

CREATION CARE BIBLE STUDY

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Christian Reformed Church
Worship
Ministries



CLIMATE
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CALVIN INSTITUTE OF
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP



Creation Care Bible Study

Interim 2017

Engaging God's Creation

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On behalf of Campus Ministries, in our effort to partner with January's Kill-A-Watt initiative, we are delighted to share with you this option for an Interim Bible study. We commend it to those of you looking for a way to continue seeking to live into the kingdom ways of righteousness and justice that many of us learned about during our Fall Sermon on the Mount Study. For students, we are glad to offer you a study developed by a peer and for staff and faculty we similarly celebrate this opportunity to be challenged by those we typically serve.

Welcome to this three-week study on Creation and Justice. Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring the biblical call to the care of God's creation through sustainability. We will do this by looking at biblical texts and then by looking at the world around us. Through this we are likely to find areas in which we see injustice in our own lives and will be challenged to act. This study is intended to stretch our thinking about certain topics. We hope this struggle leads us to an appropriate response—one that seeks change. At the same time, we hope that it also helps us to better celebrate the goodness around us.

Please note: The first two weeks of this study are content rich and you might not get through all of the questions. Week 3 is purposefully designed with less study and more conversation so that if Weeks 1 and 2 require more time, it can be borrowed from Week 3. Of course, feel free to pick which questions suit your group the best as you move through the study.

Week 1 - Building a Theology & Ethic of Care for the Earth

To begin our study, we will explore the biblical call to care for all creation. This first week will explore the significance of God as creator and God as King.

Discussing the Text

Read Genesis 1, Genesis 6:5-8 and Genesis 9:1-3

- Of what significance is the fact that God is the creator of ALL things?
- Is it striking that humans are entrusted and empowered to oversee creation (v.28-29)? Do you think this is every human's vocation or responsibility?
- God deemed all of creation to be good with humans as the crown of goodness. How have we deviated from this view of complete goodness?
- What kind of things would be required of us to return to that original state of peace, harmony and the flourishing of all things?
- Based on Genesis 6, how does immorality affect God's view of a harmonious creation?

Read Colossians 1:15-23

Colossians 1 claims Christ is the real power that holds the world together. In Him all things were created. And through Him all things will be reconciled. The Creator is not only the one who actively holds the universe together; He is also the one who redeems it.

- How should our work of redemption correlate with that of Christ?

Read Matthew 6:10 and Mark 1:14-15

The kingdom of God is the reign of God over all things. Put another way, the kingdom of God is things going God's way at every turn, in every circumstance, everywhere. This is good news only because God is a good king who wants his kingdom to flourish. As we pray for God's kingdom to come to earth and as we receive the news that in fact the kingdom has already begun to be established right here on planet earth, the picture of God's relationship to his creation becomes more hope-filled.

- If the kingdom has already come but is not yet fully here, where do we see evidences of this in the world?
- Does our view of the end times and the coming kingdom (i.e. whether the earth will be destroyed vs. a renewal of all creation) affect how much we care for creation now? How so?

Discussing the World

The coming kingdom: In early Jewish culture, it was customary to welcome a king back into his kingdom when he returned from battle. In a similar manner, we are called to welcome Christ on his return to the earth by ushering in God's coming kingdom.

- What does ushering in God's kingdom mean for us now?

- How, specifically in your life today, do you see yourself welcoming God's kingdom?
- As you ponder caring for creation, where does it rank on your list of priorities? Is it something that needs to be a priority?

Steven Bouma-Prediger notes "It is as false to claim that concern for the earth is not a legitimate feature of authentic Christian discipleship as it is to claim that care for the earth is the sum total of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. The gospel is surely more than caring for the earth, but just as surely it involves nothing less." (*For the Beauty of the Earth - A Christian Vision for Creation Care* – second edition by Steven Bouma-Prediger)

Calvin DeWitt further observes that, "Jesus Christ is Creator, Integrator, and Reconciler; yet many who call on his name abuse, neglect, and do not give a care about creation. That irony is there for all to see. Honoring the Creator in word, they destroy God's work in deed. Praising God from whom all blessings flow, they diminish and destroy God's creatures here below. The pieces of this puzzle do not fit! One piece says, "We honor the Great Master!" The other piece says, "We despise his great masterpieces!" (*Caring for Creation by Calvin DeWitt*)

In closing for today, ponder the Kingdom and Will of God in your life as you say the Lord's Prayer together.

For further reflection:

- If the concepts of God's Kingdom and Justice are new to you or difficult to grasp, consider reading in appendix B a bit about Kingdom.

Other resources include:

- *When the Kings Come Marching In*: Richard Mouw
- *The Upside-Down Kingdom*: Donald Kraybill
- *Announcing the Reign of God*: Mortimer Arius
- *Simpler Living*: Michael Schutt

Week 2: Building a Theology of God's Justice

Introduction: In continuation from last week we will focus in on our King's call for justice by asking each other the following:

- What do you believe Justice is and where do you see it in action? Where do you see a greater need for justice?

Discussing the Text

Read Micah 6:8

- What does God require of us in seeking Justice?
- Matthew 22 calls us to loving our neighbor as ourselves. What is the role of Love in seeking justice?

Read Isaiah 58 and Psalm 103 together.

- Isaiah 58:5 points out that God finds flaws with our 'fasting'. What needs to be different? Consider how this stacks up with what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18).
- Talk about the biblical vision of justice (Isaiah 58:6 onwards). Is the way it's described in the text the way you usually think of it?
- Psalm 103:6 claims the Lord works justice for the oppressed. Consider who might be the oppressed around you, and in the larger global community. How do they fit with your vision of working towards Christ's kingdom?

Discussing the World

- How is the Lord just in his dealings with us? What role does mercy play in justice? Consider how God might be different if God were only merciful; or only focused on justice. Talk about how we can reflect God's character by being both merciful and just.
- There are many places in our daily lives in which we discover injustice. One example of this is in the area of consumption. Are there ways injustice is being done in overconsumption? Are there ways of being a 'just' consumer?

Week 3

Introduction: This week is an attempt at thinking about practicing justice communally. The aim is to establish habits that can be sustained in the long-term. During your time today, pray that the Spirit will lead you to a cause, an organization or a change in your lifestyle. Then, tell someone about it, and take action.

Below are just some of the areas in which we might consider establishing just habits. We have also provided an extended exploration in one area (that of food consumption) as an example of how justice can be lived out in one area of daily living.

How might you consider practicing justice in the following areas: (Note: included are some examples of practices which were collected from Student Life Staff. The list is NOT comprehensive but is intended to give a few ideas).

Purchasing:

- Try writing with a Sharpie pen, "Am I loving my neighbor?" on your credit card.
- Every time you get to the checkout line, take one thing out of your basket, no planning ahead!
- Every time you treat yourself to something, spend the equivalent on someone else who could use some help.
- Before you go to a store (Ex: Walmart, The Gap, Meijer, J. Crew) spend 5 minutes online investigating the labor practices and conditions of the company.
- Research the values of buying local versus global and get to know your neighborhood.
- Don't buy it, make it!

Disposal:

- No takeout unless you bring your own containers.
- Recycle.
- Pick the product with the least packaging.
- Get rid of disposables like: paper towels, diapers, use a handkerchief (ask someone older than you if you don't know what that is).
- Find out where to recycle the extras like Batteries (libraries), electronics (Comprenew), and Styrofoam plus many other odds and ends (TreeHugger on Wealthy St.)

Energy Use:

- Shower shorter or shower less
- Eat by candlelight
- Use renewable whenever possible: solar, wind, hydropower
- Change your light bulbs

Transportation:

- Bike, walk, rollerblade

- Ride the Rapid (as in, take the bus already)
- Plan your trips out to use gas efficiently
- Carpool

Language:

- In all things, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Remember humans are all made in the image of God.
- Speak about people as if they are in the room, always.

Definitions of Beauty:

- Notice what you think is beautiful, ask yourself if that beauty is available to others.

Food:

Below are some tips to establishing just habits in being a thoughtful consumer of food and resources, adapted from *The Pleasures of Eating*, by Wendell Berry:

- Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it. Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertilizer. Only by growing some food yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and to ground again. You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life.
- Prepare your own food (cook and eat a communal meal together!). This means reviving in your own mind and life the arts of kitchen and household. This should enable you to eat more cheaply, and it will give you a measure of “quality control”: you will have some reliable knowledge of what has been added to the food you eat.
- Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy food that is produced closest to your home (alternatively, find out more about how the dining halls source their food). The idea that every locality should be, as much as possible, the source of its own food makes several kinds of sense. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, the freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence.
- Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist. All the reasons listed for the previous suggestion apply here. In addition, by such dealing you eliminate the whole pack of merchants, transporters, processors, packagers, and advertisers who thrive at the expense of both producers and consumers.
- Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can of the economy and technology of industrial food production. What is added to food that is not food, and what do you pay for these additions?
- Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.
- Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species.

Staff contributions...

- Can I love my neighbor better by purchasing this item secondhand?
- Am I caring for creation by using this cleaning product? Can I use non-disposables (cloths vs. wipes or paper towel) or non-toxic cleaners?
- Am I caring for creation by adding toxic waste to our landfills? Look for ways to recycle as much as possible...especially when it comes to batteries or electronics. (Most public libraries have battery recycling; Comprenew recycles electronics)
- Conserve natural resources (water, forests, wetlands) and learn to use them responsibly and in a sustainable manner.
- Use renewable energy sources whenever possible (solar, wind, hydropower).

Finally, in all things, remember we are called to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'.

Appendix B:

Kingdom (Matthew 6:10)

The concept of Christ's lordship over all things is closely related to the biblical and Reformed emphasis upon the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news" (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus taught many parables of the kingdom. Jesus taught Christians to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The kingdom of God is the rule of God over all things. God is king. He is sovereign. He reigns. God always has ruled, but his rule has been vindicated and established once and for all in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15- 20; Eph. 1:15-23).

The kingdom is both a present and a future reality. It is "already now" and "not yet." Jesus said the kingdom is at hand; he also prayed for the kingdom to come. One can see the fruit of this already-now kingdom concept in ministries throughout the CRC. The list below is only a small sample of such kingdom endeavors:

- Christian colleges and Christian schools across the United States and Canada
- Elim Christian School for children with physical and mental disabilities in Chicago
- Citizens for Public Justice in Ottawa
- Cary Christian Center, a community development association near Jackson, Mississippi
- Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C.
- Beginnings Counseling and Adoption Services of Ontario
- Pine Rest Christian Hospital of Grand Rapids, Michigan

These are all kingdom endeavors. These institutions are bigger than the church, God's gathered people. They are the fruit of Christ's reign in the world. They are part of that new order of peace, justice, and healing that Christ has ushered in. Christians live in hope because the kingdom is also not yet. Christians look forward to not just the defeat but the banishment of Satan, to Christ's glorious return, and to a new heaven and the new earth where there will be no more tears or brokenness or death and where, at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Closely related to an emphasis upon the kingdom is a commitment to seek justice in society. Many passages of Scripture call for Christians to seek justice, but none is more eloquent than Micah's call to Israel:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8)

It follows from an emphasis upon the lordship of Christ and the kingdom of God that Reformed Christians would be strong promoters of involvement in the broader society. And justice is generally what Christians seek as they work in these broader areas. Theologians and philosophers talk about the relationship between love and justice. Generally speaking, Christians construe God's call to love as applying to the personal relationships Christians have with people within the communities in which they

live; whereas justice is something that Christians can seek for all people everywhere. Some examples of seeking justice are:

- Fighting against laws or practices that cause racial discrimination or economic inequities.
- Promoting a proper balance of punishment, rehabilitation, and restoration in the criminal justice system.
- Promoting policies that alleviate human suffering, poverty, and hunger and that give hope and opportunity to the weaker members of society.

One important caveat is in order here. Biblical justice and the idea of justice as it is used in North American political discourse often have quite different overtones. Justice in North American society tends to focus upon personal rights, what one is entitled to, what is due an individual; whereas justice in the Bible, while it certainly includes a concern for personal rights rooted in the human person's exalted status as God's image bearer, upholds the notions of righteousness, obedience to God's law, the restoration of relationships, and the righting of wrongs that leads to righteousness and peace. Justice in the Bible is fully bound up with the kingdom of God and God's new order of righteousness and peace.

Excerpt taken from *What it Means to be Reformed: An Identity Statement* pp. 30-32

Find more creation care worship resources at justice.crcna.org/worship