

# Bible Study material on the Environment

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## *A note to the groups:*

The idea of the study material is to give you time and space to reflect together on the subject of the environment. The opening worship is shaped to begin that focus and then there will be just over an hour for you to explore the issues together. On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July Paula Gooder will set up some of the issues which might help you in your discussion. The extra notes on words etc. in the material below will all be covered in the introduction on the 12<sup>th</sup> July so they are just there to jog the memory and don't need reading 'formally' in the group.

The questions are designed to stimulate conversation. There are too many for the time you have but they were deliberately chosen that way so that your group can have options of what direction it wants to take on this subject. There are also one or two really hard ones in case you feel like a challenge! Please feel free to stick as closely or as loosely to them as your group requires.

There are four main questions. The main questions may stimulate you enough without any further help; the additional questions are there to give you a few more nudges if you need them. You can either split the time equally between the four questions (giving a little over 15 minutes on each) or you can spend longer on one or two than on the others.

For further reading do look at the excellent Biblical and Theological Reflections on pages 10-14 of GS Misc 1110.



# A Service of Morning Prayer

## ¶ Preparation

Come, Holy Spirit

**All and renew the face of the earth.**

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;  
let us pray with one heart and mind.

**Silence is kept.**

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever.

**All Amen.**

**Silence is kept.**

## Prayers of Penitence

Human sin disfigures the whole creation,  
which groans with eager longing for God's redemption.  
We confess our sin in penitence and faith.

*cf Romans 8.22,23*

You delight in creation, its colour and diversity;  
yet we have misused the earth  
and plundered its resources for our own selfish ends.  
Lord, have mercy.

**All Lord, have mercy.**

You have brought order out of chaos,  
light in darkness, good out of evil,  
but we have preferred darkness  
in words and deeds which dishonour God's holy name.  
Christ, have mercy.

**All Christ, have mercy.**

You have showered us with blessings,  
but we have been grudging towards others  
and lacking in generosity in word and deed.  
Lord, have mercy.

**All Lord, have mercy.**

May the Father of all mercies  
cleanse *you* from *your* sins,  
and restore *you* in his image  
to the praise and glory of his name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen.**

## ¶ The Word of God

### *Psalmody*

*Psalm 8 (second version)*

- 1 *O Lord our governor, •  
how glorious is your name in all the world!*
- 2 Your majesty above the heavens is praised •  
out of the mouths of babes at the breast.
- 3 You have founded a stronghold against your foes, •  
that you might still the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, •  
the moon and the stars that you have ordained,
- 5 What are mortals, that you should be mindful of them; •  
mere human beings, that you should seek them out?
- 6 You have made them little lower than the angels •  
and crown them with glory and honour.
- 7 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands •  
and put all things under their feet,
- 8 All sheep and oxen, •  
even the wild beasts of the field,
- 9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea •  
and whatsoever moves in the paths of the sea.
- 10 *O Lord our governor, •  
how glorious is your name in all the world!*

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1.26-31 (*text can be found in the Bible study material*)

This is the word of the Lord.

**All Thanks be to God.**

***A period of silence will follow the reading to give time for reflection upon it.***

*Benedicite - a Song of Creation*

- 1 Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 2 Bless the Lord you heavens: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 3 Bless the Lord you angels of the Lord: •  
bless the Lord all you his hosts;  
bless the Lord you waters above the heavens: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 4 Bless the Lord sun and moon: •  
bless the Lord you stars of heaven;  
bless the Lord all rain and dew: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 5 Bless the Lord all winds that blow: •  
bless the Lord you fire and heat;  
bless the Lord scorching wind and bitter cold: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 6 Bless the Lord dews and falling snows: •  
bless the Lord you nights and days;  
bless the Lord light and darkness: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 7 Bless the Lord frost and cold: •  
bless the Lord you ice and snow;  
bless the Lord lightnings and clouds: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

- 8 O let the earth bless the Lord: •  
bless the Lord you mountains and hills;  
bless the Lord all that grows in the ground: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 9 Bless the Lord you springs: •  
bless the Lord you seas and rivers;  
bless the Lord you whales and all that swim in the waters: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 10 Bless the Lord all birds of the air: •  
bless the Lord you beasts and cattle;  
bless the Lord all people on earth: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 11 O people of God bless the Lord: •  
bless the Lord you priests of the Lord;  
bless the Lord you servants of the Lord: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.
- 12 Bless the Lord all you of upright spirit: •  
bless the Lord you that are holy and humble in heart;  
bless the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: •  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

*The Song of the Three 35-65*

### **Reading**

New Testament Reading: Romans 8.19-23 (*text can be found in the Bible study material*)

This is the word of the Lord.

**All Thanks be to God.**

***A period of silence will follow the reading to give time for reflection upon it.***

## ***Prayers of Intercession***

Creation groans with pain like the pain of childbirth,  
and longs to share the freedom of the children of God,  
so we offer you our prayers for the healing of all creation.  
Let us pray.

***Intercessions may be made in silence or out loud.***

***This response is used***

Lord of creation

***All*** hear the cry of our hearts.

***At the end***

Merciful Father,

***All*** accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

## ***The Collect***

Lord our God,  
as with all creation  
we offer you the life of this new day,  
give us grace to love and serve you  
to the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.

***All*** Amen.

## ***The Lord's Prayer***

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

***All*** Our Father in heaven ...

## 1) The Importance of care for the environment in Christian thought

**Why do you think that care for the environment has been so far down the list of Christian priorities for so long?**

*In her talk Paula suggested three reasons for this*

- *An interpretation of Genesis 1.26-28 which gave humanity the right to have dominion over and to subdue creation.*
- *An understanding of the Fall and its impact on the relationship between human beings and creation*
- *A dualist view of the world which sees the 'spirit' as good and the 'physical' as bad*

### **Additional questions**

- a) Do you agree that these three reasons have affected the Christian mind-set? In your view is any one of them more important than the others?
- b) Are there any other factors that you would want to add to the list?
- c) What do you think has changed to make the environment a higher priority for many Christians?

## 2) Reflections on Genesis 1.26-31

**What do you think Genesis 1.26-31 has to say about our relationship to God and to the world that he created?**

### **Genesis 1:26-31**

Then God said, "Let us make humankind<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind<sup>1</sup> in his image, in the image of God he created them;<sup>2</sup> male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> 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." <sup>29</sup> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.



*A note on words:*

*The word dominion (in Hebrew radah) in verses 26 and 28 means to ‘rule’ or ‘have authority over’ it is used throughout the Old Testament*

- *in neutral contexts (e.g. 1 Kings 4.24: ‘For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza);*
- *good contexts (Psalm 72.1 and 8 (Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son....<sup>8</sup> May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth)*
- *and bad contexts (Leviticus 25:43<sup>43</sup> You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God.*

*Subdue (in Hebrew kabash) is more difficult. It is the word used to turn people into slaves (Jeremiah 34.11) and to conquer lands (Joshua 18.1)*

### **Additional questions**

- a) How might you ‘have dominion’ over creation in a good way?
- b) Having ‘dominion’ over creation has been interpreted by some as being given the permission to use and abuse the world as we choose. What is your view about the connection between being made in God’s image and having dominion over creation?
- c) What do you think God meant when he said ‘fill the earth and subdue it’?
- d) What should we make of God’s observation Genesis 1.31 that the world was ‘very good’? Does/has the Fall changed this?

## **3) Reflections on Romans 8.19-23**

**Why does creation groan as it waits for the revealing of God’s children? What does this tell us about the connection between humanity and the created world?**

### **Romans 8.19-23**

<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

### **Additional questions**

- a) If, as Paul suggests here and Revelation states explicitly (Revelation 21.1, ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth’), our eternal fate is an embodied one in a created world – how might that affect the way we live in our bodies now in *this* created world?

- b) When Paul talks about creation being set free from its bondage to decay, what do you think he wants to say about the world as it is and what vision does he have of the world to come?
- c) The connection between redemption and creation is strong in the Pauline writings. Why do you think this is? What does it tell us about the nature of redemption in Paul's mind?

#### **4) Practical Reflections**

**How important is/should be care for the environment in your Christian life and faith?**

- a) If you were to make a list of the top ten things that all Christians should do. Where on that list (with 1 being most important and 10 least important) would you put care for the environment? Why would you put it there?
- b) If you were to suggest to the others in your group one really good action that they could do to show their care for the environment what would it be?

#### ***A Final Blessing***

May God  
who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds of the sky,  
who leads the lambs to pasture and the deer to water,  
who multiplied loaves and fishes and changed water into wine,  
lead us, feed us, multiply us,  
and change us to reflect the glory of our Creator  
now and through all eternity;  
and the blessing ...

**All Amen.**