
LENT

BLESSED EARTH
TENNESSEE

Earth's Lament

a new perspective on scripture



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Earth's Lament

Purpose

Lent is a time of [self-examination, reflection, and repentance](#). The modern practice of Lent, giving up something, does not usually come with reflection or repentance during the season, yet that is an essential piece leading up to Easter. Since most people give up something consumeristic, it is a good time to reflect on the human impact on the earth. The study will give a new perspective on scripture. Participants will learn about human consumption and its effects on the earth, but also show how consumption disconnects us from God, either because consuming fills a need only God can fill or because it takes away from our time spent with God.

Learning/formation goals for the study.

- Goal 1: Participants will be introduced to scriptures and shown the connection to creation care. Scriptural connections to creation care are often overlooked throughout the Bible. Participants will learn creation care is a Biblical and spiritual issue.
- Goal 2: Participants will experience and participate in [repentance](#) as a regular spiritual practice. In some religious communities, sin is overlooked, and repentance becomes a vague notion. Participants will be presented with how humans' sin against the earth and have opportunities to confess their sin.
- Goal 3: Participants will recognize human contributions to the destruction of God's creation and take spiritual and physical action. The actions will be a response to conviction and love for God and neighbor, human and non-human.

Knowledge of topic

Americans make up a little more than 4% of the world's [population](#), but if the world's population [consumed](#) at the rate of Americans we would need four Earths to sustain us. [65%](#) of Americans claim some branch of Christianity, yet if the world's population consumed at the rate of American Christians, we would still need more than one Earth to sustain us. These statistics provide a commentary on the obvious disconnect between Christianity and the Biblical mandate to care for God's creation. God was clear in Genesis 1 and 2 that creation was good, even before humans were created. We were given the mandate to care for creation. This was given before sin entered the world. Dominion should then have a God-like care of creation and not an exploitative, destructive attitude towards creation like many Christians believe today. Many Christians also believe the Bible is the only Word of God we have, but that is contrary to many scriptures, particularly Romans 1:20- People have no excuse for not knowing God because God is revealed through God's creation. Destroying God's creation removes opportunities for people to learn about and experience God. The importance of taking care of God's creation is not just about sustenance for humans but allowing non-human creation to be what God created them to be and for humans to revel in the creative genius of God that reveals God's goodness and character.

In front of a religious audience, scientist Gus Speth said,

I used to think the top environmental problems facing the world were global warming, environmental degradation and ecosystem collapse, and that we scientists could fix those problems with enough science. But I was wrong. The real problem is not those three

items, but greed, selfishness and apathy. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that. We need your help.

If the Earth is to heal and sustain us, Christians need to take the lead on addressing greed, selfishness, and apathy that contributes to the destruction of the earth. That work likely begins within us. This Lenten study will hopefully be a beginning for Christians to acknowledge our sin, grow closer to God, and respond by loving our human and non-human neighbors.

This Lenten study will include three concepts in each week's lesson. The concepts of Lent (self-examination, reflection, repentance), current environmental issues, and action. There will be overlap in how content is taught, but will include: prompts, exercises, meditations, guided prayer, prayer, reading scripture, etc. Scripture will come from the lectionary during the season of Lent versus using "green" scripture. If a pastor uses the lectionary and participants attend church, then there will be reinforcement of the scripture. If only "green" scriptures were used in the study, participants would think creation care is only a topic found within some scripture, when it is fluid through the whole Bible. Scripture will be read and discussed. Participants who are familiar with the scripture will see a new focus compared to what is usually taught. This will enhance their knowledge regarding that scripture and story. This will lead into a modern-day environmental issue. We are culpable in these issues and participants may feel melancholy and repentant. The study is intended to invoke these feelings, and even though Lent is a time of lamentation and repentance, the intention is not to stay in these feelings for a long period, instead, to move through acceptance of our participation in environmental harm, repentance for our participation, and create actions to remove ourselves from participation in the disrespect of God's creation. Hopefully participants will continue this journey after the study has concluded as

it is not a one-time action, but a progression of actions that will contribute to the healing of our hearts and the healing of the earth as a result.

Learning approach

The learning approach is to use the collective knowledge and experiences of participants to engage each scripture and environmental issue. The study is designed for large and small group discussion facilitated by a teacher to invoke reflection, insight, and an emotional response. There will be a variety of hands-on activities to reinforce concepts and induce reflection and repentance. The design takes pressure off leaders and participants to know all the answers and induces a sense of camaraderie in learning together with the freedom to create personal actionable steps that are meaningful and not generic to the group. Participants should leave the study feeling like they are partners in creating a better world versus alone and hopeless. Repentance should create a feeling of freedom and energy to make better choices to protect the earth rather than guilt and shame.

Session outlines

Week 1: What is Lent?

Topic: Repentance

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-11

Creation Care: Consumerism

Content: Introduction to Lent and the meaning of repentance.

Goals:

Cognitive: Participants will think about Lent, sin, and repentance. What separates us from God?

Affective: Participants will examine their lives for sin, admit their sin, and repent.

Behavioral Aspects: Participants will have the opportunity to choose an action they will work on for the week. They will work on a hardness of heart, and area for personal growth, or something they need to release to God.

Steps:

Gathering- As people enter the room, they will answer questions placed around the room.

Opening Prayer- Prayer by leader

Group Discussion- Conversation regarding gathering questions

Small Group- Read Psalm 51:1-17 and answer questions.

Group Discussion- Question and introduction to creation care lesson: consumerism

Small Group- Each group is given a scripture and assignment

Group Activity- From the previous assignment, write a group prayer

Reflection and send off- Questions, song, group prayer, hand washing

Week 2: Losing the Wild

Topic: Jesus in the Wilderness

Scripture: Luke 4: 1-13

Creation Care: Deforestation

Content: Jesus in the wilderness, deforestation, and God's love for creation

Week 3: Light Redirected

Topic: Citizens of Heaven

Scripture: Philippians 3:17- 4:1

Content: Citizens of heaven, light pollution

Week 4: In the Water

Topic: Water

Scripture: Isaiah 55: 1-9

Content: Scripture invitation to come to the waters, water pollution

Week 5: Fresh Eyes

Topic: Seeing with God's perspective

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

Content: Seeing with God's eyes, new perspective on creation, reconciliation

Week 6: Restraint and Extravagance

Topic: Restraint and extravagance

Scripture: John 12: 1-8

Content: Reflection on Mary's extravagance and restraint, God's extravagance of natural resources

Week 7: Noisy World

Topic: Noise is distracting

Scripture: Luke 22: 14-28

Content: Jesus at the last supper, disciples arguing about who is the greatest among them, noise pollution

Week 8: Peaceful Community

Topic: Peace

Scripture: Acts 10: 34-43

Content: Repentance, peace, and community

Session Outlines

Session 2: Losing the Wild

Theme/Topic: Jesus in the Wilderness

Content: Luke 4: 1-13

Time: mins Description of Activity (Include specific questions if using discussion)

12

Gathering:

- Recap and comments about previous week
- Opening Prayer
 - Your choice

- God, we are so thankful for the opportunity to gather and learn more about you and your creation. Open our hearts to hear you and each other. We thank you for being present with us. Amen.

- Read Luke 4:1-13

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Group Discussion:

- What happens before Jesus goes into the wilderness? (Jesus was baptized. Luke 3:21)
- Why, after baptism, would Jesus go into the wilderness?
- What do you think Jesus did in the wilderness?
- How was Jesus tempted? (Jesus just spent 40 days in God's creation.)

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Creation Care: Deforestation lesson

“Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.” - Henry David Thoreau

This week, our topic is deforestation. [Forests](#) make up 31% of the earth's surface. Take a deep breath (breathe in loudly for the group to follow). Breathe out (loudly for the group to follow). Trees [exchange](#) the carbon dioxide we breathe out for oxygen to breathe in. Trees reduce erosion, help filter water, and provide habitat and food. Deforestation is the clearing of trees and natural vegetation.

This occurs because of construction of roads and subdivisions, tree harvesting, and the need for agricultural land. Rainforests in particular are being destroyed to plant [monocrops](#) of palm oil and cocoa or raise cattle.

8

Group Discussion: Think about a forest.

- What lives in a forest? (Animals, birds, insects, fungi, plants, flowers, trees.)
- What lives in the soil of a forest? (Microorganisms, fungi, insects, bacteria.)
- What happens when a forest is cleared? (Less trees to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, erosion, landslides, water pollution, habitat and food loss, death of non-human creation...non-human creation cannot live fully into what God created it to be.) Give time for this to sink in.
- What can we do? (Check ingredients. Don't purchase products with palm oil. Eat less meat. Advocate for parks and spaces with trees. Plant trees...)

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Small Group Discussion

- Group 1- God loves animals: Genesis 9: 9-10
- Group 2- God created the universe: Colossians 1:15-16
- Group 3- Creation reveals the Creator: Job 12:7-10
- Group 4- Creation reveals the Creator: Romans 1:20

Question for small groups: What does the scripture mean to you? With deforestation in mind, does the scripture take on a different meaning?

Group Discussion

- Group 1- God loves animals: Genesis 9:9-10
 - It's common for people to only think about God's covenant with humans, but God included God's creation. Does that change the way you think about God and creation?
- Group 2- God created the universe: Colossians 1:15-16
 - Not only created by but created for. What does that mean?
- Group 3- Creation reveals the Creator: Job 12:7-10
 - Everything was created by God. Do you believe we can learn about God from God's creation? Why or why not?
- Group 4- Creation reveals the Creator: Romans 1:20
 - The Bible is not the only way to learn about God. Before scripture, God gave us creation. For some, being in nature is the way they experience God. What happens when nature is destroyed?

Individual Activity

- Take a sheet of paper and fold in half twice. Open it and you should have four squares. Label each square:
 - What did you learn from this lesson?
 - Where do you feel closest to God?
 - When and where will you spend time with God each day? Be specific.

- What packaged products do you buy that you need to check ingredients for palm oil? What can you replace the product with, or can you refuse to buy?

5 Reflection and Send off

- Listen to [Song](#) “Earth” by Imogen Heap. (Remember, ads may play before and after.)
- Group Prayer (created first week)

Session 4: In the water

Theme/Topic: Water

Content: Isaiah 55: 1-9

Time: mins Description of Activity (Include specific questions if using discussion)

12 Gathering:

- Recap and comments about previous week
- Opening Prayer
 - Your choice
 - God, we are so thankful for the opportunity to gather and learn more about you and your creation. Open our hearts to hear you and each other. We thank you for being present with us. Amen.
- Read Isaiah 55:1-9

8 Group Discussion

- Who is invited to “come to the waters”? (Isaiah 55:1- Jews and Gentiles)
- What does the scripture say about repentance? (Isaiah 55: 6-9)

10 Individual work:

- Read Isaiah 55: 2-3. When do you feel unfulfilled or unsatisfied?
- How do you cope?
- Do you think it’s easier to ignore your feelings, sit in the uncomfortableness and pain of your feelings, or address your feelings?
- Ignoring our feelings or bad things in the world doesn’t make them go away.

10 Group Discussion

- Where do you see sin in today’s world regarding the environment?

Teaching of present-day environmental issue: water pollution

15 Activity and Discussion: Water Pollution

“When the well’s dry, we know the worth of water.” – Benjamin Franklin

The earth is called the Blue Planet for a reason: it’s made up of 71% water. 97% is saltwater, 3% is freshwater, and only about 1% is available for use. That’s hard to imagine considering how easily we can access clean water from our faucets. What do you think when you hear 1%? Is it common? Or rare? Do you think of water differently knowing the earth only has 1% available for life?

Think of all the symbolism water represents in the Bible: life, cleansing, baptism, and miracles to name a few. Do you think of that water being polluted? (Pause) Water pollution is an issue, not only because our lives depend upon clean water, but because when we pollute the water, we are abandoning our Biblical mandate to care for creation, to love God, and to love our neighbor- human and non-human.

Look at your table. Each person should have a jar of water. Each table should have four bowls marked with the pollutants they represent.

Right now, about 70% of that usable fresh water goes to commercial and home agricultural endeavors. When it rains, animal waste, pesticides, and fertilizers contaminate water that runs to our streams, rivers, lakes, and eventually the ocean. Just like the drugs that are given to animals end up in our water, even the drugs we put into our bodies eventually end up in our water through our excrement or improper drug disposal. If you use medication, pour “Medication” from the bowl into your jar. If you use fertilizers or pesticides on your lawn or eat commercially raised foods, add “Fertilizer” to your jar.

Fossil fuels create pollution from its production and its use. If you drive a car, use gas/ natural gas, add “Oil” to your jar.

Land development and deforestation removes vegetation that keeps soil in place. Soil, waste materials, plastics, and oil from machinery will pollute the groundwater or waterways. If you live in a subdivision, drive on a road, shop at stores or online, or eat

packaged foods made with palm oil add “Dirt” to your jar. If you use plastic, have seen litter add “Plastic” to your jar.

Group Reflection Questions

- What does your water look like? Would you drink it? Would you want to be baptized by this water? Everyone pours your water into the bowl.
- What happens when we all contribute to the pollution of water? (Show the bowl of water.)
- Most of the U.S. has good water systems to filter and send clean water to our faucets. What about Flint, Michigan? What about the rest of the world?
- Lawn fertilizers and pesticides are to make our lawns look uniform and “perfect”. Why is a human-made lawn more desirable than a God-made lawn?
- What can you do to protect water? (Plant trees, refrain from using chemicals on your lawn, use biodegradable soaps and cleaning supplies, etc. [Water Tip Sheet](#))

5 Reflection and Send off

- [Song](#) “Softly and Tenderly”
 - Participants are free to stay for prayer at the altar or leave.
- Group Prayer (created first week)

NEEDED RESOURCES:

Participants should bring:

- Bible
- Favored way to take notes

Leader needs:

- WIFI
- PowerPoint, equipment to show PowerPoint with sound
- One long table with tablecloth:

Decorate with:

- Fresh artisan loaf of bread
- Grapes
- Communion set
- Large glass container

- Prayer station in quiet spot near exit:
- Standing and kneeling altar or small table
- Soft pillows
- Scentless candle or soft light
- Holding crosses
- Tissues

At tables:

- Enough tables to accommodate participants socially distanced
- Bibles for each participant
- Clear glasses (or mason jars) with water for each person
- Pencils, pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Water Pollution Activity needs per table: (just enough for each person to add some to their glasses to create “polluted” water)

- 1 small bowl of flour and sugar mixed
 - Label: Medication
- 1 food color
 - Label: Fertilizers, pesticides, household cleaning products
- 1 bowl of dirt
 - Deforestation and development
- 1 bowl of plastic strips
 - Plastic
- 1 bowl of oil
 - Fuel and natural gas

Human resources (teachers, consultants, assistants, etc.) are needed and when?

- Teacher
 - <https://www.trvst.world/environment/water-pollution-facts-statistics/>
 - <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/water-pollution-everything-you-need-know>
- Assistant for set-up and clean-up, to collect polluted water during Group Reflection Questions.

Plan for evaluating effectiveness of the session:

- Observation and follow up at beginning of next session