



BREATH OF LIFE

Bible Study Curriculum

MOMS
clean air
FORCE

CommunityRX

— ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH JUSTICE —

EDITOR'S PREFACE

God has given us a gift in the earth. The earth provides us with everything we need to prosper physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is our responsibility as inhabitants of earth to preserve God's creation, to protect it as we would our children, and to ensure that generations that follow will be able to enjoy God's greatest blessing to us.

This Bible study serves as a guide to exploring the connectedness between God's commandments and the earth, us and the earth, and the call on the community to care for one another as we care for ourselves. We are blessed with the responsibility to advocate for one another in terms of justice and freedom. We are blessed with the responsibility to correct our wrongs and learn from the mistakes of those who paved the way for us to have these civil liberties. We are further blessed with the responsibility to call out environmental injustice and present ways to heal our communities from all harm, including pollution, climate change, and hazardous waste and chemicals.

For God so loved the world that He not only gave His only begotten Son, but He gave us earth to love and humanity to grow with. What a happy day when we can all exercise our right to breathe His pure breath of life as we continue our daily journey to be more Christlike and show others the essence of Jesus.

Shakeila Stuckey James



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

We will save the earth when we love her, and we can only love her when we know her. This Bible study will introduce to you the interconnectedness of air with the other three elements and why that unity must be preserved in order to save the air. You will also discover how to enhance your child's breath of life for generations to come.

God's creation is always in motion. The air we breathe is powered by the jet stream which forms a "line dance" around the planet. I call it a dance because of the consistent and rhythmic ways it encircles our earth home. You may want to think of this Bible study as a dance between the word of God and your actions in the world.

Sometimes our missteps in the dance of life create great harm in our children's bodies and the planet at large. I hope this Bible study inspires you to review your own actions and then move full steam ahead to lead your children, homeschool, or congregation in redeeming the "Breath of Life" given to you and your family.

Rev Dele



LEADER'S NOTES

There is a theme for each chapter and focus scripture(s) to guide the study. If you have time, you may also want to study the scriptures listed in the “Other Resources” Section which follows each chapter. People rarely all arrive at Bible study at the same time and it can save time to have a standard way to begin the study. If you have found it difficult to interrupt the casual conversations which occur during this time, consider using the Gathering Activity. It is given as a suggestion to discipline people’s focus to spiritual matters while they wait for others to arrive. If your group prefers to do a circle “check in” to allow everyone to share something significant in their day, that is a fine opener as well.

The opening prayer and song give everyone gathered the opportunity to “tune in” to one another before you begin your teaching. There are original and shared prayers to provide diversity of expression. Songs are chosen for diversity as well. The reflection contained within each lesson is intended to provide guided practice in the class as well as independent practice at home. Suggested actions cover activities you may do personally and with a child; with your homeschool or Sunday school group; and of course activities you may perform with your congregation of faith.

Also included in this Bible study is a children’s guide to help readers keep their children engaged. Chapters 1-4 have a fun fact and a word bank. Instruct your child and his/her friends to go through and find the bolded words, write down the definitions, and discuss them with the group. At the conclusion of the study, encourage your child and Sunday school groups to present what they’ve learned to the church and/or his/her classmates.

[All Scriptures come from the Green Bible, New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.]

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INTRODUCTION

Stewardship is the process we use to care for the gifts God gives us.

But Creation is more than a gift—she is literally a part of us. Her soil colors our body; her air animates our soul; and we are to love all of these manifestations of this great creation.

God created a diverse earth that responds to God's love with built in seasons of growth, rest, and regeneration. In the beginning we were asked to love earth as God loved us. Because we are infused with Creation, the way we care for Creation is a reflection of how we care for ourselves. Self care has become a concern in our communities partially because we have neglected the invitation to grow, rest, and regenerate within a practice of love.

Christ, as Lord of Creation, gathered his disciples and reminded them to love one another as He loved them.

Caring for the earth is an extension of God's commandment to take care of ourselves. When we care for Creation, we are caring for the dust from which our bodies were molded and the air He blew into those bodies to give them life.

As believers, we often sacrifice ourselves to care for others. Women do this often as they sacrifice for the nurturing of children and the community at large. You are challenged to extend stewardship to yourselves and as you do so, extend it to Creation care.

The hope is this Bible Study will inspire you to gather, reflect on your practices of love, and be made whole within yourselves and your community to act stewardly, not only to others, but to yourselves and the earth as an extension of you and of God.



CHAPTER ONE: CREATION

“A GOSPEL OF THE GARDEN”

FOCUS SCRIPTURES

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 2:8-9

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there He put the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (New International Version)

LESSON

GATHERING ACTIVITY

We ask ourselves certain questions to begin understanding what God asked us to take care of in Genesis 2:15.

God created **ecosystems** as “outdoor rooms” (forests, prairies, lakes, rivers, floodplains, wetlands, meadows, tundra, etc.) for our planet.

Spend some time guessing which ecosystem/ outdoor room you live in. What do you think made the air fresh in that original design? In what small ways can you help replenish the air?

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Gracious and Loving God, we are in awe of this beautiful planet You asked us to care for. We wish everyone were blessed to enjoy the scent of fresh blossoms in the air and dew on the grass. We need Your wisdom in restoring battered ecosystems. We need Your discipline in transforming our lifestyles and Your courage in crafting new policies so that everyone can breathe freely Your breath of life. Amen.

SONG

“How Great Thou Art” i
<https://youtu.be/M6LTqtYKDtI>

“Created to Worship” ii
<https://youtu.be/94sVWnFrzu8>



TEACHING

A Gospel of the Gardenⁱⁱⁱ

“When God coupled the earth with the breath of eternity, our souls and the **soil** were fused and our destinies perpetually intertwined. While many of us have been taught that human beings have dominion over the Earth, we have not understood that what we do to Mother Earth, we do to one another and to God.” ⁱⁱⁱ The dominion theology expressed in Genesis 1:26-28 has led to domination, abuse, and destruction of Mother Earth and human communities. We have forgotten that we must preserve our moral integrity in order to **preserve** the cleanliness of the air and fertility of the land (Genesis 3:17).

Biodiversity -- all of the different kinds of organisms living within a given area including plants, animals, and fungi -- provides a template for cultural diversity when we stop to listen and learn the lessons of the garden.

Every time we strip the land of its diversity, we strip a layer of humanity from our collective souls. And yet, the forest system described in Genesis 2:8-9 was an integrated design where soil, plants, and water worked together in natural harmony in order to preserve clean air. In addition to the food they provide humans and wildlife, trees increase and preserve soil; they provide oxygen through **photosynthesis** and generate rainfall through **transpiration**. One acre of new forest can impound about 2.5 tons of carbon annually within that forest. When clear cutting, coal mines, or chemical spills make these beings homeless, our soil becomes dust pollution and is “gone with the wind.”

Let us redeem ourselves with a “Gospel of the Gardenⁱⁱⁱ.” Just as Christ redeems humankind back to union with God, let us redeem land to its diversity, water to its purity, and air to its life-giving force.

Whether to the garden of Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37, 22:39) or the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36, Mark 14:32), Christ regularly crept away to a garden at night to nourish himself in Creation. There he found clarity about his life’s mission, guidance for the journey, and strength to overcome obstacles. He was transfigured in the garden (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28) -- unified with our Creator and fortified by the prophets who had gone before. Let us follow Christ into the garden and be fortified to restore our home, the earth. In the garden, let us be anointed with courage and strength to overcome the forces that destroy our communities and our health.

The garden blueprint we were asked to preserve in Genesis 2:15-16 describes a human **habitat** that is beautiful, providing shelter, food, and medicine in generous measure. God created a clean, abundant food production system with trees as its foundation. God did not segregate beautiful trees from food-producing trees, nor were food crops segregated from other kinds of plants. Fertilization and pollination occurred naturally. The diversity of native plants kept insects within balance.

All that was required was pruning, harvesting an abundant yield, and restoring fertility to the soil. God’s instruction in Genesis 2:15 is often translated as “to till and keep the land,” but the original Hebrew suggests more. The Hebrew words are la’avad and l’ishmor. La’avad is the same word that (Joshua 24:15). That underlying meaning of la’avad urges us to adopt an attitude of reverence and joy in our relationship with the earth. L’ishmor means to preserve or take care of something. We were given a system of naturally recurring abundance. Maintaining that principle of abundance is a bedrock of our faith and our health.

REFLECTION

“Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God.”

— *George Washington Carver* ^{iv}

Spend 10 minutes outdoors under a tree, breathing deeply and exhaling through your nose. Record how your mind shifts. What can you see or hear more clearly, the more you sit? What challenges keep surfacing to be dispelled? See if you feel your shoulders, head, and body relaxing.

Try to do this three times this week, and share the results with your Bible study group.

ACTION

With Your Child:

Research and name local ecosystems or ecosystems that your child has visited. Try to identify 2 in at least 4 categories (forest, prairies, lakes, rivers, floodplains, wetlands, meadows, tundra, etc.).

With Your Sunday School Group, Play Group, or Homeschool Group:

Discuss the concept of dominion as it relates to Creation. Identify two familiar ecosystems that have been impacted by human neglect of God’s Creation.

With Your Congregation:

Plan a trip to a local river to journal or have Bible study as a congregation. Prior to going as a group, ask leaders in the church to go ahead and identify human influences that could harm God’s Creation in the place you’ve chosen. Before you have ended your gathering, discuss ways to coexist in a healthy ecosystem as God intended.

WORD BANK

Ecosystems
Preserve
Biodiversity
Photosynthesis

Transpiration
Soil
Habitat

FUN FACT

Did you know that create means “to make something new”? God created wonderful things in Genesis, including you and me! What other things can you find in Genesis that He created? Name some of God’s creations in your home. Name some in your community.

CHAPTER TWO: OUR INTERDEPENDENCE

“LADY WISDOM JOINS GOD AND HUMANITY IN THE BELOVED COMMUNITY”

FOCUS SCRIPTURES

Proverbs 8:22-31

The Lord created me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth - when He had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When He established the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He made firm the skies above, when He established the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him, like a master worker; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Romans 8:19-22

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (New International Version)

LESSON

GATHERING ACTIVITY

Watch one of Prince Ea's video clips and discuss:

<https://youtu.be/eRLJscAlk1M> v or
<https://youtu.be/VrzbRZn5Ed4> vi.

OPENING PRAYER

God of Creation, of cosmic networking and weaving,
We ask that you continue to weave wisdom into our personal and national choices;
May we cultivate Nature's power with respect so that she cultivates our humility;
May her beauty cultivate our joy -- her stillness ignite our peace --
And her seasons ripen our patience;
May Nature bring forth our fruit of the Spirit, even as we harvest from her. Amen.

SONG

"How Deeply I Need You" vii
<https://youtu.be/M6LTqtYKDtI>

"I Need You to Survive" viii
<https://youtu.be/94sVWnFrzu8>



TEACHING

The African proverb “I am because we are; we are therefore I am” provides a continuous source of reflection on the truth of our interconnectedness. One of the requirements of living in this truth is to take more time and more words to create a harmonious space for all of our relations to dwell together. The blessing is that as we shift from “I” to “we,” we become ready for unity of the beloved community.

Martin Luther King Jr. offered us a vision of the beloved community as an end goal of **social justice** work. Ellen Davis in the Green Bible echoes that thought, “Because we have no life apart from the health of soil, water [and air], we must care for it as one would care for a beloved family member.” Proverbs 8 describes what may be called the first beloved community between God, Creation and Humanity. Remember that throughout the Old Testament, wisdom was **personified** and described as “she” or “her.” Proverbs consistently celebrates wisdom as a woman.

Lady Wisdom is the thread that weaves God, humanity, and Creation together and she is the relationship transformer as well. She was there in the beginning before the ecosystems of mountains, seas, and fields were formed (Proverbs 8:25-26). Wisdom worked beside God “like a master worker.” She rejoiced with God, rejoiced in Creation, and delighted in the human race. Notice that no one element of Creation is given preference over another, because all **elements** must work together for each one to function properly. Biodiversity is one of those wisdom threads to study as we contemplate how to be good stewards of our air.

Given that biodiversity is also a template for human **cultural diversity**, let’s look deeper at the wisdom of **interdependence** within and between ecosystems. Ecosystems include a complex web of relationships between elements of God’s creation. Specific birds feed on specific insects, who feed on plants native to specific soils and climates. These are relationships developed

over thousands of years that maintain habitats that maintain clean air and are fueled by the proximity of ancient **aquifers**. What happens to the interconnectedness of life when humans use up thousands of years’ worth of water in one hundred years?

Another interdependent ecosystem that preserves clean air is the rainforests. They were originally placed on every continent and function as the lungs of the planet. By anchoring soil, facilitating rainfall, and filtering air particles through their leaves, rainforests are the first line of defense for clean air. Is Wisdom present when we clear cut one thousand year old trees and replace a bio-diverse ecosystem with a human driven ecosystem of concrete, asphalt, air pollution from vehicles, chemical plants and coal burning factories?

Wisdom seems to be removed from the beloved community when mountaintops are cleared for coal mining. **Air quality** is quickly diminished for all plants, animals, birds, and humans who live close by. Coal miners work for low wages and have inadequate health care despite their higher incidence of lung disease and cancer. When we dismantle ecosystems, there seems to be a corresponding dismantling of a fair work ethic, demise in physical health, and a disconnect in the original joy between God, humanity, and Creation. Is the Psalmist suggesting we were not given dominion over the air?: “The heavens are the Lord’s Heavens, but the Earth he has given to human beings” (Psalms 115:16). If our earthly actions create a negative impact on the heavens, perhaps we overstepped our boundaries. No wonder the Paul in Romans 8:19-23 writes of Creation groaning with all of humanity to birth a new reality -- one that is free from the slavery of corruption and human selfishness.

REFLECTIONS

Often within our communities, there are multiple groups working to address community issues or concerns. Although their methods may differ, ultimately they are working to accomplish the same goals. We sometimes find it difficult to support them all and in an effort to optimize the efforts, we make difficult choices as to where our personal time and resources will go. Because of this, at times some groups are supported more than others and less is accomplished than if these groups were to attempt to combine their efforts. These individual groups put tremendous effort into planning and executing events and meetings to address our community needs. How can we best honor everyone's work?

How may we positively acknowledge the importance of Lady Wisdom? Do we live in a way that honors serving and preserving? Can we make the biggest difference individually? Is it better to collaborate as a community and a body in Christ to find solutions and implement them? What does that collaboration look like in your community? Discuss with your group.

ACTION

With Your Child:

Go on a nature walk with your child. Discuss what you see and how the things you see depend on each other and work together. Teach them this slogan: "What do the forests bear? Soil, water, and pure air!"

With Your Sunday School Group, Play Group, or Homeschool Group:

CHILDREN: Have your child describe the nature walk and teach the other children the slogan above. Video it and post it on social media. Consider tagging your local forestry commissioner.

ADULTS: Research the Green Belt Movement. What does it mean that the rainforests are the "lungs of the earth"? How do earth's lungs take care of us? How can we take care of earth's lungs?

With Your Congregation:

Complete this "ecological footprint" activity and compare notes: www.footprintcalculator.org^{xi}

WORD BANK

Social Justice
Personified
Elements
Cultural Diversity

Interdependence
Aquifers
Air Quality

FUN FACT

A giraffe deals with unwanted parasites on a daily basis, like ticks and flies. The oxpecker bird likes to eat these ticks, flies, and other intruders off the giraffe. Both animals help one another in an interdependent relationship! The giraffe gets cleaned, and the oxpecker gets fed.

CHAPTER THREE: AIR

“OUR BREATH OF LIFE”

FOCUS SCRIPTURES

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Exodus 9:8-10

Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.” So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals.

Ecclesiastes 12:7

And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.

LESSON

GATHERING ACTIVITY

Close your eyes and count to 20. What do you smell? How does it feel on your skin? Take a moment and discuss what you smelled and felt with your group, describing it with adjectives and adverbs.

You may also watch

https://youtu.be/E8d_JvMpoY4.^{xii}

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit
Caress us with your presence
Fill our hearts with joy
Create a sacred space of love
Be With Us

SONG

“This is the Air I Breathe”^{xiii}

<https://youtu.be/tXpy5dnIoxI>



TEACHING

Since our breath is such a precious gift and such special conditions were put in place to keep it healthy, all of us should know some basic facts about air. Even after we learn the facts, we must keep a sense how sacred it is when we perform clean air **advocacy**. The Word tells us that in the beginning when waters separated, the sky appeared, holding the largest amount of uninterrupted air. Air is a mixture of **gases** that encircle Earth (78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, 0.9% argon, 0.04% carbon dioxide, and very small amounts of other gases). The custom designed ratios in this mixture are perfect for life on this planet and must stay in balance in order for healthy breathing to occur. He created the perfect breathable atmosphere for us- balanced and pure.

God drew a canopy around Earth to keep that mixture close by for our use (Genesis 1:6-7) and provided for constant purification to occur through the **jet stream** as it undulates all around the globe. After allowing air to form and making a special place for it (the sky), God created land, vegetation, and animals until the end of the sixth day. Then God formed human beings from dust and animated them through an intimate and special gift of this air called the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). If we were grateful for every breath of life we experienced in a day, imagine how many times we would have to say "Thank You." If we were grateful for this breathable atmosphere, wouldn't we take special care to ensure it stayed balanced and pure, free from the chain reaction of climate change and pollution?

One thing we know about healthy air is that it stays in constant motion interacting with bodies of water, and with leaves in forests. Quite the "social butterfly," air requires **circulation**. Large bodies of water moving with intense force help to transfer negative **ions** to air and make it cleaner and lighter. Waterfalls and ocean shores are perfect places to experience the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of freshly cleaned air. And yet, the quality of water must also be clean in order to reap this benefit.



Remembering our interdependence in chapter two, each continent had a rainforest, and this network of forests formed the "lungs of the earth." With most of our rainforests clear cut, we find the absence of leaves makes for poorer quality of air in many of our neighborhoods. Maintaining carbon in the earth is another condition supporting clean air. Whenever the natural **carbon cycle** is reversed and earth particles stay in the sky, humans get sick and other animals die. In Exodus 9:8-10, soot from large furnaces was thrown into the air. In Biblical times people developed boils from soot in the air; today scientists have established that air pollution causes stroke, heart attack, asthma, and cancer. It is clear that we are all healthier when the air is clean.

Air is experienced in the human body by the process of breathing. Our lung capacity and skin work together to keep our bodies animated and toxin free. Our capacity to hold this breath of life dictates our quality of life as well as our life span (Ecclesiastes 12:7). When the air we breathe contains more poison than the body can eliminate, not only are our bodies sick, the Earth is sick as well. Our enlightened self-interest helps us realize that we must make necessary changes to keep all of God's Creation in good working order.

REFLECTIONS

When Marvin Gaye wrote “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),”^{xiv} it was seen by many as prophetic.

Have our actions since the 1970s made our relationship with Creation better or worse? Are we more like the people of Ninevah who repented and were spared, or the children of Israel in the wilderness who disobeyed God and were destroyed? Taking Joshua and Caleb as our models, we can find the faith and willingness to work on climate solutions. <https://youtu.be/F5Kr1YB2cs4xv>

How do you think your life would change if you were grateful for each breath?

ACTION

With Your Child:

African American communities are disproportionately exposed to pollution in the US. They breathe more particle pollution^{xv} and live closer to dangerous chemical facilities^{xvi} compared to white Americans. They are also greatly affected by the oil and gas industry in the US, as documented in the NAACP report “Fumes Across the Fence-Line”^{xvii}. Can you find similar issues in your neighborhood or surrounding neighborhoods? Learn about your community brothers’ and sisters’ problems by researching local environmental justice communities and find out if these groups are aware of and fighting the issues you noted.

With Your Sunday School Group, Play Group, or Homeschool Group:

Spend ten minutes writing points in preparation for a talk with a neighbor about the link between air pollution and asthma attacks, and/or about the sources of air pollution in your neighborhood. In your group, use role play to practice this conversation and help each other by giving feedback. Commit to spark a conversation with two neighbors before the next class.

With Your Congregation:

Go to your church meetings and engage in discussions on how to ensure Mother Nature has her rightful seat at the table in your church and community service to inform, empower, and engage others to act on environmental issues including clean air. Suggest a local speaker who works on environmental issues to speak to your congregational family.

WORD BANK

Advocacy

Gases

Jet Stream

Circulation

Ions

Carbon Cycle

FUN FACT

When humans and animals breathe, we give off an odorless gas called carbon dioxide. Plants use this gas along with sunlight to make food and oxygen. It’s an ongoing cycle: Plants make the oxygen that humans and animals need to live, and we use that to make the carbon dioxide that plants need to live.

CHAPTER FOUR: CLIMATE JUSTICE

“MOTHERHOOD STANDS FOR JUSTICE”

FOCUS SCRIPTURES

Proverbs 8:12-14

I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. (NIV)

Proverbs 8: 20-21

I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full. (NIV)

Proverbs 8:29-31

When He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him, like a master worker; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

LESSON

GATHERING ACTIVITY

Take turns reading the lines of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth and discuss:

www.therightsofnature.org/universal-declaration
xviii

While this document was initially prepared by nations from the Global South, it is now used in the United States for environmental justice work.

OPENING PRAYER

God who is our Mother and Father, Provider and Protector,
You who gather us under Your wings as a mother hen,
Continue to love us as we perform the difficult task of repentance,
Give us the humility to return as children and resolve to do better,
And then the strength to actually follow through. Amen.

SONG

“A Wonderful World”^{xix}

<https://youtu.be/MnbLRCIJkBE>



PRE-TEACHING

This chapter is deeply reflective and challenges you to mature as a student. Before listening to the historical research and **philosophical** perspectives, search your own intuition and spiritual breadth, and come to class with a prepared response to the passages and questions that follow. A prepared response is helpful because it usually takes less time to share and has deeper content than an impromptu response.

Passage one, below, is an example of a community member's heart-rending passion for their homeland and the commitment to rebuilding in the face of opposition and life threatening danger. Passage two is an example of a Hebrew son's responsibility to his mother. Because the passages can become so deeply personal, you may want to use a practice from Native American ancestors. In the talking circle only the person holding the "talking stick" may speak. They speak from the heart and are not interrupted. The stick can return to the center between speakers. Everyone speaks from their own heart, so there are no critiques, challenges, or arguments. Sometimes a feather is attached to the stick to symbolize the desire that one's heart and speech is as light as a feather.

PASSAGE ONE:

Nehemiah 1:3-7

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.



Nehemiah 2:17-18

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Picture this: Nehemiah was the King's cupbearer and had a pretty good job living in the King's palace. In fact, one could say quite literally, that he was living in the lap of luxury. Still, he was part of the community of Jewish people that had been exiled from their homeland and became distraught when he learned that the lands of his home had been abused and overlooked. Nehemiah asked to leave his comfortable job to go and help restore his community. He felt an overwhelming duty to work alongside his fellow countrymen as they together began the process of re-establishing the land. Nehemiah's journey was not easy. In fact, he was faced with threats and opposition, sometimes from his own people. There were many that did not want to see the city restored. Many more felt his talents could be used elsewhere and that there were more pressing issues that he should address first. Still, Nehemiah prioritized restoration of the land as the means to restore the city and her people.

PRE-TEACHING

Today, at times we hold tightly to the many luxuries that endanger our future and the air, such as individual ownership of big cars, clear cutting forests, wasteful use of electricity, maintaining monoculture on our lawns, and monoculture in all of our crops. Like Nehemiah, we must look to our home and the communities that raised us. How are they thriving when forced to endure the pollution from our big cars and trucks? Will you cultivate the strength to let go of a few luxuries so your community can be restored? What resistance do you hold to letting go? How might working with other groups help dissolve your resistance to maintaining a healthy planet?

PASSAGE TWO:

John 19: 26-27

When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

In the Hebrew patriarchal society, the eldest son became legally responsible for the safety and well-being of his mother once the father was deceased. Having a son was critical because only men could transact the business of daily living. Realizing he is no longer able to carry out his responsibility, Jesus designates someone to care for his mother, Mary. Notice he first notifies his mother of the change "Here is your son," he says in verse 26, and then notifies the new son, "Here is your mother," in verse 27. There is the promise from Jesus, but the follow through is from the new son: "From that hour, the disciple took her into his own household."

Even while he feels death approaching, Jesus makes sure his mother is cared for. Surely he could have been focused on the extreme pain he was in from hanging in the hot sun for hours, or the exhaustion from having been beaten all night, or even the injustice of being there in the first place. Instead of focusing on his own comfort, Jesus ensures his mother and the generations to come are cared for.



TEACHING

Considering the pre-teaching, have you ever **delegated** a really important responsibility to someone else? What did you consider in the process? Do you think God made those same deliberations when he delegated taking care of the planet to humans? What might God be saying now?

Recall the last time you were in excruciating pain. Did you focus on just your own condition or were you able to take care of others at the same time? Can Jesus' example of caring for his mother inform the way we put aside our own comfort and care for the comfort of future generations?

Many of the behaviors we associate with mothers are principles for **climate justice**. Mothers set limits so the whole family may have enough and interact in a way that is healthy. Just as rivers flow within banks, and oceans within shores, setting limits is essential for healthy interactions either between children or between humans and our planet. **Sabbath** is just another word for "time out". Mothers use time out when children have pushed past healthy behaviors and need to rebalance. Sabbath can be seen as a form of economic and **ecological** justice. Observing the sabbath means that we rest, or take time out, refraining from work and renewing ourselves and the land.

REFLECTION

When nature is not part of our culture which seeks justice, imbalance seeps into our social actions. We may speak with passion and great intention, but without nature, we lack follow through in our actions. Using nature as an example, we can find harmony in the coexistence of passion and planning. Our passion is fiery like the sun. Planning takes thought and introspection from a calm place, like a serene brook or summer rain. We need both passion and planning to achieve true justice.

Do you practice the sabbath now? Do you use nature to refresh, renew, and inspire? Considering the passage above, how might you consider improving your sabbath observation and being equitable in your actions?

ACTION

With Your Child:

First, look for examples of environmental injustice in your community. For example, look for communities being harmed by air pollution from factories, power plants, refineries, and highways. Consider how residents experience this injustice. They may have increased health risks, little access to people holding the power, or economic disparity. Then, identify a related volunteer activity to perform during the next school break. Let your child find a volunteer activity that he/she can attend and possibly bring a friend.

Reach out to a local environmental justice or community development organization working in the community. Let them know that you are interested in doing something about pollution, and ask for suggestions for volunteer activities. Activities might include neighborhood clean-ups, community garden work, air monitoring projects, and more. Let the community leaders tell you what would be helpful.

With Your Sunday School Group, Play Group, or Homeschool Group:

Together, look for examples of environmental injustice in your community. For example, look for communities being harmed by air pollution from factories, power plants, refineries, and highways. Consider how residents experience this injustice. They may have increased health risks, little access to people holding the power, or economic disparity. Then, identify a related volunteer activity to perform during the next school break. Let your child find a volunteer activity that he/she can attend and possibly bring a friend.

Reach out to a local environmental justice or community development organization working in the community. Let them know that you are interested in doing something about pollution, and ask for suggestions for volunteer activities. Activities might include neighborhood clean-ups, community garden work, air monitoring projects, and more. Let the community leaders tell you what would be helpful.

With Your Congregation:

Share your volunteer experience with your church. Also share the examples of environmental injustice in your community or surrounding communities. Propose a church-wide day of environmental volunteerism. Consider tagging your local representative and council people encouraging them to volunteer as well.

WORD BANK

Philosophical
Delegated
Climate Justice

Sabbath
Ecological

FUN FACT

Did you know that it would take four Earths to sustain a population of seven billion at American levels of consumption?

CHAPTER FIVE: GOD IS CALLING

“LIVING OUT THE FIRST COMMANDMENT TO SERVE AND PRESERVE CREATION”

FOCUS SCRIPTURES

Colossians 1: 16-20

For in Him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -- all things have been created through Him and for Him. He Himself is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross.

John 1:3

All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being.

Hebrews 1:3

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (NIV)

Luke 6:46

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?

LESSON

GATHERING ACTIVITY

Share stories about a time when you felt God calling you to do something.

Did you laugh at the possibility like Sarah, avoid the call and end up with more trouble like Jonah, give God conditions like Moses, or respond eagerly like Mary?

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious one, you see through my eyes and breathe through my lungs. Allow me to breathe freely the breath of life and help all people to do the same. Strengthen my inner being and give me courage to live a life of compassion within my family, strength within my community, and to perform justice that balances the world. Amen.

SONG

“Calling My Name” ^{xx}

<https://youtu.be/5eMRyv7Hnzo>



TEACHING

An African proverb says, “If you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you!” In the beginning humankind was in direct **communion** with God. God and humans spoke freely and clearly understood one another (Genesis 2:16, 2:23, 3:9-19). Mother Nature provided all material needs through the garden (Gen 2:29). The only requirement was that humans serve and preserve earth. In other words, God instructed us to make sure earth had what she needed to remain fruitful. We were instructed to love her. Now, it’s important that we keep our head and heart working together. Emotion and logic must be combined to truly understand one’s spiritual purpose and calling. We are asked to use our hearts, souls, and minds to honor God, not one over the other. Seeking wisdom, we will find the knowledge that will help our hearts answer His call.

An act of **consumption** caused humans and the earth to be cursed (Gen 3:17), but praise be to God, 2,000 years ago Christ, as Lord of Creation, redeemed us from this curse. No longer must any aspect of Creation suffer from domination -- not people, soil, water, or air. In a sense, we are back to the beginning, and all we have to do is convince and redeem whomever “didn’t get the memo.”

The “memo” said God’s way of living on the land is best. If we want fresh air and abundance to return to the land, we must redeem biodiversity: in our front and back yards, public right of ways, parks, forests, and **croplands**. Those parts of the earth we have given over to the government must also be held accountable. That means we must speak to our politicians about destroying ecosystems with pipelines, polluting the air with coal, and cutting down trees.

Those of us who live, breathe, and have our being in Christ Jesus (Acts 17:28) also live, breathe, and have our being in Creation. In order for that “being” to be healthy, we must have clean air. Disciples of Christ cannot ignore Creation, because “all things have been created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:15-16). All of Creation is held together by Christ’s consciousness. Since Christ is “Lord of Creation,” respecting Creation is the same as respecting Christ. Discipleship, following Christ, includes protecting Creation.

When we plant trees, we are preserving the air and following Christ. When we petition our leaders to clean up air pollution, we are acting as faithful **stewards** in redeeming the earth. When we model a work ethic that has breathing room, we are observing God’s sabbath.

REFLECTION

Finish sharing stories about what God has called you to do in your past.

What is God calling you to do now? Will you answer God’s call to restore our earth? Or will your inaction bring forth this rebuke, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you” (Luke 6:46)? He is calling your name.

ACTION

With Your Child:

A carbon footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide and other climate-warming gases emitted due to the consumption of energy and other resources by a particular person or group. When considering your carbon footprint, think about how your lifestyle contributes to climate change. Discuss ways to reduce your carbon footprint with your household. How can you, your child, and your family make a difference in your neighborhood? Create a family plan that includes three things you are going to do and encourage others to do.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION: Any community member can request to address a city or county council meeting. Attend a local city/county council meeting with your child and request 2-3 minutes to speak about what you have implemented in your home and/or community and how they could support you in making a larger impact.

With Your Sunday School Group, Play Group, or Homeschool Group:

Since caring for creation is a blueprint for community care, brainstorm on ways you can demonstrate this in your community. How can you, as a group, decrease your carbon footprint? Take on five actions and create an accountability group. Children and adults can work together to produce a presentation that summarizes everything you have learned over the past five weeks.

1. Use paper products instead of styrofoam in your group
2. Change all light bulbs in church to energy efficient LEDs
3. Start composting food, paper, and yard waste
4. Plant a tree
5. Commit to using no straws one day a week

LEGISLATIVE ACTION: Use the provided template to submit a letter to your mayor. Explain what you are doing in your church, ask what they are doing in your community, and discuss ways you can work together on these issues.

With Your Congregation:

Find the appropriate ministry for social justice in your church. If you are not a member of that ministry, join it. Help empower the ministry with climate justice information. Research together and create a plan that will reduce the church's carbon footprint. Make your goals attainable, measurable, and replicable.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION: Draft a letter as a congregation, with approval from your church leadership, to the city/county council or commission asking for information about your local government's climate resiliency plans. If they don't have one, ask them to set a date for a draft to be complete and available to the public.

Lastly, as a church, identify some church ministries or programs that you will present this information to (i.e Women's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Men's Day, Church Revival, etc). Commit to a quarterly presentation, with the goal of informing and empowering about Creation Care and environmental justice.

WORD BANK

Communion
Consumption

Croplands
Steward

FUN FACT

Did you know that stewardship applies to money, skill, time, and/or talent? God's call for us to be good stewards starts at birth, so no one is too young to begin stewardship!



A close-up photograph of a person's hands, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, cupping a mound of dark, rich soil. A small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves is growing out of the soil. The background is a blurred field of similar soil. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the text 'RESOURCE GUIDE' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

RESOURCE GUIDE

SONGS

“HOW GREAT THOU ART”

in the style of Pentatonix featuring Jennifer Hudson

<https://youtu.be/5eMRyv7Hnzo>

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
And when I think of God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And lead me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow with humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
family, strength within my community, and to
perform justice that balances the world. Amen.

“CREATED TO WORSHIP”

in the style of John Lakin

<https://youtu.be/94sVWnFrzu8>

Created to worship, Created to give you praise,
Created to worship, I give you all of me

For I was born with a purpose, placed in this
earth just to give you praise

For I was born with a purpose, placed in this
earth just to give you praise

Created to worship, Created to give you praise
Created to worship, I give you all of me

Bridge:

I'll bless you, forever, I'll give you praise (tenors)
I was created, to give you worship, I'll give you
praise (altos)

My heart's desire, my heart's desire, is to give
you worship and praise (sopranos)

“HOW DEEPLY I NEED YOU”

by Shekinah Glory Ministry

<https://youtu.be/8W2hx2Mj4k0>

Here is my heart, I give it lord to you

Here is my life, I lay it before you

Where else would I go?

What else would I do?

If I did not know you?

How deeply I need you

How deeply I need you, my lord

How deeply I need you, my lord

Like the desert needs the rain, I need you

Like the ocean needs the streams, I need you

Like the morning needs the sun, I need you

Lord you are my only one

In every way, and every day

I need you

“I NEED YOU TO SURVIVE”

by Hezekiah Walker

https://youtu.be/uMcJL_UDAvw

I need you, you need me.
We're all a part of God's body.
Stand with me, agree with me.
We're all a part of God's body.

It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.

I pray for you, You pray for me.
I love you, I need you to survive.
I won't harm you with words from my mouth.
I love you, I need you to survive.

It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.

“THIS IS THE AIR I BREATHE”

in the style of Byron Cage

<https://youtu.be/tXpy5dnIoxI>

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me
This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me
And I I'm desperate for you
And I I'm lost without you
This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me
This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me
And I I'm desperate for you
And I I'm lost without you
And I I'm lost without you
And I I'm desperate for you

“WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD”

by Louis Armstrong

<https://youtu.be/MnbLRCIJKbE>

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself what a wonderful world
I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself what a wonderful world
The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do
They're really saying I love you
I hear babies crying, I watch them grow
They'll learn much more than I'll never know
And I think to myself what a wonderful world
Yes I think to myself what a wonderful world

“CALLING MY NAME”

by Hezekiah Walker

<https://youtu.be/5eMRyv7Hnzo>

How many times, do I go against Your will
Then You forgive me, but yet I still
Turn around and do the things, the things I
shouldn't do
Cause I belong to You and I know You will come
through
Lord I know, I take advantage of Your grace
Here in this Christian race,
But yet I still hear You calling my name
How many times, would it take for me to learn
That it's only in Your will, I'll ever earn
I'll ever earn my life's reward, the honor due to me
Life eternally, riches in Glory
Lord, I know, I know I don't belong
With You cause I've done wrong
But yet I still hear You calling my name
You're calling my name to come into Your arms
To be safe from fear and harm.
Knowing this but I still choose to go my way
And You still say, You say that I am He
Who will supply your every need
Oh Lord I sinned but You're still calling my name

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Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth

Preamble

We, the peoples and nations of Earth: considering that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny; gratefully acknowledging that Mother Earth is the source of life, nourishment and learning and provides everything we need to live well; recognizing that the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change; convinced that in an interdependent living community it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth; affirming that to guarantee human rights it is necessary to recognize and defend the rights of Mother Earth and all beings in her and that there are existing cultures, practices and laws that do so; conscious of the urgency of taking decisive, collective action to transform structures and systems that cause climate change and other threats to Mother Earth; proclaim this Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and call on the General Assembly of the United Nation to adopt it, as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations of the world, and to the end that every individual and institution takes responsibility for promoting through teaching, education, and consciousness raising, respect for the rights recognized in this Declaration and ensure through prompt and progressive measures and mechanisms, national and international, their universal and effective recognition and observance among all peoples and States in the world.

Article 1. Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth is a living being. (2) Mother Earth is a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings. (3) Each being is defined by its relationships as an integral part of Mother Earth. (4) The inherent rights of Mother Earth are inalienable in that they arise from the same source as existence. (5) Mother Earth and all beings are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as may be made between organic and inorganic beings, species, origin, use to human beings, or any other status. (6) Just as human beings have human rights, all other beings also have rights which are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist. (7) The rights of each being are limited by the rights of other beings and any conflict between their rights must be resolved in a way that maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth.

Article 2. Inherent Rights of Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth and all beings of which she is composed have the following inherent rights: (a) the right to life and to exist; (b) the right to be respected; (c) the right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions; (d) the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being; (e) the right to water as a source of life; (f) the right to clean air; (g) the right to integral health; (h) the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste; (i) the right to not have its genetic structure modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens its integrity or vital and healthy functioning; (j) the right to full and prompt restoration for violations of the rights recognized in this Declaration caused by human activities; (2) Each being has the right to a place and to play its role in Mother Earth for her harmonious functioning. (3) Every being has the right to wellbeing and to live free from torture or cruel treatment by human beings.

Article 3. Obligations of human beings to Mother Earth

(1) Every human being is responsible for respecting and living in harmony with Mother Earth. (2) Human beings, all States, and all public and private institutions must: (a) act in accordance with the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration; (b) recognize and promote the full implementation and enforcement of the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration; (c) promote and participate in learning, analysis, interpretation and communication about how to live in harmony with Mother Earth in accordance with this Declaration; (d) ensure that the pursuit of human wellbeing contributes to the wellbeing of Mother Earth, now and in the future; (e) establish and apply effective norms and laws for the defence, protection and conservation of the rights of Mother Earth; (f) respect, protect, conserve and where necessary, restore the integrity, of the vital ecological cycles, processes and balances of Mother Earth; (g) guarantee that the damages caused by human violations of the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration are rectified and that those responsible are held accountable for restoring the integrity and health of Mother Earth; (h) empower human beings and institutions to defend the rights of Mother Earth and of all beings; (i) establish precautionary and restrictive measures to prevent human activities from causing species extinction, the destruction of ecosystems or the disruption of ecological cycles; (j) guarantee peace and eliminate nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; (k) promote and support practices of respect for Mother Earth and all beings, in accordance with their own cultures, traditions and customs; (l) promote economic systems that are in harmony with Mother Earth and in accordance with the rights recognized in this Declaration.

Article 4. Definitions

(1) The term "being" includes ecosystems, natural communities, species and all other natural entities which exist as part of Mother Earth. (2) Nothing in this Declaration restricts the recognition of other inherent rights of all beings or specified being.

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www.momscleanairforce.org/CommunityRX

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Moms Clean Air Force is a community of over 1,000,000 moms and dads united against air pollution and committed to fighting for climate safety to protect our children's health.

We empower parents to become engaged citizens in order to keep the people we love safe.

We run CommunityRX — an environmental health justice program designed to advocate, educate, and amplify the stories of impacted communities to protect African-American children and families.



For more information, please visit:

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