

LEADER'S GUIDE

# INHABITING EDEN

CHRISTIANS, THE BIBLE, AND  
THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS



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Leader's Guide for  
*Inhabiting Eden:*  
*Christians, the Bible,*  
*and the Ecological Crisis*

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# Introduction

This Leader's Guide will help teachers and group leaders plan classes and events using Patricia K. Tull's book *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis* (Westminster John Knox, 2013). The guide includes suggested schedules for various study formats and events, and a lesson plan for each chapter of *Inhabiting Eden*.

*Inhabiting Eden's* nine chapters bring study of the Bible to bear on contemporary ecological concerns. The study seeks to educate Christians about our faith's deep historic connections to creation—connections that are now threatened not only by our increased physical and psychic distance from the rest of creation, but also by our detrimental impacts upon it. The book emphasizes the crucial contributions that faith and faith communities can make to refashioning our approach to the world we inhabit. It offers stories both ancient and

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contemporary, information about today's environmental issues, questions for discussion, and suggestions for activities.

Besides this leader guide and the Bible study book itself, readers may wish to use the spiral-bound *Reading and Writing Workbook*, which may be purchased directly from the author (visit <http://inhabitingeden.org>) or from Amazon.com. The workbook includes a tool for examining one's own ecological understandings as well as prompt questions relating to each section of *Inhabiting Eden*, with plenty of white space for writing the reader's own ecological story.

### **Scripture as a Key to Environmental Understanding**

When our church's Green Team began in 2008, we became better acquainted with one another and with our mission by reading and discussing several books, beginning with Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Times Books, 2007). Although some of the books we studied were written for faith communities, none of them drew on the deep connections Christians maintain with the biblical tradition that formed us.

In fact, it seemed at first that, aside from a few proof texts from creation stories and the Psalms, the Bible was invoked very little when it came to earth care. True, widespread pollution and environmental damage on the scale we now witness are modern problems. And true, Christians wrestle with many of our forebears' perspectives in tradition and Scripture when it comes to the place of women, for instance, and some scriptural portrayals of God. Yet it was striking that a Bible that begins with five and a half days of creation before humans appear should occupy such a marginal place in contemporary churches' environmental ethics.

When Westminster John Knox invited me to write a book-length Bible study around ecological issues, I welcomed the opportunity to explore Scripture's ecological message in depth, and to bring sensibilities emerging especially in Old Testament scholarship to people in the pews. But I agreed to write the book with little idea, at first, of how distinct the biblical understanding of the natural world is from our own.

Before beginning *Inhabiting Eden*, I was writing a commentary on Isaiah. I began to notice botanical references on every page of the prophet's book. Israelites and Judeans are compared unfavorably to farm animals who know what is best for them. They are compared to fields of grain that flourish or wither, to trees that bear fruit or are cut down, and to vineyards that grow sweet or rotten grapes. Trees behave like people, ridiculing the emperor who would dare to clear cut them for profit, or rejoicing at the renewal of healthy human cultures. Most of all, Isaiah reminds readers over and over that we are utterly dependent on the natural world not simply for our aesthetic wellbeing, but for survival itself. As civilizations are imagined perishing, their place is taken by thorns and briers, hedgehogs and wild goats. As rains water the desert and the desert blooms, humans also thrive.

Because ancient Israel's culture was deeply rooted in the land, much of what we see in Scripture as a social ethic, promoting a just human society, is also an environmental ethic, promoting fairness in use of the natural world's bounty. Isaiah is deeply critical of those "who join house to house, and who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you in the land," predicting that such action would lead to infertility, poor harvests, and abandoned mansions (Isaiah 5:8–10). Ezekiel describes the powerful as rams who foul even

the water they don't drink, and tread down even the grass they don't eat, rendering it unsuitable for the smaller sheep (Ezekiel 34:16–22). Even King David considers the slaughter of a little ewe lamb an act equal to murder (2 Samuel 12:1–6).

The mental landscape of our forebears who composed Scripture, in fact, differs substantially from that of modern Westerners. The biblical Hebrew language possesses no word for “nature” as a separate category from the human domain, and no word for “culture” as distinct from the rest of what exists. We may think of ourselves as “going out into nature” as if it were somewhere else. But for the ancients, human life existed within, and subject to, the larger sphere of creation. In the domains of heavens, earth, and sea, with all their inhabitants, we were among those who walked the earth's fertile soil, along with domestic animals who shared human work, and wild animals who shared the land's bounty.

In addition to the Bible's deep immersion in the natural world, or perhaps because of it, Scripture teaches ethics—now deeply rooted in our faith tradition—ethics concerning the limits of human and personal expansion, concerning care for the community at large (poor as well as rich, young and old as well as powerful, animals as well as people) and concerning the welfare of future generations even centuries after the writers' time. Greed for material gain is viewed not only as socially damaging but also personally diminishing, and therefore imprudent. Food is viewed as a basic right for all creatures, its provision coming ultimately from the creator, who also owns the land.

Since the Bible was produced over centuries by many groups responding to various social settings and historical needs, it contains provocative breadth in its descriptions of

the human role on earth. The Hebrew Scriptures offer no less than seven major depictions of creation itself, and countless minor ones, each possessing implications for human self-understanding in relation to God and to our nonhuman neighbors and the land on which we live. In the modern world we have drifted to viewing only one of these as central: the notion that we were given “dominion” over the earth’s other creatures. Since the beginning of modernity, this notion of dominion has unwisely expanded to encompass every element of the natural world.

Lately “dominion” has been recast as “stewardship,” suggesting that we may not possess owners’ rights but that we nevertheless are capable of overseeing all creation. Yet most of the biblical descriptions of the human place in the world maintain that we may gain more knowledge, but our knowledge encompasses only a fraction of what is there, and our wisdom a sliver of that.

- The second creation story in Genesis 2–3 posits humans not as rulers over the earth’s other creatures, but rather as ones who “till and tend” or, translated more carefully, “serve and preserve” the ground out of which God formed us.
- Descriptions of creation in God’s speeches in Job 38–41 don’t suggest that Job is in charge at all. In fact, he doesn’t even understand the world. According to God’s voice from the whirlwind, even a domesticated horse is too powerful for his command.
- Psalm 104 displays knowledge and curiosity about the natural world, from meteorology to astronomy to physical geography to natural habitats of many species. This psalm nowhere implies that humans are anything

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more than one of the many fascinating creatures that share the earth.

Such pointed discussions of creation can sensitize readers to the presence and roles of the natural world throughout Scripture. Portrayals of pastures and sheep, seas and rivers, furrows and fields, and “everything that breathes” in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture are not window dressing. Rather, they show depth and breadth in the biblical writers’ awareness of creation’s power and presence. Scripture portrays humans as inhabiting a wondrous planet whose bounty, properly understood and modestly tended, causes humans to flourish alongside other life.

Beyond helping us reclaim more modest views of the human role and renewing imagination concerning creation, Scripture along with more recent history offers models for thinking constructively about the changes we face today. As the first chapter of *Inhabiting Eden* describes, while the current scale and danger of ecological problems are unprecedented in human history, the circumstance of facing unprecedented challenges is one we share with many prior generations. From ancient Judah’s grappling with the destruction of their nation, temple, and monarchy, and the exile of many of their people to a foreign land, to early Christianity’s call to rethink relationships between Jews and Gentiles, to the many revolutions in human rights that have occupied the past several centuries, to several recent ecological threats posed by DDT, nuclear proliferation, and the destruction of the ozone layer by CFCs, grappling with calls to rethink our ways is the common lot of humanity. What worked in the past does not always serve new circumstances well. The courageous leadership of those who conceived of ways through their own

wildernesses can inspire us today with both direction and hope.

We often simplify the stories of past movements by identifying one figure who displayed courageous leadership—Martin Luther King Jr., for instance, or Rachel Carson. But when we examine their stories closely, we see that while these leaders provided vision, they were surrounded by others who worked tirelessly to promote changes. The same is true today. We can identify people whom we admire now, but we don't know yet who will stand out to our descendants as the figures who shepherded us through this crisis—assuming we do find our way through. Not many of us will be remembered by name a hundred years, but our actions will aggregate into a story of change, or of failure to change, and our influence will ripple far beyond our lives.

This is one reason it is important that we study together the current crisis, its dimensions, and its solutions. When a variety of people with common interests reads together, we can feed one another's curiosity and imagination, we can provide information from various skill sets and backgrounds, we can encourage one another in unpredictable ways. One person may gather a group; others nourish that group with their warmth and hospitality; others may seek out further resources and knowledge; and yet others, impatient with talk, will prompt action.

The needs are so great, and the issues so urgent, that there is room for everyone, from every walk of life, to bring their talents together. All hands are needed on deck. Churches are by nature cross-disciplinary. We aren't just theologians; we are teachers, politicians, farmers, engineers, scientists, economists, builders, nurses, poets, organizers, social

workers, attorneys, C.E.O.s—a wide range of people with skills, wisdom, and experience to contribute to addressing our ecological situation.

### **Contemporary Attitudes toward Environmental Concern**

Sadly, there are some who profess the Christian faith but oppose creation care. Those who believe “this world is not my home,” who expect Jesus to come soon and remove them from the earth, have no need to amend environmental behavior. In fact, from this perspective climate chaos may help inaugurate Armageddon.

But even more sadly, some of the most conservative churches are now moving away from escapism toward “Christian Reconstructionism,” the idea of a theocratic takeover of political power, the U.S. government replaced by a piecemeal version of Old Testament law, including capital punishment for cursing parents or being gay. Proponents of this ideology promote “dominion” over nature, women, and children, and view environmental ethics as pantheistic. Their philosophy cherry-picks among biblical themes and laws: for instance, usury is all right; capitalism is biblical; and the law of Jubilee no longer applies.

Such philosophies, hostile to core Christian values of humility, love, and hospitality, lead some astray and mar Christianity’s public image. But they aren’t likely to be tolerated by most Christians, nor by the general public. The next generation of fundamentalists will doubtless reinvent itself again. Christian advocates of creation care should be aware of such groups and their effects on political discourse, including debates over environmental issues. But like the

dispensationalists before them, reconstructionists speak a language quite foreign to that of historic Christianity.

More happily, most Christians agree in principle that creation should be cared for. But what that means to them varies widely, as does the priority they place on it in word and deed. Many faithful, Bible-respecting Christians enjoy nature and understand the general value of conservation, but do not go out of their way to act on these sentiments. They may welcome structural changes in a community or church that facilitates conservation, such as the presence of recycling bins, the introduction of LED lighting, or the availability of Energy Star appliances, but will not actively advocate on behalf of environmental issues.

Others may hold generally environmentally positive attitudes, but do not regard climate change as a threat. Perhaps they have difficulty imagining that humans could have such a drastic effect on the biosphere. They may find it difficult to grasp that invisible gases such as carbon dioxide and methane could create such harms (unlike smog, which is visible and ugly). Or they believe the conservative media's claims that the reality of climate change is still under scientific debate. Or they may believe the threat is real, but that human technology can fix the problems without their participation.

This study invites those unconcerned about climate change to examine many other environmental issues before studying this one. It commends a "precautionary" approach for those who choose to remain agnostic about global warming. Study leaders should be aware that some group members may demur when it comes to climate change, while others within the same group may be alarmed or even

outraged by such a stance. Leaders will need to set and encourage a tone of mutual respect, in which everyone may have their say but none may dominate or demean others. In such a safe environment, participants may learn more about the sources and contents of one another's positions, and thereby learn to converse with those who hold differing views. As chapter 8 points out, measures that are commended to address climate change also carry a great many other social and environmental benefits—benefits to human health, the economy and jobs, species diversity, and energy efficiency leading to economic savings. The amount of greenhouse gases present in the earth's atmosphere is not affected by the opinions we hold, but by our activities. Pragmatically, energy conservation measures aimed at saving money can be as effective as those aimed at addressing climate change.

Some people who hold a positive but passive approach to environmental issues may find that this study provides them more specific information or prompts for action. Or they may find their tacit feelings about the natural world's grace strengthened into more conscious awareness. Some particular pro-environmental habits may be formed or enhanced by these encouragements.

Other participants who already hold strong environmental commitments may find that the book's scriptural discussions aids their own articulation of these concerns, or helps them to move from concern to action. It is hoped that no matter where readers stand along the environmental attitude spectrum, the opportunity to study together will aid in strengthening and shaping commitments.

# Schedules for Various Study Formats

*Inhabiting Eden* has nine chapters that fall into three parts:

- Chapters 1–3 lay the groundwork for a biblical argument for care of creation. Within this section, chapter 1 introduces the problem of human change and chapters 2–3 together explore the Genesis creation stories that set the agenda for the human connections with, and disconnections from, the rest of creation.
- Chapters 4–8 explore specific issues in greater depth: consumerism, agriculture and food, toxic waste and environmental justice, and climate change. Within this section, chapter 4 on consumerism and chapters 5–6 on agriculture and food hang together as arguments to live an environmental ethic in our households' buying choices, while chapters 7 and 8 extend to action for public policy.
- Chapter 9 concludes with discussions about the future and calls to action.

Nine lessons with advance reading and use of the accompanying *Workbook* is optimal. But actual schedules may dictate a briefer approach. Here are some suggested patterns:

1. A nine-month or nine-week study, either in Sunday school or in evening sessions, devoting one session to each of the book's chapters.

2. A six-month or six-week study:

1. Introduction (ch. 1)
2. Creation stories (chs. 2–3)
3. Commerce and Contentment (ch. 4)
4. Agriculture and Food (chs. 5–6)
5. Pursuing a Just and Healthy Future (chs. 7–8)
6. Living within Our Means (ch. 9)

3. A five-session Vacation Bible School:

1. Introduction and Creation Stories (chs. 1–2)
2. Disconnections and Reconnections (chs. 3–4)
3. Agriculture and Food (chs. 5–6)
4. Pursuing a Just and Healthy Future (chs. 7–8)
5. Living within Our Means (ch. 9)

4. A four-week study:

1. Introduction and Creation Stories (chs. 1–3)
2. Voting at the Cash Register (chs. 4–6)
3. Pursuing a Just and Healthy Future (chs. 7–8)
4. Living within Our Means (ch. 9)

5. A two-night retreat:

1. Evening: Introduction (ch. 1)
2. Early morning: Creation Stories (chs. 2–3)
3. Late morning: Commerce and Contentment (ch. 4)
4. Lunch exemplifying the themes of chs. 5–6
5. Afternoon: Agriculture and Food (chs. 5–6)
6. Evening: Environmental Justice (ch. 7)
7. Morning: Living within Our Means (chs. 8–9)

6. A twenty-four-hour retreat:

1. Evening: Introduction and Creation Stories (chs. 1–3)
2. Morning: Voting at the Cash Register (chs. 4–6)
3. Lunch exemplifying the themes of chs. 5–6
4. Afternoon: Pursuing a Just, Healthy Future (chs. 7–9)

7. Two overnight retreats within three months of each other:

Retreat 1:

1. Evening: The Problem of Change (ch. 1)
2. Early morning: Humans and Creation (ch. 2)
3. Late morning: Leaving the Garden (ch. 3)
4. Afternoon: Commerce and Contentment (ch. 4)

Retreat 2:

1. Evening: Agriculture and Food (chs. 5 and 6)
2. Early morning: Environmental Fairness (ch. 7)
3. Late morning: Our Children's Inheritance (ch. 8)
4. Afternoon: Living within Our Means (ch. 9)

Below are guides for leading studies of each chapter of *Inhabiting Eden*, which may be adapted for briefer formats.





# The Problem of Change, Then and Now

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will identify commonalities between today's ecological challenges and historical challenges discussed in chapter 1, and will articulate a stance of courageous faith in the midst of uncertainty.

## **Session at a Glance**

### **OPENING**

- Opening Prayer
- Moments of Social Change
- Today's Theme

### **EXPLORING**

- What Do We Care About?
- What Have We Been Taught?
- What Are Some Precedents?

### **RESPONDING**

- Coaching Courage in Crisis

### **CLOSING**

- One Action
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

While individual attitudes toward ecological concerns vary, it may help to think ahead about the general “temperature” of the church or organization for which you are teaching and the likely composition of the class. Environmental issues have unfortunately been politicized, and the group may well consist of members who hold differing political loyalties. So it is helpful to model—and to affirm—recognition that our relationship to God’s creation fundamentally arises from faith convictions, and that within the broad spectrum of information and views available, no one owns all the facts.

Avoid and discourage soapboxes. Consider how to encourage class participants to listen respectfully and reflectively to one another’s views. It may be necessary, without pointing fingers, to find ways to discourage any one participant from dominating the conversation or dismissing other views (“Is there anyone we haven’t heard from yet who would like to respond?” “Let’s go around the room and state our reaction in a single word or phrase.”). If we believe God loves the breadth of created beings, we must believe God loves even those whose opinions differ from our own.

*Compassionate God, help me to show compassion to all in the room, practicing hospitality and grace as Jesus did. Amen.*

### *Preparation Checklist:*

- Several weeks in advance, ask participants to purchase their books for the study. Or, better, have the church or organization buy and provide books for sale at least a

week before the study begins. You may consider a slight price mark-up to cover extra copies. Let participants know that the accompanying *Reading and Writing Workbook* is also available if they wish to record their own reflections while reading.

- The previous week, ask participants to prepare by reading chapter 1 of *Inhabiting Eden*.
- Read chapter 1 and this guide at least once, and peruse the rest of the book.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

*Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Newsprint and markers (more than one color may prove helpful)
- Index cards or scratch paper, one per participant, and extra pens



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Opening (10 minutes):

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Loving God, guide us as we study together. Enrich our minds, enliven our hearts, and prompt our faithful actions. Amen.*

### *1. Moments of Social Change*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 1.

Ask participants to think about a critical moment in the Bible or in more recent history in which change was afoot and leadership was needed. It could be one named in the book, or something else they are aware of. Once they have done so, ask them to think about feelings they themselves might have had if they had been there. Then ask them to turn to the person next to them and each describe the moment they identified and the feelings involved.

Call the group back together and ask volunteers to call out some of the feelings and reactions they imagined. Tell the group that today's session considers what it is like to live in moments of social change, and what we can learn from forebears who have faced these moments with courage, faith, and persistence.

Exploring (30 minutes)

2. *What Do We Care About? (10 minutes)*

Remind the group that the book opens with several brief accounts of ecological waste, mostly in the form of littering. Yet the list of environmental concerns summarized beginning on page 4 is much broader than litter. It includes problems in the areas of water, land use, trash and toxic waste, energy, and climate change.

Ask participants to call out in single words or brief phrases the environmental problems they find most troubling. Have someone list them on newsprint as they do so. Then ask them a second question: are these distinct issues, or are they interrelated? Allow participants to draw connections among the issues listed on the newsprint.

3. *What Have We Been Taught? (10 minutes)*

Read this quotation from the top of page 3 of *Inhabiting Eden*:

We may search for technological answers to the multiple ecological problems we face, but the questions are really human ones: What do we value? How do our lives and values line up?

Ask participants to reflect on their values. As the conversation unfolds, you might prompt with such questions as: In what sense are religious values involved in the environmental problems that have been named? Are there biblical texts or religious teachings that come to mind when thinking about how we treat our surroundings? What does it mean to live as if we valued the world God created?

*4. What Are Some Precedents? (10 minutes)*

Introduce the next part of the conversation by saying that social change often occurs when people reach a point that they either can't return to the past—as when the ancient Judeans lost Jerusalem to Babylonian destruction—or when they become convinced that business as usual has become unacceptable. Even when the past becomes unavailable or unacceptable, future direction may be unclear, daunting, or disputed.

Ask participants to recall some of the feelings they named at the beginning of the session, imagining themselves in a critical time in history. Then ask for two volunteers for a role play. One volunteer will be God, speaking to Ananias about Saul. The other will be Ananias. Reminding them that biblical stories often condense the drama, offer them their first lines from the story in Acts 9:10–14, and invite them to carry the conversation between God and Ananias as they imagine it might have taken place.

After a few exchanges, thank the role players. Note that an important distinction between Ananias's story as Luke tells it and most of ours is that the prompts we receive to do the right thing don't usually come as God's voice speaking as specifically as Luke portrays in Acts. Ask participants to think of instances when they may have felt prompted to do something, but also found themselves struggling with doubt or uncertainty. What fears or doubts did they know? What role did faith values play in their decisions? Was the actual outcome the same as what they feared? How did it differ?

Responding (10 minutes)

*5. Coaching Courage in Crisis*

Give each participant an index card or piece of scratch paper, and make sure everyone has a pen. Invite them to imagine that they have a friend who feels convicted to do something (even if they don't yet know what) about one of the environmental issues that were named earlier, and to write one sentence of encouragement or coaching about how to do so as a Christian.

After allowing time for participants to think and write, invite volunteers to read aloud the encouragement or coaching they have written.

Closing (10 minutes)

*6. One Action*

Invite participants to imagine themselves taking one step this week to address an environmental issue for which they care. It can be a personal action or a public one, one single thing, not more than one.

Invite participants to name the actions they imagine in the context of the following closing prayer, or one of your choosing:

*Creating God, create within us the courage to change one small part of our world. As we name our intentions before you, let us affirm one another, saying, "Faith, courage, and perseverance be yours this week."*

[Leave time for all who wish to name their actions aloud, and lead the group in response. Then close with:]

*In the name of the one who made heaven and earth, we pray,  
Amen.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on p. 16 of *Inhabiting Eden*, to pay attention to presence of natural world when reading Scripture, and to ecological issues in the news. Remind participants to read chapter 2, “Humans and Creation,” concerning the human role as Scripture describes it.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 1**

Isaiah 43:16–19

Acts 9:1–16

### **For More Information**

Berry, Wendell. *The Citizenship Papers: Essays*. Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2003.

Wilson, E. O. *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*. New York: Norton & Co., 2006.



# Humans and Creation

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will examine elements of Genesis 1 and 2 and other creation texts to better understand scriptural views of the human role in God's world.

## **Session at a Glance**

### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- Genesis 1:1–2:3
- Today's Theme

### EXPLORING

- Two Religious Understandings
- Other Biblical Images of Humans in Creation

### RESPONDING

- Serving and Preserving

### CLOSING

- Receiving with Gratitude
- Closing Prayer

## PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

Often the Bible surprises us by not saying what it has been assumed to say. It takes a new generation, reading with different questions, to discover vital features missed by previous interpreters. This is so with the question of the human role on earth. As exploitation of resources and living creatures has multiplied, Genesis 1:26–28 has been blamed for authorizing destructive behaviors. Yet, as this chapter shows, these verses understood in their context mean nothing of the kind. Further, they are far from being Scripture's only description of the human role.

A challenge in teaching this chapter will be to encourage participants to think afresh about Scripture's message. While long-held suppositions are difficult to part with, participants who are troubled by the “dominion” idea may be ready to hear something new.

*Give me grace, O God, to listen with discernment to the conversations today, and to lead with sensitivity.*

### *Preparation Checklist:*

- Read chapter 2 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

*Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Two pieces of newsprint with one of the following quotes on each:
  - “God put coal and other natural resources here for a purpose. That purpose is for energy requirements and jobs.”
  - “There’s a document at the county courthouse that says I own twenty-one acres on Wilson Creek. But I don’t think I own it... It is mine to take care of, and to protect, and to enjoy, and then to pass on to the next generation—hopefully in better shape than I got it.”



**LEADING THE SESSION**

*Opening (10 minutes):*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Loving God, you made us to grow, and to love growing. You made us for community with you and with other creatures. As we seek to learn together today, grant us wisdom and courage. Amen.*

1. *Genesis 1:1–2:3*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 2.

Ask participants to turn to Appendix B on page 167. Ask for volunteers to read parts A, B, C, D, and E. Ask the group to listen for the various repetitions as the passage is read aloud. Then ask the readers to begin.

Ask participants to point out some of the key repetitions they heard. What is emphasized? Whom or what does God see as “very good”?

Tell the group that today’s session considers not only this familiar creation account, but some other descriptions of creation in the Bible for insight into the role of humans in relation to the rest of creation.

*Exploring (35 minutes)*

2. *Two Religious Understandings (15 minutes)*

Show participants the two newsprint pages with the quotations, and explain that they are two statements made by neighbors in the documentary movie *Deep Down: A Story from the Heart of Coal Country*. Ask participants which statement they think most Americans would consider to reflect best the relationship of humans to the rest of the created world as Genesis 1 describes it. As the participants respond, ask them what *they themselves* think. To what extent is the natural world provided for human benefit? What are the proper limits of human behavior in the image of God? What responsibilities do we bear to the rest of creation, if any?

*3. Other Biblical Images of Humans in Creation (20 minutes)*

Divide the participants into three groups and assign one of these texts to each of them: Genesis 2:4–15; Psalm 104; Psalm 148. Ask them to read the text together, looking for the role of humans and the role of other elements of creation in these stories, and be ready to report briefly, citing a key verse and a one-sentence description of the role of humans as this passage describes it.

After 10 minutes of small group exploration, ask the three groups to report back on what they discovered. After all three groups do so, ask for common themes among them. What new discoveries did they make?

*Responding (5 minutes)*

*4. Serving and Preserving*

Point out that according to *Inhabiting Eden*, Genesis 2:15 is better translated “serve and preserve” than “till and keep.” Ask what the implications of this role might be for the way we address the ecological challenges that were identified last week.

*Closing (10 minutes)*

*5. Receiving with Gratitude*

Read aloud the following passage from page 30 of *Inhabiting Eden*:

We were intended to draw sustenance from creation’s bounty. With each breath, we take in God’s provision of air; with each drink, the precious water supply; with each bite of bread, the manna for one more day of love and

service. We can begin to uphold the world that upholds us by recognizing these gifts with gratitude, especially our place in an ordered world that is full and fundamentally good, and our vocation to preserve the goodness and health of this living, teeming, exuberant world.

Pray the following prayer, asking participants to name God's provisions coming through the natural world for which they wish to express gratitude:

*Our God, each day you give us not only our daily bread, but also so many other reasons for awe and wonder coming through the miracles of nature, of other species, of our own remarkable bodies. Especially today we thank you for these marvelous gifts*

.....

*Though molded from the earth's dust, we reach up to you in gratitude for all your bounty. Amen.*

Suggest that participants try the "Try This at Home" suggestions on page 33 of *Inhabiting Eden*, to spend time observing elements of the natural world each day. Remind participants to read chapter 3, "Leaving the Garden," concerning human disconnections from the earth.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 2**

Genesis 1:1–2:3, 2:4–15

Psalm 104; 148

Isaiah 43:19–21

**For More Information**

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# Leaving the Garden

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will explore the theme of violation of limits in Genesis 3 and 4 and consider basic ways to live within environmental limits.

## **Session at a Glance**

### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- The Concept of Limits
- Today's Theme

### EXPLORING

- Genesis 2–4
- Ecological Footprint:  
How Many Earths?

### RESPONDING

- What Helps Us?

### CLOSING

- Bits of Eden
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

While no one leading adult studies is expected to become an expert in the subject matter, some advance preparation both energizes the teacher and enlivens the class. This week, some internet research can be especially helpful. As described below, you will want to become familiar with websites that calculate a person's "ecological footprint." Since the group will be discussing not only problems but solutions, research resources that help encourage sustainable choices, such as the following:

- <http://www.energystar.gov/>
- <http://www.dsireusa.org/>: the database of state incentives for renewable energy and efficiency
- Websites of your local power providers, which may offer their own energy saving incentives
- Websites of local city or county recycling services (<http://www.recyclingcenters.org/>)
- <http://www.usdalocalfooddirectories.com/> for farmers markets and other local food providers

This information will come in handy during the session.

*Guide me to lead with clarity and integrity, loving God,  
knowing where I myself stand and both challenging others and  
welcoming their contributions.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 3 and this guide at least once.
- Go to one of the "ecological footprint" websites and familiarize yourself with it. Decide which one to use.

- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below. Make sure computer, internet, and projector are working properly.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

*Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Newsprint and marker
- Computer, projector, screen, and internet access



**LEADING THE SESSION**

*Opening (10 minutes)*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Still our hearts, our God, so that in our discussions today we may hear what you wish to teach us.*

*1. The Concept of Limits*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 3.

Ask the group what they think of when they hear the word “boundaries” or “limits” in regard to personal relationships. Take answers. Ask what “limits” apply in relation to our own health? Invite responses. Ask for examples of biblical values and teachings corresponding to practical wisdom when it comes to personal and interpersonal limits.

Tell the group that today’s session considers the concept of violating or respecting ecological limits, and ways we can live freely and fully within such limits.

*Exploring (35 minutes)*

*2. Genesis 2–4 (15 minutes)*

Note that the Hebrew word *adamah* (“ground”) occurs fourteen times in Genesis 2, 3, and 4, making it a major theme of these stories. (It is readily apparent in the NRSV in 13 places, but in Genesis 4:14 it is translated as “soil.”) Ask what were God’s instructions in Genesis 2:16–17, and what happened in Genesis 3:6. Have someone read God’s speech in Genesis 3:17–19 and note the prominence of the word “ground” and associated words in this passage. Ask: In what sense is it fair to say that the couple violated an environmental limit, and suffered an environmental consequence? Ask for examples today in which ignoring or violating environmental limits have brought direct or indirect environmental consequences.

Turning to the story of Cain, ask what God said to Cain in Genesis 4:6–7. What action is God expecting of Cain? When Cain acts, how is he violating God’s words to him? Cain’s sin is social, but how do ecological forces come into play in what he did, especially as pointed out by God’s response in verses 10–12? Ask for examples of relationships existing today between violence against people and ecological damage.

*3. Ecological Footprint: How Many Earths? (20 minutes)*

Explain that the concept of “ecological footprint” is a way of estimating the ecological impact of personal habits such as how we drive, how we eat, and how we use energy. There are several different calculators available, with varying degrees of complexity and precision. They help us understand better the share of the earth’s resources that we are using. Often the results are expressed in terms like, “If everyone on earth lived my lifestyle, we would need (x number of) earths to support us all.”

If internet and projection equipment are available, demonstrate the quiz using either a volunteer in the room or a hypothetical average American, using data from the participants to fill in the quiz. A thorough quiz taking about 6–7 minutes may be found at [www.myfootprint.org](http://www.myfootprint.org). A briefer one, taking 2–3 minutes, is at [www.ecologicalfootprint.com](http://www.ecologicalfootprint.com). Ask what conclusions might be drawn from such quizzes. Note that taking more than one’s fair share violates a limit, yet the American lifestyle is constructed in a way that discourages living within sustainable limits. If there is time you might invite people to name some of the factors that make living within environmental limits difficult. Examples

might be lack of efficient transit systems, overwork that precludes conscientious personal choices, or lack of knowledge of options.

*Responding (10 minutes)*

*4. What Helps Us?*

Note that there are some resources that help us to live within more reasonable ecological limits. Ask the group to break into pairs and try to identify at least one resource from each of the following sources that encourages and helps people wishing to live within ecological boundaries:

- Scripture and the church's tradition
- Government resources such as Energy Star and energy rebates
- Innovative technology
- Resources within your local community

After a few minutes, ask participants to reconvene and name the resources that they have come up with. List them on newsprint.

*Closing (5 minutes)*

*5. Bits of Eden*

Read the following passage from page 3 of *Inhabiting Eden*:

Scripture tells us that our original forebears lost the garden of Eden before they realized what they had. Not ever having been there myself, I have trouble picturing a world more exquisite than our own. It's not just the snowcapped peak of Fishtale Mountain behind my daughter's house in Pokhara, nor the vast red hues of the

Grand Canyon, nor the Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah Valley. It's the mockingbird practicing its repertoire in the burning bush; it's the maple tree in the backyard, changing with the seasons from greens to oranges to intricate, rugged browns. Each locale has its bits of Eden, habitats to inherit, enjoy, tend, and bequeath to our descendants.

Ask participants to name “bits of Eden” that come to mind for them, that are worth the effort to bequeath intact to our descendants. Tell them there will be a time in the closing prayer to name these before God in gratitude. Lead them in this prayer:

*God of grace and glory, we thank you for all your wonders alive in the world today. We repent of the ways human, including us, have violated these gifts of creation, and we ask for wisdom to help us protect what you have bequeathed to us. With special fondness we name these exquisite wonders out loud .... For all these we give you thanks. We pledge to protect, with our choices and actions, the wonders you have made.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 50 of *Inhabiting Eden*, finding ways to reduce energy consumption at home. Remind participants to read chapter 4, “Commerce and Contentment,” concerning the problems raised by consumer culture.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 3**

Genesis 3:1–4:16

Hosea 4:1–3

Isaiah 24:4–6

**For More Information**

“Coal Consumption (Per Capita) by State.”

[http://www.statemaster.com/graph/ene\\_coa\\_con\\_perca\\_p-energy-coal-consumption-per-capita](http://www.statemaster.com/graph/ene_coa_con_perca_p-energy-coal-consumption-per-capita).

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# Commerce and Contentment

## Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the contemporary problem of consumerism and its consequences in human and environmental degradation, and examine choices leading to greater material freedom.

## Session at a Glance

### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- Serving Masters
- Today's Theme

### EXPLORING

- A Merry Little Christmas
- Feeding Desire
- *The Story of Stuff* Videos

### RESPONDING

- The Story of Choices

### CLOSING

- Rich in Soul
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

Little is ever gained by rehearsing “oughts.” Yet discussions of consumerism often devolve into guilt and finger-wagging. This chapter of *Inhabiting Eden* does explore some of the injustices and environmental costs of consumer culture. But it focuses on the spiritual health and wholeness of consumers themselves. It does so in several ways: (1) by reflecting on biblical wisdom concerning the high cost of serving wealth; (2) by relating the history of pressure placed on Americans to contribute to the GDP; and (3) by examining the psychological and health results of cultivated “Affluenza.” It offers an invitation to exit the culture of consumption, and to seek God and God’s reign, along with the spiritual and emotional wealth to be found in daily choices of sufficiency.

It is helpful for you as leader to be prepared to reflect with some honesty and humility on where you stand in this quest, where you wish to be, the questions you face, and the story behind your own struggle with materialism in culture. Such honesty will invite similar forthrightness in the conversations of the group.

*I give you thanks, teaching God, for the many ways I have learned to live according to your reign on earth, and pray for increasing depth in knowing and living your truth.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 4 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- View a few videos from the website [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org) and choose one that suits your timeframe and audience.
- Using three pieces of newsprint, write at the top of one of them, “No one can serve two masters.” On the top of the second, write, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” On top of the third, write this quote from Reno: “Neither the luster of coins nor their ability to bring us all the merchant’s cargo is powerful enough to bring us peace.” Post these on the walls with enough space for participants to gather around them.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

### *Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- A variety of advertisements for different products cut from magazines: electronics, clothes, cars, detergents, cruises, foods, petroleum products, etc. Bring twice as many as the number of participants you expect. Scatter them on a table or tape them to the walls

- Blank paper (2 sheets for everyone) and pens
- TV or computer screen viewable by all and internet connection



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Opening (10 minutes)

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Great Shepherd, lead us in right paths for your name's sake, and comfort us with your presence.*

#### *1. Serving Masters*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 4.

Read Jesus' words from Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” Point out that Jesus didn't say, “No one *should* serve two masters,” but rather makes his point as a statement of fact: it's not possible to serve God and wealth simultaneously.

Tell the group that today's session considers contemporary American culture in light of biblical and

theological assessments of material accumulation. Direct attention to the three quotations from Jesus, Augustine, and Reno that are printed on newsprint, and ask them to ponder these, and then write their own one-sentence response to *one* of them. Their response can restate, paraphrase, or even debate the quotation, but it must be phrased as an *is* statement and not an *ought*, and should reflect their own view. After a few minutes to compose their response, invite volunteers to tell briefly which statement they reflected upon and to read their “truth” sentence to the group.

Exploring (30 minutes)

*2. A Merry Little Christmas (10 minutes)*

In our culture it is difficult to avoid having strong feelings, both positive and negative, around the holiday that marks both the year’s spiritual apex and its busiest commercial ventures: Christmas. Invite participants in groups of three to each tell the other one thing that distresses them about Christmas, and why. Then invite them to each relate a one-minute description of a time when they experienced deep Christmas joy (what happened? who was involved? what did it feel like?). Last, ask them briefly to draw conclusions: how can Christmas be merriest? What cultural expectations must be reinforced or resisted to do so?

*3. Feeding Desire (10 minutes)*

Direct participants’ attention to the magazine ads you brought. Note that the elements of our lives that are free, such as friendship or clouds, and those that are necessities, such as running water or fresh vegetables, do not generally need ads.

Rather, money is spent on advertising to sell non-necessities, “wants” rather than “needs.” Yet these ads often attempt to connect their product with some emotional value or physical need, such as desire for love, beauty, health, or security.

Invite participants to choose one of the ads and, after inspecting it, to describe what they see as the value it is designed to appeal to, and to suggest a more direct and less economically or ecologically costly way to attain that value.

#### *4. The Story of Stuff Videos (10 minutes)*

The original “Story of Stuff” video described in chapter 4 is 20 minutes long. Some class settings may accommodate its length, but if not, there are other, shorter videos on the same website that invite conversation, such as “The Story of Change” or “The Story of Solutions.” Show the video that you have chosen and invite conversation about its messages: what is it opposing? What is it proposing? How, as Christians, do we respond?

#### *Responding (10 minutes)*

#### *5. The Story of Choices*

Question 8 on page 70 asks, “If you were challenged to make three steps toward simplifying your material lifestyle, what would you do? What would result?” Ask participants to brainstorm this question, and to each write down one challenge for themselves for the coming week that will exercise their capacity to choose service of God over pursuit of material wealth. Ask volunteers to share their commitment, and how they think this commitment will benefit themselves, other people, and the earth.

Closing (10 minutes)

6. *Rich in Soul*

Ask participants to think of people they know whom they see as materially frugal but rich in non-material ways. It will be easy to name famous people such as Sister Teresa or Gandhi, but invite them to mention people closer to home whom they view as exemplary.

For the closing prayer, ask participants to complete this sentence: “*I give thanks for those who lead the way by \_\_\_\_\_,*” naming in one sentence the qualities and actions of this person that they find most striking. Close with:

*For all who serve you in richness of soul, for all who serve you without slavery to wealth, for all who serve you by serving the health of society and nature, we thank you, God.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 70 of *Inhabiting Eden*, taking inventories of possessions at home. Remind participants to read chapter 5, “Food for Life,” concerning modern crop production.

**Key Scriptures in Chapter 4**

Isaiah 2:1–21

Psalm 10:2–4

Proverbs 16:18–19

Matthew 6:24

**For More Information**

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# Food for Life

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will compare current American food practices with the food ethics portrayed in the Exodus manna story and the Sinai laws, and explore alternative practices available in their community.

## **Session at a Glance**

### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- Where Does Our Food Come From?
- Today's Theme

### EXPLORING

- Manna Principles
- Multiple Dimensions

### RESPONDING

- Adopting Food Rules

### CLOSING

- Table Blessings
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

Food can be a touchy subject. Yet it is important to explore, especially since agricultural practices account for a large percent of both greenhouse gases and other kinds of pollution. Most Americans do not realize how dramatically the industrial food system has changed during our lifetime. Like the waste underlying consumerism in general, many aspects of the food system remain hidden from public view. In addition, many farmers themselves are invested in it in a number of ways, from cooperation with large companies such as Monsanto to dependence on U.S. farm subsidies. Yet humans, especially the poor among us and abroad, are vulnerable to its failures. So it is ethically important to understand better the system in which we participate several times a day.

Food issues are quite multifaceted and complex, and this chapter and the next touch only briefly on some of the many that can be named. For leaders who have time and interest, further reading may well be worthwhile.

*As I examine my own eating habits, God of all bounty, give me clarity, grace, and gratitude.*

### *Preparation Checklist:*

- Read chapter 5 and this guide at least once. As mentioned above, further reading may be worthwhile. Being alert to newspaper stories concerning agriculture, hunger, migrant labor, and other food-related topics may also help provide good preparation.

- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

*Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Blank paper (2 sheets for everyone) and pens
- Newsprint and marker
- Optional: brief news stories or further reading related to the issues in section 3 below, to be shared with breakout groups



**LEADING THE SESSION**

*Opening (10 minutes)*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*You who prepare a table in the wilderness, refresh us today with food from heaven.*

*1. Where Does Our Food Come From?*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 5.

Give each participant a piece of paper and make sure everyone has a pen. Invite them to list the meals they have eaten in the previous twenty-four hours, leaving space between them. Then invite them to list the ingredients to the best of their knowledge, and to move as far back in the supply chain as they can, detailing the sources of each item. (Some, for instance, may say, “broccoli from our garden,” but “milk from the grocery store—not sure where from.”) Ask for comments: how far did some of their foods travel? What are their ingredients? Who grew or developed them? Are there any surprises among the group?

Tell the group that today's session is the first of two that considers the environmental and justice features of our daily bread.

*Exploring (30 minutes)*

*2. Manna Principles (15 minutes)*

Ask the question posed at the beginning of chapter 5: “What is food for?” First answers will likely have to do with its biological significance for survival, and in a few moments more sociological answers may surface, such as food's role in community building or social status differentiation.

Have someone in the group read aloud the story of the manna in Exodus 16:13b–26 (also found on page 77 of *Inhabiting Eden*). Ask participants to name features of the story that seem to surprise the Israelites, and to identify

underlying principles such as equal distribution, simplicity, plenty, and Sabbath rest.

Invite various members to read aloud the following passages from the Sinai laws: Leviticus 25:13–16, 23; Leviticus 19:9–10; Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 11:1–8. What principles of fairness, respect, and self-limiting can they see in these rules? How do they relate to the manna story?

### 3. *Multiple Dimensions (15 minutes)*

Ask participants to divide into four topic groups according to their interests:

1. Food deserts (pp. 73–74)
2. Commodification and waste (pp. 75, 81–82)
3. Control by large corporations (pp. 82–84)
4. Food miles (pp. 85–87)

Direct them to review the topic as discussed in *Inhabiting Eden*, and ask them to discuss the following:

1. How does this phenomenon manifest itself today?
2. What opportunities does it provide, if any?
3. What problems does it raise?
4. What are ways Christians might address this phenomenon as households and as churches?

After ten minutes or so in small groups, invite participants to report back briefly on their discussions. Ask them especially to identify answers to the fourth question about how Christians might respond.

Responding (10 minutes)

*4. Adopting Food Rules*

Ask participants to volunteer, as they wish, one new insight from this discussion, and one practice that they would like to adopt or strengthen, either within their household or as part of the congregation's outreach. Invite them to include in their discussion the steps they think would be important to take to get there (such as negotiating this practice with relevant others, seeking out alternative grocery sources, etc.). As participants respond, jot their ideas on newsprint for all to see.

Closing (10 minutes)

*5. Table Blessings*

For whom and what do we give thanks for the gift of food? What do we wish for all people on earth? Invite the group in pairs to compose two-sentence table blessings including both petitions for food security and gratitude for bounty. As a closing prayer, invite participants to read their prayers out loud. They might take them home to use during the week.

Suggest that participants try the "Try This at Home" suggestions on page 89 of *Inhabiting Eden*, concerning growing, finding, and eating food. Remind participants to read chapter 6, "The Needs of Animals," concerning animal farming.

**Key Scriptures in Chapter 5**

Exodus 16:13–26; 20:8–11; 23: 10–11

Leviticus 11:1–8; 25:1–28; 19:9–10

### For More Information

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# The Needs of Animals

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will compare what is known about commercial meat-production practices with the respectful treatment of animals prescribed in Scripture, and explore options for eating with integrity.

## **Session at a Glance**

### **OPENING**

- Opening Prayer
- Our Animal Stories
- Today's Theme

### **EXPLORING**

- Biblical Animal Stories
- Eating Animals Today

### **RESPONDING**

- Christian Principles for Animal Treatment

### **CLOSING**

- Intention and Action
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

This week's topic is one few people enjoy examining in depth, since it can foster both guilt and defensiveness on the one hand, and self-righteousness on the other. Taking time to ponder (and feel) your own responses to the subject before the meeting time is helpful: in your heart of hearts, how do you react to questions of animal suffering connected with meat eating? What are sources for, and points of, ambivalence for you? You may find during the session that some may try to alleviate their own discomfort with comments like, "I love animals; they're delicious." As leader, you can help set the scene for a more valuable discussion by emphasizing that eating or not eating animals is not in itself what is at stake, but rather the way they are treated during their lifetime. Emphasize that all participants, including yourself, are fellow seekers for wisdom.

*Faithful God, let me seek loving-kindness toward all your creatures, four-legged and two-legged, great and small.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 6 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

*Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Newsprint and markers



**LEADING THE SESSION**

*Opening (10 minutes)*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Be our Shepherd today, great God. Restore our souls with you loving kindness for all creatures.*

*1. Our Animal Stories*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 6.

Introduce the lesson by saying that many people enjoy telling stories about the cute or amusing things their dogs and cats do. It is often difficult to express our feelings about animals more directly, because our society has a split consciousness toward them: many of us live with, or very close to, animals, and feel love and appreciation for them. But, having been taught since childhood that animals are not

as important as people, and having been warned against attributing human characteristics to animals, some are apologetic about deep feelings that we have toward them, and prefer to keep them private.

Invite a willing soul or two to recount a brief story of a vital relationship they have with an animal, or a moment when they felt they sympathized with an animal's feelings. You might begin by telling a story of your own. Try to avoid sentimentalizing, and instead seek to take seriously the dignity and beauty of the animals you and others are discussing.

Tell the group that today's session considers practices toward animals in contemporary America, particularly toward those we use as food. The question to place before the group today is how, given a world where animals eat each other and are eaten by us, this food chain can be practiced as humanely as possible.

*Exploring (30 minutes)*

*2. Biblical Animal Stories (15 minutes)*

Divide participants into groups of three to examine one of these passages, depending on how many people you have: Genesis 1:1–17; Leviticus 17:3–14; Numbers 22:20–33; 2 Samuel 12:1–7; Job 39:13–30; Psalm 23:1–6; Psalm 104:9–18. Ask them to describe animal roles in their passage, the relationship that is suggested between animals and their creator, and the human attitude toward animals the passage suggests. After they have had time to read their passages and discuss them, call everyone together and ask a representative

of each group briefly to describe the passage and what they learned from it.

*3. Eating Animals Today (15 minutes)*

Pages 99–101 of *Inhabiting Eden* list a number of issues that have been raised concerning the contemporary practice of factory farming in CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations). Ask participants to turn to this list, and note that it encompasses not only problems of animal suffering but also social justice, pollution, public health, and water and land use. Ask, “Which of these concerns have you heard of before, and what have you heard?” and invite answers. Then ask, “Which of these concerns you personally?” and invite discussion, listing concerns on newsprint.

*Responding (10 minutes)*

*4. Christian Principles for Animal Treatment*

Ask, “If we wanted to create principles for Christian treatment of animals in our eating practices, what would we include?” List responses on newsprint. Not all will agree with one another. If it is possible to find some broad consensus, guide participants in shaping a statement that takes into account the sensibilities of various people. If there is strong disagreement, try to shape two different statements representing the views of more than one group. After asking if the final product represents each group’s understanding fairly, ask whether there are some bottom lines on which all may agree. If there are, that is good; if there aren’t, point out that this topic is in many ways so personal that it is often difficult for people to come to agreement on it.

Closing (10 minutes)

*5. Intention and Action*

Ask members to write down one intention this consideration of livestock farming has brought them to. Invite a couple of people who are willing to share briefly.

Close with the prayer of St. Basil found on page 106 of *Inhabiting Eden*:

*O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom Thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee in song has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee and that they love the sweetness of life even as we, and serve Thee better in their place than we in ours.*

*For those, O Lord, the humble beasts, that bear with us the burden and heat of day . . . and for the wild creatures, whom Thou hast made wise, strong, and beautiful, we supplicate for them Thy great tenderness of heart, for Thou hast promised to save both man and beast, and great is Thy loving kindness, O Master, Saviour of the world.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 107 of *Inhabiting Eden*, concerning animals in Scripture and today. Remind participants to read chapter 7, “Environmental Fairness,” concerning toxic pollution.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 6**

Genesis 1: 1–17, 29–30; 9:2–3

Isaiah 11:6–9

Leviticus 11:1–30; 17:3–14, 10–14

Numbers 22:20–33

2 Samuel 12:1–7

Job 39:13–30

Psalms 23:1–6; 104:9–18

Proverbs 27:23–27

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/business/09arsenic.html?\\_r=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/business/09arsenic.html?_r=3).

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Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Gospel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

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United States Environmental Protection Agency. "What Is a CAFO?"

<http://www.epa.gov/region7/water/cafo/index.htm>.

Weida, William J. "Considering the Rationales for Factory Farming." Presented at a 2004 Iowa City conference entitled *Environmental Health Impacts of CAFOs: Anticipating Hazards - Searching for Solutions*.

<http://www.worc.org/userfiles/file/Weida-economicsofCAFOs.pdf>.

Wennberg, Robert N. *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge our Moral Universe*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.



# Environmental Fairness

## Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the problem of toxic waste endangering the health of people living nearby factories, plants, and mining operations in the light of biblical standards of justice, and consider ways they might seek to address the health and justice problems raised by pollution.

## Session at a Glance

### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- Ahab and Naboth
- Today's Theme

### EXPLORING

- Environmental Justice Is a Legal Right
- Case Studies
- The EPA's 2014 Coal Emission Guidelines

### RESPONDING

- Making It Personal

### CLOSING

- The Christ Child among Us
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

Regarding issues raised in this and the next chapter on climate change, many people who do not believe they themselves to be directly affected may consider the challenges too overwhelming for personal action. Not everyone has the time or passion for deep commitments to activism. Yet every caring and responsible adult can become informed, and can inform others. Everyone can strive for conscientious choices in our buying. And a few of us—a teacher never knows who—can go farther, either in the course of our professional lives or as volunteers.

*Serendipitous God, give me grace to welcome each individual just as they are, and open me to welcome surprises.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 7 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

### *Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles

- Newsprint and marker
- Copies of several brief environmental justice case studies found at <http://eelink.net/EJ/laws.html>, your local paper, or elsewhere (You may seek out examples that are close to your locale or are otherwise pertinent.)
- Copies of EPA Fact Sheet at: <http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-05/documents/20140602fs-overview.pdf>
- At least one copy of the UCC document “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987–2007” (<http://www.ejnet.org/ej/twart.pdf>) and of the NAACP study “Coal Blooded: Putting Profits before People (Executive Summary)” ([http://action.naacp.org/page/-/Climate/Coal\\_Blooded\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_Update.pdf](http://action.naacp.org/page/-/Climate/Coal_Blooded_Executive_Summary_Update.pdf))



## **LEADING THE SESSION**

### *Opening (10 minutes)*

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Just and loving God, in all our words and deeds guide us to make your priorities our own.*

*1. Ahab and Naboth*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 7.

Invite the group to read together the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21:1-16. Lead a discussion of the story by asking: What did Naboth value about his land? What did Ahab value about it? According to biblical standards as you understand them, what behavioral limits should the king and queen have observed? How did they use the legal system for their advantage?

Now invite them to read Ezekiel 34:15–22. Ask: who do you imagine are the “fat sheep” in this passage? What are they doing that is objectionable? What is the result? Ask the group what similarities, if any, can be found between the Naboth story and this prophecy, when it comes to the way the land and other inhabitants of it are treated.

Tell the group that today's session considers environmental justice, particularly when it comes to the actions of some spoiling land, water, or air for others, or even endangering the lives of neighbors in their pursuit of wealth.

*Exploring (30 minutes)*

*2. Environmental Justice Is a Legal Right (10 minutes)*

Read together the Environmental Protection Agency's definition of Environmental Justice on page 117 of *Inhabiting Eden*. Note that this definition moves beyond the general issue of pollution in that it seeks to prevent some people— notably those who are poor or otherwise lacking in legal

power—from bearing a disproportionate burden from industry-generated pollution.

Ask participants to name some sources of industrial pollution of which they are aware. Explore what sources of pollution of land, air, or water are particularly problematic in the area in which you live.

*3. Case Studies (10 minutes)*

Invite participants to divide into groups of three or four. Distribute the brief case studies (see above under “Materials Needed”) and ask participants to read them together and to discuss these questions:

- a. What might the prophet Ezekiel say about this case?
- b. What biblical teachings concerning justice may be relevant to this case?
- c. What practical things can Christian communities do about situations like this one?

*4. The EPA’s 2014 Coal Emission Guidelines (10 minutes)*

Introduce this discussion by telling participants that, in June 2014, the EPA proposed emission guidelines to cut carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants that generate electricity. These guidelines are designed to offer the double benefit of reduced health risks for citizens living nearby the plants and subject to their pollution, and of a reduced rate of greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change.

Hand out copies of “EPA Fact Sheet: Clean Power Plan” and invite participants to look it over. Note especially the public health benefits estimated for current citizens. Note that although this fact sheet does not mention race or poverty, other sources do:

- According to the United Church of Christ report “Toxic Wastes at Twenty: 1987–2007,” “More than 68 percent of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant—the distance within which the maximum effects of the smokestack plume are expected to occur—compared with 56 percent of white Americans” (p. 4).
- A study by the NAACP entitled “Coal Blooded: Putting Profits before People” reports that “People who live within three miles of a coal power plant have an average per capita income of \$18,400, which is lower than the U.S. average of \$21,587” (p. 3). It also cites a 2010 report by the NRDC calculating that “approximately 1,530 excess deaths per year are caused solely by particulate matter pollution from U.S. coal-fired power plants, and that ‘aggregate damages associated with emissions of SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, and PM from [the 402 largest U.S.] coal-fired facilities in 2005 were approximately \$62 billion” (p. 3).

Invite participants to list the pros and cons of the EPA plan as they see them. Note their responses on newsprint. Ask them to consider other ways, or additional ways, the public health dangers of power plants might be relieved.

*Responding (10 minutes)*

*5. Making It Personal*

Ask the group to name ways Christians can adapt our lifestyles in light of the disproportionate health effects of coal burning on poorer communities. Are there things we can do in our daily lives to lighten the burden our use of electricity and other products places on poorer communities? Are there things we can do to encourage more widespread awareness of

health effects of pollution? Are there alternatives to present practice about which we can learn or for which we might advocate?

Invite each participant to spend a little time in the coming week researching what is being said about the health effects of a product or process that they have a stake in, such as petroleum production because they drive a car, precious mineral mining because they use electronics, or plastic development because they buy plastic products. Ask them to see if they can find alternatives being developed or proposed that have fewer health impacts.

*Closing (10 minutes)*

*6. The Christ Child among Us*

Remind participants that the story of Christmas in Luke's gospel emphasized the modesty, even poverty, of Jesus' parents' circumstances at his birth, and of the shepherds who were the first to welcome him. The story of Christmas in Matthew similarly emphasized the risks to all young children subject to King Herod, who put them to death. Invite them to imagine the young face of Jesus living, like many poor children today, subject to the pollution of industries nearby. Invite them to join you in prayers for the health of these innocents, naming their petitions aloud or silently as you lead:

*Loving, living God, who came to us as a vulnerable child, we pray today for your children and for their safety. Guide our hearts even as we pray..... Make us also into instruments of your peace on their behalf, seeking their welfare. Amen.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 128 of *Inhabiting Eden*, concerning chemicals used at home. Remind participants to read chapter 8, “Our Children’s Inheritance,” concerning global climate change.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 7**

1 Kings 21:1–24

Isaiah 5:1–8; 10:1–2

Ezekiel 34:17–23

### **For More Information**

Brown, Phil. *Toxic Exposures: Contested Illnesses and the Environmental Health Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Kriebel, David, et al. “The Precautionary Principle in Environmental Science.”

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- and Ethnicity.” NCCP, 2011.  
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- Shrader-Frechette, Kristin. *Taking Action, Saving Lives: Our Duties to Protect Environmental and Public Health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. See also: Center for Environmental Justice and Children’s Help.  
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<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/basics/index.html>.
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# Our Children's Inheritance

## **Goal for the Session**

Participants will explore biblical precedents for heeding prophets in times of crisis and the scientific and religious basis for responding to climate change, and will consider appropriate attitudes and actions.

## **Session at a Glance**

### **OPENING**

- Opening Prayer
- Hananiah the Popular Prophet
- Today's Theme

### **EXPLORING**

- Climate Change—What Scientists Say
- Religious Responses
- Climate Justice

### **RESPONDING**

- What Now?

### **CLOSING**

- Remaining Open
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

As was mentioned in the introduction to this guide, many people who agree in general about taking responsibility for our care of the natural world still balk at the idea that excess greenhouse gases could be a serious threat. Despite repeated warnings by the vast majority of the world's leading climate scientists, special interest groups continue to sow doubt and false information. Because of this, many people choose to believe that conclusions are still unclear. As time progresses and evidence mounts that climate change is already underway, more and more people are becoming convinced of its existence and threat. But without sufficient hope that meaningful action will be taken throughout the world, denial can morph into despair, another cause for inaction.

Climate change can be an emotional topic for many, generating feelings that immobilize. Finding out that others also feel fearful or overwhelmed can help participants name the dread that might otherwise remain diffuse and debilitating. Your role as leader of this discussion is not to argue anyone into agreement, but instead to make sure that discussion takes place, that it isn't shut down by denial, and that everyone's voice is heard.

*God who said so many times, "Do not fear," help me to face my own anxieties with courage to lead.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 8 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

### *Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Newsprint and marker
- Copies of the world map graphic in this article: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-cook/those-who-contribute-the- b 835718.html>, which is reprinted from J. Samson, D. Berteaux, B.J. McGill, and M.M. Humphries, "Geographic Disparities and Moral Hazards in the Predicted Impacts of Climate Change on Human Populations," *Global Ecology and Biogeography* 20:537–544. You can right-click on the graphic to copy it to a Word file or other form.
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, statement on end of fossil fuel era: <http://www.tutu.org.za/archbishop-tutu-calls-for-end-of-fossil-fuel-era-18-september-2014>
- Copies of several statements by world religious leaders about climate change:

- A statement by interfaith leaders in England:  
<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/770/faith-and-climate-change#Statement>
- The World Council of Churches:  
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/climate-change-and-human-rights-at-the-heart-of-the-wcc2019s-work-at-cop-20>
- The National Association of Evangelicals:  
<http://www.nae.net/lovingtheleastofthese>
- Presbyterian Church U.S.A.:  
<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/power-change-us-energy-policy-global-warming/>



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Opening (10 minutes)

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*God of prophets and sages, may we who gather today practice wisdom in all our words and deeds.*

#### 1. *Hananiah the Popular Prophet (10 minutes)*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 8.

Tell participants that the biggest turning point in ancient Judah's history was the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and its monarchy in 587 by the Babylonian army. For many years before this happened, Jeremiah and other prophets tried to warn the king and people of Jerusalem of the threat that was upon them. Jeremiah even resorted to street theater, wearing an animal's yoke to symbolize the yoke of servitude the Babylonians would impose. But other prophets voiced reassurances that God would never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. Even after Babylon invaded once, exiling the king and raiding the temple, Hananiah and other prophets continued to maintain that the worst could never happen to Jerusalem.

Invite the group to read together one of the dramatic episodes in Jeremiah's story, when the rival prophet Hananiah confronted Jeremiah personally, claiming to be speaking the God-given truth. Have them read Jeremiah 28:1–17. (One way to do so is for different speaking voices to read the words of each prophet, in a dramatic reading.) Ask them why they think many in Jeremiah's day resisted his words of warning.

Tell the group that today's session considers a modern parallel, the controversy that continues despite scientists' warnings of global climate change.

*Exploring (30 minutes)*

*2. Climate Change—What Scientists Say (10 minutes)*

Using newsprint and a marker to record responses, ask the group to recall to the best of their knowledge what scientists are saying about climate change, either from their reading of

*Inhabiting Eden* or from other sources. Allow participants to voice this in their own words. If some dispute others' facts, allow them to correct one another, but not to argue. If someone begins arguing against the science, remind them that at this point the goal is simply to hear clearly the salient points the scientific community is making. Try to get the basic scientific claims on the newsprint. Don't worry about trying to explore every detail.

Then ask, what is the bottom line, according to the scientific community represented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? What must the nations of the world do to mitigate and prepare for climate change?

### *3. Religious Responses (10 minutes)*

Ask participants to form groups of two or three and read one of the statements made by world religious leaders as described and located above. Ask them to discern the ethical basis of the statement they are reading and the changes the statement may be asking of leaders and/or citizens. After a few minutes to peruse these, call the group together and ask them to identify themes in what they were reading, and record them on newsprint.

### *4. Climate Justice (10 minutes)*

Pass out or show the world map showing distribution of emissions and distribution of likely effect. Tell the participants that several studies have shown the inequity of climate problems: that people who have contributed the least to greenhouse gases live in places that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, while people in industrialized nations like ours that have contributed the most to the problem live in less vulnerable areas.

If you have access to the internet, view together the seven-minute September 2014 statement of Archbishop Desmond Tutu calling for an end of the fossil fuel era. Ask participants for responses to Tutu's statement.

*Responding (10 minutes)*

*5. What Now?*

Invite participants to reflect on what they have read and seen. Remind them of the precautionary principle as described on pages 142–143 of *Inhabiting Eden* as it applies to climate change. What do they believe are the most important things they have learned or discerned from the materials and discussions about climate change? Ask them also to discuss how this challenge makes them feel about the responsibilities of faith groups in addressing this issue. Ask them to call out actions that they perceive ordinary citizens can carry out to help promote climate justice.

*Closing (10 minutes)*

*6. Remaining Open*

Remind participants that when confronted with overwhelming threats people can be tempted to shut down or despair. But people living today are indebted to a great many forebears who had the courage to confront threats they faced in their own times. We owe it to their memories to take courage today. Ask them to name ways that paralysis can be avoided and courage claimed.

Invite prayer for political leaders and other influential people on the world's stage. As each person voices a prayer,

follow by saying, “For \_\_\_\_ let us pray to the Lord,” inviting all participants to respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” Close the prayer with:

*Guide us into actions that help bring your reign of peace to this troubled and endangered world. Help us always to carry before us the prophetic hope of shalom. Amen.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 147 of *Inhabiting Eden*, concerning greenhouse gas reduction measures. Remind participants to read chapter 9, “Living within Our Means,” concerning making plans for our future.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 8**

Genesis 15:13–16

Jeremiah 6:10–14; 28:1–17

### **For More Information**

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/may/28/climatechange.fossilfuels>.

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Dessler, Andrew, and Edward A. Parson. *The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change: A Guide to the Debate*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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## Living within Our Means

### **Goal for the Session**

Participants will identify both sources of sorrow and reasons for hope, and embrace them in ways that lead to positive action.

### **Session at a Glance**

#### OPENING

- Opening Prayer
- Micah through Jeremiah's Eyes
- Today's Theme

#### EXPLORING

- What Do We Grieve?
- What Do We Hope?
- What Nourishes our Hope?

#### RESPONDING

- What Do We Bring?

#### CLOSING

- How Shall We Pray?
- Closing Prayer

## **PREPARING FOR THE SESSION**

### *Focus on Your Teaching*

As a teacher I find Jesus' words in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3–9) eminently true and comforting: While there are many who hear and for various reasons fail to act, when our seed finds its way to fertile ground, the return more than outweighs what has been lost. Further, since we don't really know where that fertile ground is—since it lies hidden in hearers' hearts—we are encouraged, like Jesus himself, to cast the seed of our teaching widely, trusting God for the growth.

*God of revelation, encourage me as leader, and give me faith that your word is heard and welcomed.*

### *Preparation Checklist*

- Read chapter 9 and this guide at least once.
- Adapt this guide for the needs and time limits of your group. The times given are for a one-hour session—you can expand or contract each section accordingly.
- Pray for participants.
- Gather materials listed below.
- Arrange chairs so that all can see one another comfortably.

### *Materials Needed*

- Copies of *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis*
- Bibles
- Newsprint and marker



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Opening (10 minutes)

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers. Make extra copies available to participants who do not yet have their books. Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

*Teaching, guiding God, we thank you for all that we have explored and learned together. Be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.*

#### *1. Micah through Jeremiah's Eyes*

If participants are reading *Inhabiting Eden* in preparation for each session, ask them to name briefly one “takeaway,” something they learned by reading chapter 9.

Ask participants to read together the story of Jeremiah's conflict with religious leaders in Jeremiah 26:8–19. (As in the previous session, this may be read in “reader's theater” style.) Ask: How was Micah's dire prophesy viewed a century after the fact?

Tell the group that today's session considers the hopeful actions we can take in light of the ecological crisis that we will be glad we have taken, and that we may be proud for our descendents to appreciate.

Exploring (30 minutes)

2. *What Do We Grieve? (10 minutes)*

Remind participants that in the first session they were asked to name current ecological problems that concern them. Ask them to do so once again, only this time make it a bidding prayer. Spend a few moments in silent prayer first. Then, as each participant names a concern, respond, “For \_\_\_ we pray to the Lord” (you may elaborate beyond a single word in naming this aspect as it seems appropriate). Invite participants to respond, “Lord, we entreat you, hear our prayer.”

3. *What Do We Hope? (10 minutes)*

Invite participants to read together Isaiah 65:17–23. You may use the author’s translation on page 155 of *Inhabiting Eden* or another translation. Ask participants to respond to this reading by voicing specific hopes that they have for the next thirty years of human history. As they do so, jot them on newsprint.

4. *What Nourishes Our Hope? (10 minutes)*

Read to participants this quotation from page 143, chapter 8, of *Inhabiting Eden*:

There is a crucial distinction to be made here between empty optimism and hope. Optimism believes that we needn’t worry, nor act. If a problem exists someone else will solve it, just as they develop an iPhone app for every need. Hope, on the other hand, faces facts and fears. It doesn’t leave the solutions to others but participates. Optimism is passive; hope is active.

Invite someone to read the paragraph on page 159 of *Inhabiting Eden* directly under the heading “Making Plans,” which begins with the sentence, “Inaction breeds despair.” Invite participants to name times in their own lives when they have confronted or overcome despair by finding specific steps to take.

*Responding (10 minutes)*

*5. What Do We Bring?*

Invite participants to examine the list of possible actions on pages 160–161, and ask what actions they think they would consider delving into, either among those listed or that they can think of on their own. If there are convergences among what various group members say, ask if there are things that your group might venture into collectively. Be sure the conversation remains as concrete as possible. If possible, conclude the conversation by summarizing one or two concrete, collective next steps, along with the names of those who wish to be involved and the first action that might be taken to achieve that goal. For instance, if participants say they would like to begin a green team in the church, include steps toward setting a date for, and advertising, an initial meeting.

*Closing (10 minutes)*

*6. How Shall We Pray?*

Read aloud Jesus’ parable of the pearl from Matthew 13:45–46, and follow it by reading aloud the paragraph of *Inhabiting Eden* that begins at the bottom of page 161, with “Today we

find ourselves.” Lead them in a bidding prayer of gratitude for all that is glorious and beautiful in creation:

*In peace let us pray to the Lord. For these wondrous signs of your presence on earth, we thank you: \_\_\_\_\_. May your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*

Suggest that participants try the “Try This at Home” suggestions on page 163 of *Inhabiting Eden*.

### **Key Scriptures in Chapter 9**

Micah 3:9–4:5

Isaiah 65:17–23

Mark 13:34–37

Matthew 13:45–46

### **For More Information**

Moseley, Lyndsay, ed. *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2008.

# About the Author

Patricia K. Tull is an ordained Presbyterian minister and A.B. Rhodes Professor Emerita of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. She grew up in Austin and attended the University of Texas (B.S.Ed.), Austin Presbyterian Seminary (M.Div.), and Emory University (Ph.D.).

When Trisha retired early from Louisville Seminary to devote more time to environmental issues, her colleagues graciously made her the seminary's first professor emerita. Her flexible schedule has allowed her to produce several books and articles, to become a Climate Reality Presenter and GreenFaith Fellow, and to work for Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light in Indiana. She blogs and provides further resources as <http://inhabitingeden.org>.



“The Bible speaks in many ways about God’s commitment to creation and our calling to be good stewards. Trisha Tull lifts up these biblical voices with passion, humor, and real sensitivity, and helps us hear God’s word in a new way.”

—**FLETCHER HARPER**, Episcopal priest and Executive Director of GreenFaith

“In this fine work, the reader will encounter many helpful stories, questions, and suggestions from which to draw inspiration and encouragement. I believe that anyone interacting with this resource, whether Christians long dedicated to ecological justice or those just beginning to ask about the connections between faith and the environment, will go away with new ideas, a rejuvenated spirit, and a willingness to try something new.”

—**REBECCA BARNES**, Associate for Environmental Ministries, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and author of *50 Ways to Help Save the Earth: How You and Your Church Can Make a Difference*

“Here’s a book that is right on target. Patricia Tull finds that rare balance between Bible study, personal reflection, ethical insight, and social commentary that will move readers to action. For those who think that the church should stay out of the ‘politics’ of climate change and creation care, this book is the perfect gift.”

—**WILLIAM P. BROWN**, William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

“We have all strayed far from the garden, resulting in a world where there are no elms on Elm Street and no chestnuts on Chestnut Lane. But God is doing a new thing, stirring the call to care for creation in the hearts of people. Books like *Inhabiting Eden* give voice to this important movement, urging readers to live the life our creator God intended from the beginning. Highly recommended!”

—**MATTHEW SLEETH, MD**, Executive Director, Blessed Earth

“With a gentle touch and inviting prose, Patricia Tull shares Scripture’s timely message for modern ecological challenges. Her words ring with hope that we may indeed recover Eden: a new and beautiful way of belonging rightly within the marvel of God’s creation.”

—**KYLE T. KRAMER**, organic farmer and author of *A Time to Plant: Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt*

**PATRICIA K. TULL** is Professor Emerita of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. She is the author of several books, including *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis* (Westminster John Knox, 2013), *Isaiah 1-39* (Smyth & Helwys, 2010), *Esther and Ruth* (Westminster John Knox, 2003), and *Remember the Former Things* (SBL Press, 1997). An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), she writes a regular column on environmental themes in the lectionary for [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org) and works for Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light.

Visit <http://inhabitingeden.org> for links to additional resources and information.

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