way?
2. What entities within your circle exercise the most decision-making power over the landscape? What do they do?

Session 5

1. What forms of environmental damage or potential hazards are you aware of within your map area?
2. What do you know about income distribution within your region? What social classes live where?
3. Is racial segregation a part of your region? Where do minorities live?
4. Can you see any relationships between the location of low income or minority communities and potential environmental hazards such as landfills and factories?

Session 6

1. What are the primary sources of CO₂ within your map area?
2. What energy sources generate the electricity in your home and church building? If fossil fuels are used, where do they come from?
3. How is climate change expected to affect your region?
4. Are people within your map area planning for climate change? Are there business or government leaders who are concerned about this?

Session 7

1. Are there ethnic groups different from your own living within your map area? Who lives where? What about congregations of different nationalities, races, or religions? How do you think these other congregations would answer the questions in this study?
2. What kinds of goods are *not* produced in your region and are shipped in from international locations? Choose one or more common products and research where they come from. Can you find out where your winter vegetables, petroleum or electronics come from?

Session 8

1. What organizations within your circles are responsible for overseeing the environmental health of the area? What do they do?
2. How does one gain input into these groups?

Session 9

1. Choose a retail business or industry that is located within your map area. Find out what challenges they face in balancing costs and impacts on the environment.
2. Where do the raw materials come from that are used in your local industries? How are they transported to your region? Could the raw materials be produced locally?
3. How much of your spending supports local businesses? What changes could you make to help ensure that the income you spend on goods and services provides income to your neighbors? Is this important to you?

Session 10

1. Where does your drinking water come from? Where does your wastewater go and how is it treated? Are there contaminants in your water?
2. Where does food come from in your community? How much is grown within a 25-mile radius?
3. How can you support the farmers in your region who are doing the best job of caring for their land and animals? Where can you buy their food?

Session 11

1. What native peoples originally inhabited your region? What waves of immigrants followed and when did they arrive? How did they relate to the land? Are remnants of these groups still present?
2. What natural resources or community resources do members within your congregation share? How can the relationships you already have with each other be an asset in caring for these natural resources?

Session 12

1. What soil types are common in your community? What kinds of plants grow best in these soil types? What “root” issues do you notice within your map area?
2. What does it mean to be rooted in this community? What bonds people to this particular locale? How is a sense of place expressed? How has your relationship with God been shaped by this place?
3. What spots within your map area need a sustained commitment? How might Christ the Root provide that?

Appendix 2

Overview of Suggested Spiritual Practices . . . pp. 1 – 5

Overview of Suggested Household Practices . . . pp. 6 – 10

For complete descriptions of these practices, see the pages indicated in parentheses. The Overview of Household Practices begins on page 6 below.

Session 1 (page 1-5)

Adopt a prayer of intent: It is always important to remember why we are doing the spiritual practices we have chosen and how these activities might connect us with God. Page-1-5

Session 2 (page 2-6)

1. **Walk your community** with an eye to the landscape, its inhabitants and how they interact.
2. **Bible study:** Spend time with a text that illustrates God's care for the broader creation. See bottom of page 2-1 for a list of options.
3. **Pray, sing or chant** the Christ hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 outdoors, pausing on the word, *ALL*, each time you come to it.
4. **Choose a natural object** you can hold, or an animal that is easy for you to watch. Imagine God's love extending to this creature.
5. **Find a photograph** related to a current environmental issue that troubles you and hold it while you pray for this troubled corner of the world.
6. **Meditate on this quote:**
"[The cross] is a revelation of the Presence at the heart of the universe...."
- J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, p. 104

Session 3 (page 3-9)

1. **Select your favorite part of Psalm 104** and rewrite it, replacing the species and ecosystems the psalmist knew with those found within your map circle.
2. **Find a "waste space" in your area** and pay attention to it, using a camera or nature journal.

3. **Visit a natural area** within your map circle that you have never been to before.
4. **Memorize** one or more of the scriptures listed for session 3.
5. **Think about ways** your worship services might emphasize our dependence on creation.
6. **Spend time with nature images for God or Jesus:** rock, wind, water, lamb, pathway, etc.
7. **Adopt this Amish prayer** into your own life: "Help us not to harm your creatures and creation."

Session 4 *(page 4-7)*

1. **Bible Study:** Choose one of the four points in the essay and follow up with your own study and reflection. Or reflect on discussion question 6.
2. **Keep the Sabbath:** How would your life be different if you were a consistent observer of the Sabbath? How would our environmental predicament be different if the whole world practiced the Sabbath?
3. **Learn about a species** that shares your backyard or church grounds.
4. **Add a Season of Creation** to your yearly worship cycle. See the [Seasons of Creation](#) web site for ideas.

Session 5 *(page 5-8)*

1. **Read and reflect** on the poem, "[Ordinance Plant](#)," by Joseph Gascho. Pray or journal about the issues mentioned. Pray that any toxins in your present community will be revealed and dealt with.
2. **Praying with waste:** If you have a town dump, super-fund site or other hazard within your radius circle, visit that site. Walk, observe and pray in this area.
3. **Spend time with a weeping Jesus:** In a journal or prayer, name the things that make you weep over your city or country today. What "things that make for peace" go unrecognized?

Session 6 *(page 6-7)*

1. **Intercession:** Post a picture on your refrigerator to help you remember to pray for humans or animals affected by climate change.
2. **Lament:** Review the projected impacts of climate change for your region. Then go to a natural area you love—or your own backyard—and imagine what it might look like if these impacts come true. Mourn for the losses this change would entail and write a lament for them.
3. **Memorize this sentence:** “I’m a Christian, and I think we should do something about climate change—even if it costs us.” Say it to everyone you meet.
4. **Use the ecological lens questions** to explore the primary and related passages from Jeremiah listed in session 6.

Session 7 *(page 7-4)*

1. **Listening to the global community:** For one week, suppose that hearing global voices on issues related to creation care is your first priority.
2. **Listening to opposing perspectives nearby:** For one week, suppose that hearing nearby voices that you disagree with on a particular issue related to creation care is your first priority.

Session 8 *(page 8-5)*

1. **Intercessory prayer:** Pray for a local environmental governing body. Learn the names of the people who are part of this body.
2. **Biblical models:** Spend time with one or more of the texts related to citizenship or political action that are mentioned in the essay.
3. **Read Martin Luther King Jr.’s [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#),** devotionally. Who is speaking these words to you today?
4. **Monitor yourself:** If you are a person with pronounced opinions about environmental issues, spend this week paying attention to the comments and assumptions you make about people and groups who disagree with you.
5. **Write your own pledge of allegiance:** Read Ellie Schoenfield’s poem, “[Patriotism](#).” In it, she describes her loyalty to the soil. Play around with creative ways to state where your allegiance lies.

Session 9 *(page 9-6)*

1. **Claiming economic power:** When you wake up tomorrow morning, spend a few moments reflecting on the power you have as a North American consumer. Think about how you might use your economic power, whether it is large or small, to support the work of God's people.
2. **Fast from one of your electronic pastimes** in order to reflect on Mark 4:19 (the seed among thorns) and Matthew 6:33 (seek first the Kingdom).
3. **Breathing our own wastes:** Stand behind an idling truck, car or school bus for a few minutes. While you are there, pray for those most affected by air pollution.

Session 10 *(page 10-6)*

1. **Seek abundance:** Find a way to fast this week from your usual level of consumption. This could include skipping a meal, giving up meat, making your Sabbath a carbon-free day, biking whenever possible or not entering a store.
2. **Pay attention to water:** Give thanks for each cup of water you drink this week. Pray for those whose rivers are dried up, whose aquifers are depleted, who have no well.
3. **Begin a gratitude journal:** Each day, write about the things you are thankful for. You may find you have a lot to say, even on bad days.
4. **Bible study:** Apply the Ecological Lens Questions to Psalm 23 or the related scriptures listed for session 10.

Session 11 *(page 11-6)*

1. **Invite input** from a few members of your congregation on a financial decision you might normally make on your own.
2. **Start a small group** that draws on one of the models of community described in this session's essay.
3. **Agape meals:** Find new ways to eat together that include people who usually eat alone and/or people who have trouble keeping food on the table.
4. **"No needy among them":** Spend time discerning non-human need in your community. What about birds that are losing their habitat? Pray for the need that God reveals to you.

Session 12

(page 12-6)

1. **Review spiritual practices you tried.** Think about which practices you want to hold onto in the future and what needs to happen so that becomes possible.
2. **Listen for the sound of creatures singing.** Spend time outside noticing the songs of birds, frogs, insects, wind in trees or other sounds of creation. Offer your own prayers along with these sounds.
3. **Pray for your congregation** as Paul prays in Ephesians 3:14-20. Ask that it may be rooted in Christ's love.
4. **Experiment with a spiral** using [The Work that Reconnects](#) website. This is interior work that focuses on moving people from despair to empowerment using a specific set of practices.

Appendix 2

Overview of Household Practices Suggested

See the individual curriculum sessions for more detail on the practices below.

Session 1 *(page 1-5)*

Finding time to care about the earth: How will you find time to make the questions and practices that this study suggests a priority? Discuss this question with your household at home.

Session 2 *(page 2-7)*

1. **Plan ways to walk, bike or carpool more often.**
2. **Avoid aggressive driving and idling your car.**

Session 3 *(page 3-9)*

1. **Add some milkweed to your lawn or garden** for the sake of monarch butterflies, a species in serious decline.
2. **Find ways to make your home or church property hospitable to other species.**
3. **Make a list of household items or foods** that you use daily and normally think of as commodities. Choose one that came from a living thing and trace it back to the creature and ecosystem it came from.

Session 4 *(page 4-8)*

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.
2. **Exercise dominion** over an area of your household that you have neglected, such as weather stripping or tire inflation.

Session 5 *(page 5-8)*

1. **Locate your county's household hazardous waste disposal.** Set up a safe storage area for items on the way to the hazardous waste facility.
2. **Make a list** of all the products in your household that contain toxic chemicals. Can you switch to natural agents or use less of these?

Session 6 *(page 6-8)*

1. **Calculate your carbon footprint.** See additional information on the session 6 handout, About Carbon Footprints.
2. **Think justice, not charity.** Give money to an organization that in some way works with climate change, either by helping disaster victims, raising awareness or mitigating effects.
3. **Organize a voluntary gas tax group:** Group members agree to "tax" their own gasoline expenditures in recognition that the price we pay at the pump is not the full cost of using gasoline.

Session 7 *(page 7-4)*

1. **Navigate household conflicts:** Discuss any tensions at your house this week related to sustainable practices. Do you understand the other person's position? Can you find common ground?
2. **Map your consumer goods:** Make a list of where items in your house came from. Pick one or two products you buy regularly and see what you can find out about the country they came from and/or the industry that produced them there.
3. **Develop Fair Trade brand loyalty:** Read about Fair Trade products and practices. Find an item you would like to buy fair trade and do the math. What would it cost you per year to make the welfare of the community that produces this item a priority?

Session 8 *(page 8-6)*

1. **Remember this sentence from Session 6?** “I’m a Christian, and I think we should do something about climate change—even if it costs us.” Find new places to say it.
2. **Take a walk** around your neighborhood with a notebook in hand. Make a list of all the policies you encounter that affect the care of creation. Do you question the wisdom of any of these policies? Do you see a need for policies that don’t exist?
3. **Choose a new source of news** to follow on a regular basis that could help you become a better caretaker of creation.
4. **Write a letter** to an elected official expressing your views on a creation care issue you are concerned about. Could your household make this a weekly practice?
5. **Post the guidelines** suggested on page 8-6 to help you evaluate political issues that come by you.
6. **Encourage someone:** Write a kind note to someone whose ecological leadership, business or farming practices you respect.
7. **Start a public affairs club** for high school students or young adults in your community. Include an environmental justice focus.

Session 9 *(page 9-6)*

1. **Tools for God’s kingdom:** Choose one item you own and find a way to transform it into a tool for God’s kingdom. Could sharing this resource build community? Can it help you to carry out your vocation? Does someone else need this tool more than you do?
2. **Tithing:** What would you need to give up in order to increase your donations to ten percent of your before-tax income, or some other percentage? Try giving this much next month to see how it changes your perspective.
3. **Reflect on your investments:** How might our values related to the environment influence the investments we make and the organizations we support?

Session 10 *(page 10-7)*

1. **Discuss your food choices** with your household using the food resource sheet provided for session 10. In what way is God calling you to practice your faith at the table?
2. **Calculate your carbon footprint.** If you did not already do this during Session 6, try it now. See the session 6 handout, [About Carbon Footprints](#).
3. **Become aware of what you consume:** For one week, keep a list of everything that you purchase. How did each item enrich your life? Put a star by items that do not fit your values.

Session 11 *(page 11-7)*

All of these practices refer to your congregational “household.”

1. **Scoresheet work:** Mennonite Creation Care Network offers a [Greener Congregation Score Sheet](#) to help congregations gain a broad picture of creation care and get started. Questions range from buildings to congregational life to worship and encourage a systematic approach. Work through one or more questions on the score sheet. Note that discussion guides are also provided on MCCN’s [Shape Your Vision](#) page.
2. **Set up a borrowing system within your congregation** that allows members to indicate what items they are willing to share and under what circumstances.
3. **Set up systems for recycling** or evaluate the ones you do have.
4. **Glean ideas from others:** Visit [MCCN’s congregations](#) page for stories about how other congregations are working together to care for creation.

Session 12 *(page 12-7)*

The “household” these practices refer to is your congregation and the practices pertain to your corporate worship.

1. **Acknowledge the land you worship on:** Find culturally appropriate ways to pay your respects to the land you worship on in your upcoming worship services.
2. **Add a Season of Creation** to your yearly worship cycle. See *The Season of Creation* resources below.

3. **Intercessory prayer for creation:** Pray for sick parts of nature as well as sick people. Are there people with a special calling for this?
4. **Notice how creation participates in the liturgical seasons:** Find ways to accent these relationships (during Advent and Lent for example) and help others appreciate creation's part in the drama.
5. **Hold an outdoor service** or tweak an outdoor service you do have. See page 12-7 for ideas.
6. **A broader understanding of offering:** Try a spring offering of flowers, a summer offering of garden vegetables or a trash offering as a confession.
7. **Native plants for altar flowers:** Commit to using native plants rather than chemical-doused store-bought flowers. Use them as an opportunity to teach about your bioregion.
8. **Notice natural materials used in your worship** such as bread, grape juice, water for baptisms, fabric for banners, wood for benches, and so on. Can these materials be locally sourced? Used in ways that strengthen ties to the land?
9. **Communion:** Acknowledge the land that grew the wheat and the grapes during communion rituals.
10. **Plan a series of worship services** based on non-human images for God.