

Reading and Writing  
Workbook for  
*Inhabiting Eden:  
Christians, the Bible,  
and the Ecological Crisis*

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# Introduction

This workbook is designed to offer room for responding personally and creatively while reading the Bible study *Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis* (Westminster John Knox, 2013). It invites writing your own journal of thoughts and discoveries related to the study. Like the book, this workbook is intended for adults and youth who stand in a variety of relationships to faith, to Scripture, and to ecological sustainability, encouraging in-depth thinking about our views and consistency between opinions and actions.

Each chapter of *Inhabiting Eden* includes Bible study, exploration of particular issues in our collective human dealings with the natural world, reflection questions, and suggested experiments called “try this at home.” This workbook provides space to respond to all of these aspects of the book. In selecting the questions I have attempted

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to offer an open-ended invitation to move past brief thought to more fundamental and heartfelt engagement.

The epistle of James reminds us of the importance of putting faith into action:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (Jas 2:14-17)

The same can be said of ecological actions. Most of us have feelings of love for God, other humans, and the natural world. But allowing this love to infiltrate daily habits takes time and effort. It means slowing down to examine ourselves, our convictions, our homes, our opportunities, and our resources. It means taking practical steps. Although changing habits is rarely easy—and here I speak from experience—I hope sustained reflection can lead from questions, feelings, and convictions to decisions and actions.

Some questions may inspire you more than others. Feel free to skip some, to expand on others, or to take your responses in a different direction. You may also find the website <http://inhabitingeden.org> helpful. There you can find live links to Internet resources mentioned in the footnotes, as well as links to other materials and information that are available.

Many thanks to the Rev. Andrew Hartmans for inspiring this book and helping me design it, and to him and the Rev. Anne Vouga for their reading, critique, and suggestions.

# Before Reading

*Before reading the book, take a little time to consider the following questions:*

What is your current environment—within one mile of your home, within five miles, within twenty five miles?

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How do you think your location (in a city, in a suburb, in a town, or in the country, affects your connection to nature?

How much do you think the natural world enters into your daily awareness? How does it do so?

How much responsibility do you think humans bear to tend to the health of the natural world? Why?

Ecologists speak of each person having a “carbon footprint.” This is the amount of greenhouse gases—specifically, carbon dioxide—emitted in the course of regular activity. While there are too many variables to estimate our carbon footprint accurately, we can learn a bit from various calculators that are available, such as one of these:

<http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/carboncalculator>

[www.myfootprint.org](http://www.myfootprint.org)

<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/ind-calculator.html>.

What did you learn by trying one of these?

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Do you think children today are more or less connected to nature than children in earlier generations? Will the environment be better or worse for your children and grandchildren?

In general, are you comfortable being outdoors? How do you feel about sunsets? What about bugs? frogs? birds? bears?

Do you see our use of the environment to be a moral issue? Why or why not?

What are some reasons you know of for the ecological problems our world is experiencing?



Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

—*Isaiah 43:18–19*

# The Problem of Change, Then and Now

## **A. The Challenge** (p. 1)

As you read this section, consider what kinds of behavior toward our land, water, air, and creatures you have witnessed. What feelings do these behaviors inspire in you? How do you respond?

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What are some places you cherish?

What happens when you close your eyes and recall them? What do you see, hear, smell, taste, feel there?

Are there creeks, parks, fields, trees, or other features of the landscape that you explored as a child that no longer exist? What happened to them?

**B. The Problem of Precedent** (p. 4)

What ecological problems that you are aware of concern you the most?

Take fifteen minutes to choose one of these issues and to learn a little bit more with an Internet search for news articles or essays. What did you learn? What surprised you?

**C. We've Always Done It This Way (p. 5)**

It's easy to admire people who have endured great upheavals. It's not so easy to think deeply about what their experience might have been like. Take a few moments to think about one of the events this section identifies. Imagine what it may have been like for those experiencing it. (If you would like to read or review the biblical story, go to a Bible website such as Bible Gateway and use the search tool to find the story.)

**D. Abolition of British Slave Trade (p. 7)**

If you have not seen the movie *Amazing Grace*, it may be worth viewing. Imagine the impact of facing the challenge to one's assumptions that Wilberforce faced. We live with ugly realities today that we feel we can do little about. Rather than setting these aside, say a brief prayer for people living in adverse circumstances such as captivity, hunger, thirst, homelessness, or extreme poverty.

Sometimes a need knocks on our door, coming as a call from God to us particularly. When has that happened to you?

What have you done that changed a small part of the world for better?

What was it like to do so?

What kind of persistence did it take?

**E. Women's Equal Rights** (p. 8)

To address inequities that involve us personally is both easier and harder than those that involve others: easier because we know the problem from the inside; harder if we downplay our own difficulties, or are too close to the problem to see it clearly, or are too emotionally gripped by it. Sometimes the inequity itself keeps us from being in the position to change it. Are there inequities you face because of gender, race, class, background, etc.?

How do these affect your daily life?

What have you chosen to do about them, and why? How might people use their own experience as a resource in helping others?

**F. Indeed, We Have Always Done It This Way** (p. 8)

What social changes have you experienced in your lifetime that you did not expect?

What social changes are you waiting to see?

If you have seen positive social changes in your lifetime, how did they come about? If you aren't sure, take 15 minutes to read more about this change on a website such as Wikipedia.

**G. See, I'm Doing Something New** (p. 9)

The greatest turning point in ancient Judah's history came in the sixth century BCE when Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and took many people captive to Babylon. Only a half-century later, the Persian empire took control and allowed captive nations to rebuild their temples and lands. Both of these events changed Judaism forever, leading to the composition of most of the Old Testament and to new understandings of God. We never know what opportunities lie just around the corner, and what new worlds might be opened up even when disasters strike.

What kinds of “resurrections” have you witnessed being born from tragedies in your lifetime?

What have you yourself experienced?

How did it change you?

**H. Ananias's Courage and Saul's Transformation** (p. 11)

When was the last time you were called upon to make a dramatic change?

How did you react?

If you had it to do over, what would you do?

When have you been called upon to do something that was, for you, extremely courageous? What did you do?

If you had it to do over, would you have done anything differently?

What did you learn?

**I. This Book's Plan** (p. 13)

Perusing the topics of upcoming chapters, which ones interest you most, and why?

Which do you find yourself less interested in, and why?

Which are you curious about?

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 15)

1. What do you think are the greatest ecological challenges facing us today?

What do you think are causes of concern?

Reasons for hope?

2. What societal changes have you seen in your lifetime—changes you welcome?

Changes you do not welcome?

What factors make society able to change? What factors make it slow to change?

3. What heroes of cultural change do you admire most?

What do you think enabled them to be more clear-sighted than others?

How did they communicate their vision?

4. What biblical heroes do you admire?

What is it like to imagine their own viewpoint on their circumstances and actions?

What if Saul or Ananias had lacked sufficient courage?

5. Thinking ahead to the subjects of the rest of the study, what connections do you perceive between faith and ecological responsibility?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 16)

For the next week, as you read the Bible or hear Scripture read in church, pay attention to what is said about creation, the earth, and its creatures. Try your hand at a little writing. It may be a poem, a prayer, or simply a list. Try putting on paper two things: first, the gifts of life that you cherish most, and second, what concerns you most about the state of the world. If you have children, you might consider inviting them to express their joys and concerns as well.

Also, for the next week, observe your news sources. How often do you find ecological problems raised? Who discusses them? On what basis? What do they commend?



The LORD is good to all,  
and God's compassion is over all that is made.  
All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,  
and all your faithful shall bless you.

—*Psalm 145:9–10, AT*

# Humans and Creation

## **A. Poetry** (p. 19)

What do you hear when you read Genesis 1:1-2:3 out loud, individually or with a group? What jumps out? What do the repetitions suggest to you?

In your mind, how is the earth ordered, and how do humans fit into that order? Are humans to be in charge of creation, subject to it, or related in some other way?

**B. In God's Image** (p. 21)

What have you heard that the idea of being made “in God's image” means?

What would it be like to live as if we were reflections of God in the world? How are “godliness” and “playing God” distinct from each other?

**C. Dominion** (p. 23)

How do you understand the idea of “dominion”? Have you heard people use the “dominion” idea to justify destructive exploitation of the earth’s resources?

What kind of stewardship do you think this passage is commending? In practical terms, what would it mean?

Why, in your opinion, have many people assumed that “dominion” is the only way the Bible imagines the human role on earth?

**D. The Human Role** (p. 26)

What does the idea of humans being made to “serve and preserve” the earth encompass? What does it look like in day to day life?

Some have observed that trees never simply serve themselves, but offer gifts and resources to all who live around them—plants, animals, humans. What would it look like for humans to nurture not just human flourishing but the flourishing of other life as well? What one thing can you do today to do so?

How do you think one's living environment affects one's relationship with the natural world? What in your daily life connects you with nature?

What about one's upbringing, training, or profession? What in your background connects you with the natural world?

**E. Each in Its Place** (p. 27)

What would it be like to see ourselves not as apart from creation, but as an integral part of it, as Psalm 104 suggests? What differences would it make in our attitudes and actions?

**F. Awe and Wonder** (p. 29)

How do you find the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, helping you to imagine and celebrate creation's wonder? In what ways does recognizing Scripture's attention to the world beyond humans change the way Scripture is read?

**G. Gratitude** (p. 30)

What services and beauties of the natural world do you find yourself overlooking when you consider reasons for gratitude? What do you think most people overlook? Why?

Think of a time when you were overwhelmed by some aspect of the natural world—whether a starry sky, a mountain, a summer storm, or a beautiful flower or bird. What did it do to your soul? Such gifts of enlargement are available to us every day in some way, if we pay attention. Choose something in the created world today to pause over, to take in, to enjoy down to the toes of your soul. Linger over it for at least a minute, preferably five or ten. If you are inclined, write a paragraph or a poem about it. Say a prayer over it.

**Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 32)

1. What words or phrases in Genesis 1:1–2:3 stand out to you as particularly luminous? What do they mean to you?
2. What does “serving and preserving” the ground mean to you?
3. Where do you notice God’s imprint in the world, whether human or nonhuman?

4. How would you describe the relationship between humans and animals? Between people and plants?

5. For what do you praise God? What causes you wonder and awe? Is there a particular discovery that you found moving?

6. How can people fill the vocation to tend the earth? Especially for those who are not farmers, what can such a vocation mean?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 33)

Take some quiet time, preferably alone, to do nothing but observe some element of the created world. You might go outside or even into the woods or countryside. Or if the weather is uncomfortable, enjoy a window view or a book of photographs, or even the feel of a dog's or cat's fur. Don't look for words or evaluations, but simply take in the experience for at least twenty minutes, using all the senses you can. Afterward, tell someone else, or write down, what you noticed, what you thought, and what you felt.

The next day, do it again in a different place. Only this time, precede your contemplation with a prayer of gratitude for what you observed the day before. Caution: this practice can be addictive. However, it is good for your health.

If you have children, you might practice this exercise with them.



I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,  
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;  
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,  
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.  
But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;  
they have turned aside and gone away.  
They do not say in their hearts,  
“Let us fear the LORD our God,  
who gives the rain in its season,  
the autumn rain and the spring rain,  
and keeps for us  
the weeks appointed for the harvest.”

—*Jeremiah 5:22–24*

## Leaving the Garden

### **A. Genesis 2 and 3 (p. 36)**

What does the prominence of “the ground” in Genesis 2-3 mean to you?

What is our relationship to the ground, according to these chapters?

**B. Limitless Use of Resources** (p. 39)

(NOTE: if your copy of *Inhabiting Eden* says on p. 40 that “an average of 6.2 pounds of coal are mined, processed, and burned every day for each individual,” it is incorrect. It should be **62** pounds, that is, 90 pick-up loads per year per family. It is corrected in later printings.)

Do you think we are given unlimited use of the earth and its bounty for our own benefit? Or are there limits we should respect?

How would you define them?

We tend to pay a lot of attention to the price per gallon of gasoline, since we see it on gas station signs every day. But the human and environmental cost of daily electricity use is as invisible to most of us as electricity itself is. What changes in our systems could help us become more alert to conserving electricity?

**C. Genesis 4** (p. 41)

People often think about violence as being between humans alone. Genesis 4 suggests that human violence also does harm to the earth itself. In what ways do you think this is true?

Why do you think people fail to take seriously harm that is done to other elements of creation?

Do you believe there is any correspondence between interhuman violence and violence against other parts of creation?

**D. Becoming Native to This Place** (p. 44)

In what ways do you agree with Francis Bacon? In what ways do you agree with Wes Jackson?

What do you think Jackson means by “asking what nature requires of us”?

**E. Other Passages** (p. 46)

Is there a real relationship between human behavior and the health of the landscape, or are the passages cited from Hosea and Isaiah speaking metaphorically? How would you describe the relationship?

Some people think the natural world is too strong to be harmed by human behavior. What do you think the prophets thought? What do you think?

**F. Creation's Web** (p. 48)

Can you think of a moment when you experienced the sense of being part of "creation's web"? What were the circumstances?

Try to describe such a moment. What did you see, hear, feel, sense?

What are ways people can cultivate such an awareness?

How important is it to you to live with thankfulness concerning creation?

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 50)

1. What implications do you see when reading Genesis 2–4 with attention to the frequency of the word *adamah* (“ground” or “soil”)? What does it mean to “return to the ground” in a constructive way?

2. What is your gut-level reaction to the idea of living within legal, social, and religious limitations?

What is your reaction to the idea of living within ecological limits? What examples come to mind?

3. What instances have you seen of competition or greed leading to human violence against other humans?

Do you think it is appropriate to speak of human violence in relation to animals?

In relation to plants?

In relation to inanimate aspects of nature such as soil or mountains?

What is human responsibility in these relationships?

4. Consider your home, church, or town. Do you observe instances in which electricity or gas are being burned without benefit (i.e., wasted)?

5. What are some ways individuals and churches can seek to regain a sense of being part of the “web of creation”?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 50)

Begin a record of monthly energy use in your home or church. If possible, start it from a year ago. Chart the month, amount used, cost, and if possible the average temperature, which is included in some bills. Then perform an energy audit. Some power companies or renewable energy dealers will do this for free, pointing out ways to conserve costs. If you cannot find an auditor, look online to learn issues to watch for. Here is a starting place: <http://energy.gov/home-energy-audits>.

Make a list of changes you can make. Check on whether your state, city, or national government or utility company offers help financing the change. Prioritize the least expensive and easiest changes, and make a monthly budget of time and money. The first may simply be to turn off what is not being used. As you make changes, note the decreases in energy use. If you have a family or roommates, make it a game: who can find new ways to conserve? How much fossil fuel does this change represent?



You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

—*Saint Augustine, Confessions of Saint Augustine*

# Commerce and Contentment

## **A. Two Alternatives** (p. 53)

To what extent, and in what ways, do you think humans can truly take charge of our own fate? Are we independent?

In what ways do we express independence, and in what ways do we find this impossible?

**B. Biblical Visions of Pride and Idolatry (p. 54)**

Think about an instance of greed you are aware of. Think about an instance of arrogance. Do these two unappealing traits ever go together? Can you think of examples?

**C. True Love of Self and God (p. 57)**

Reno claims, “We were made for love, and our desire is to give ourselves away.” What do you think he means? Can you think of moments when self-giving seemed satisfying and happy?

**D. Seeking God** (p. 58)

What two alternatives are being described in Isaiah 2 and in this chapter? Do you agree?

Are these distinctions easy to draw? If not, what makes them difficult?

Can you think of an instance when desire for gain harmed a relationship? What happened?

**E. Consumerism's Demands** (p. 60)

When you have felt confident, to what kinds of actions have you found this confidence leading?

**F. Choices and Happiness** (p. 62)

Think about the last time you were in a supermarket. How long did it take you to find the breakfast cereal, soup, or pasta you were looking for?

We have a world of choices and opportunities, one that our ancestors could not have imagined. In what ways does this make our lives easier, and in what ways does it increase our difficulties?

How do you cope with the decisions available every day?

How do you react to the information about current U.S. ranking on measures of happiness and well-being?

How do you define prosperity? Have you found your understanding of prosperity changing over time?

**G. How We Got Here** (p. 63)

Take a little time to read this article: Jeffrey Kaplan, “The Gospel of Consumption.” *Orion Magazine* (May–June 2008).

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/2962/>.

Were you aware of this history?

How does it make you feel about the advertising you see?

Many people enjoy watching the TV series *Madmen*. Do you think our situation as consumers is better or worse than it was in the 1960s? In what ways?

What choices do you wish were readily available on the market but are not?

**H. What Consumerism Is Doing** (p. 65)

How do you define waste? What is too much waste?

What desires do you think contribute to wasted resources: Comfort?  
Ease or speed? Lack of better choices? Costs? Demands or pressure  
from others? Something else?

What obligation do you believe those of us who live comfortably have toward the people in the world who lack basics like clean water and air, or who live in polluted environments?

What is our fair share of the earth's resources?

Take a few moments to look at Maryland's Genuine Progress Indicator (<http://www.green.maryland.gov/mdgpi/>). What did you learn?

How would you define well-being?

What activities or relationships lead to a sense of happiness in your family?

What small thing, inexpensive or free, can you do this week to nurture your own well-being and that of your family or friends? After you do it, please reflect on what it did for you emotionally or spiritually.

**I. Finding the Road Less Traveled (p. 67)**

Do you know, or have you met, people who exemplify a graceful freedom from consumerism?

Do you know, or have you met, people whose poverty is too great for security? How would you describe the differences between graceful freedom and poverty too great for security?

What individual freedoms factor into people's ability to choose to consume less? What situational limitations forestall change for individuals?

What choices for simplicity have you or your family made that you are pleased with?

What would you do differently under different circumstances?

What can you do to increase your family's freedom to choose "the road less traveled"?

**J. Finding God** (p. 68)

Perhaps you have experienced times when you were forced to rely on God's grace because you had nowhere else to turn, such as during an illness, job loss, or family crisis. What did you learn about God, and about the grace inherent in the universe, at times like those?

Are there ways today to place yourself into more direct and ongoing dependence on grace?

This section listed some dominant assumptions about contemporary life that may not be particularly helpful. What assumptions do you struggle with, or against, and how?

Choose one that you would like to address more directly. Frame it as a question, and do a little Internet search to find what writers or bloggers might be saying about it. You might be surprised to find communities of others asking similar questions.

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 69)

1. What is your mental image of pride? Of idolatry? How do you think these operate in our culture?
  
2. What do you see in the contrast between Isaiah 2:2–4 and the rest of the chapter? What does it mean to use human-made tools in service of God and others?
  
3. To what extent do you think humans can live independent of service to God or to idols?
  
4. Consider Saint Augustine’s statement that “the heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.” What does it mean? How have you experienced it?

5. Have you ever had “buyer’s remorse”? What does it feel like? What might it have been like to have passed up that particular purchase?

6. If your house burned down tomorrow, what would you miss or replace?

7. Think of a recent moment when you have felt contented or joyful. What circumstances led to that feeling? Who was involved? What were you doing?

8. If you were challenged to make three steps toward simplifying your material lifestyle, what would you do? What would result?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 70)

Take some inventories. First, make a list of significant recent purchases. For each item, ask: 1) Was this a want or a need? 2) How has it changed my life? 3) How long will this purchase last, and what will I do with it then?

Second, walk around you home, evaluating the living space. Don't forget the garage and storage shed. How much do you use regularly? How many square feet are simply storage? How much does it cost to cool and heat this space?

Third, take a look at the garbage. If there were no city services, where would this garbage go? What might you buy differently if forced to find a harmless destination for your trash? What items could be reused, composted, or recycled?

From these three inventories, make a list of any changes you would like to make. If you have a family, involve them, discussing the differences between needs and wants. Plan a holiday in which you “fast” from consumerism, including shopping and media, and “feast” on simple pleasures such as reading, baking, hiking, bike riding, singing, gardening, or talking. Discuss how you feel at day’s end. Notice how you sleep.



You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

*Psalm 65:11–13*

# Food for Life

## **A. What Food Is For (p. 73)**

Many recent studies show that a primary source of malnutrition is not that food is not grown, but that the poorest both in the U.S. and around the world lack access to it because of price increases, diversion of food to other ends such as biofuels or animal feed, or lack of transportation. What organizations or groups are you aware of that successfully bridge some of these access barriers? What do they do?

Is there hunger nearby you? What are its causes, in your estimation? Who is helping to change that, and what are they doing?

**B. Commodified Water** (p. 75)

What real benefits, under what circumstances, can you think of for bottled water?

In what circumstances can a water glass or a reusable bottle fulfill the same purpose? What financial, health, and environmental benefits are there, under what circumstances, for avoiding bottled water when possible?

**C. Manna** (p. 76)

This section draws several contrasts between royal rule in ancient Egypt and God's rule in the wilderness. What do you notice most about these?

What ideals or ethics does the story of the manna bring to light?

What might it suggest about appropriate ethics among human rulers or leaders?

**D. Food Rules** (p. 78)

Take the time to look up some of the biblical passages cited in this section. When it comes to the laws of Mount Sinai, there are some, such as the Ten Commandments, that most Christians and Jews agree continue to apply to us today. There are others, such as the stoning of rebellious sons (Deut 21:18-21) or adulterous lovers (Deut 22:23-24), that horrify Christians and Jews, and have long ago been dismissed. There are still others on which people of faith disagree, such as Lev 20:13 about sexual choices. The mixture helps us recognize how culture-bound both the Bible is and we modern people are.

What does it take to read the Bible carefully, open to what we might learn from it without trying to justify or explain away much of what we read?

What did you learn from the discussion of Sinai food rules?

What does it matter to us that the biblical writers understood food in these ways?

**E. Contemporary Food Systems** (p. 81)

Do you farm, or have parents or grandparents who do or did? Do you tend a vegetable or flower garden? Identify some of your own connections to farming.

Since we all have a stake in farming (whether as farmers or as eaters), what do you think are some of the most important questions today about the farming industry?

How do you respond to the distinction made in this section between agriculture and agribusiness?

In what ways is the distinction helpful or unhelpful?

How do you think the move from a mostly rural to mostly urban life over the past two generations has affected people's connections to their food?

How might our food source choices or our cooking choices affect our sense of connection with food? What choices do you make, and why?

**F. Land and Field Use** (p. 82)

This section quickly laid out several issues in contemporary crop farming. What issues are you aware of?

What interests or disturbs you, or what would you like to debate?

Many of the footnotes in this section refer to articles available online that you might want to pursue further. (For clickable links to these, go to [inhabitingeden.org](http://inhabitingeden.org) and find the page called “*Inhabiting Eden* footnotes with live links.”)

**G. Travel-Weary Foods (p. 85)**

Do you know what grows near you, and in what season it is available? If you are not a gardener, you might start by visiting a nearby farmers’ market, and talking to the farmers about what they will be harvesting in various seasons of the year. You might also be interested in asking how they began growing foods for local markets, where else they sell their products, and whether you might visit their farm sometime. How might your family benefit by eating foods when they are plentiful and in season?

**H. Pharaoh's System Replicated in Judah (p. 87)**

After reading this chapter, what are your priorities in making food choices?

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 88)

1. Reflect on your family's own rituals and attitudes toward food. In what ways are meals celebrated with gratitude toward growers and producers, toward animals and plants, toward God?

2. What purposes do you think underlie Scripture's food rules?

How do they compare to the uses of food in contemporary culture?

3. What kind of living do you think farmers should make from their labor and skill?

What are helpful uses of cropland and what practices do you question?

4. If land ultimately belongs to its Creator, what role do humans play in its care?

How can those of us who do not own land contribute to its welfare?

5. What daily “food rules” do you follow or want to follow?

What do you see practiced in your church and community?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 89)

Buy each family member a permanent water bottle to refill at taps and water fountains.

Take inventory of your pantry and refrigerator and notice where your foods originated. Read ingredient labels. Can you pronounce the chemical names, and do you know what they are? Look them up on the Internet. (Michael Pollan wryly suggests avoiding what our great-grandmothers would not recognize and what third-graders can't pronounce.)

Plan a local harvest meal. Visit the nearest farmers' market and plan your meal around what you find. Ask farmers how to prepare that unusual squash. Give yourself extra credit for trash reduction.

If you have children, research your local agricultural year together. What grows when? Make a date to visit a nearby U-Pick farm together, and produce a pie or meal from what you bring home. Try freezing or canning what you can't use right away.

Try growing something you haven't grown before in your yard, on the balcony, or in a community garden. Experiment with something easy, like tomatoes or lettuce, and don't worry about failures. Enjoy the process.



The righteous care for the needs of their animals,  
but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

—*Proverbs 12:10, NIV*

## The Needs of Animals

### **A. Scripture and Animals** (p. 91)

What portions of the discussion of Scripture's treatment of animals in this section were you already aware of?

Were there any surprises? What were they?

Often people think of regard for animals as merely sentimental, even though we take seriously our regard for all humans regardless of age, gender, race, or other factors. How would you describe the kind of respect our Creator has, and calls us to exercise, for the lives and well-being of animals?

How would such respect inform our eating of animals?

**B. Animals in Christian Interpretation** (p. 95)

Among the ancient theologians cited in this section, whose words attract you the most? Why?

**C. Animals as Partners** (p. 96)

Think of the most important animal in your life, either present or past. How would you characterize your relationship? What do or did you gain from this relationship, and what do you think your animal friend gains or gained?

What other important contacts have you had with animals, whether wild or domesticated?

**D. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (p. 97)**

Have you been aware of CAFO's as a source of most American meat? What parts of this practice do you find defensible, and why?

What parts would you like to see changed, and why?

If you had to write or speak about factory farming from a theological or religious standpoint, what would you say?

**E. Alternative Pathways** (p. 102)

Given the variety of alternatives mentioned (and others not mentioned in the book that you are aware of), what do you think is a reasonable approach to a carnivorous diet, at least for you?

**F. Human Attraction to Animals** (p. 105)

Can you think of surprising moments of grace you have had in the presence of animals? Describe them.

The footnote after Saint Basil the Great's prayer for animals provides a link to a website with several other biblical and theological reflections on animals. Take a little time to read some of them, and then compose a prayer or reflection of your own.

## **Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 107)

1. Which biblical images of humans as animals, or human relations to animals, stand out most to you? What do they mean to you?

2. What is your instinctive feeling about animals, whether household, farm, or wild? Do you remember special relationships with animals, or feelings for them, as children?

What experiences have you had with animals?

3. Do you remember your own or someone else's reaction to the realization that meat was animal flesh? What was that like?

4. What is meat's place in your meals? How often do you eat it, and in what proportions?

Has this changed over time?

5. How does our treatment of animals affect our relationships with God and other humans?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 107)

Read Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11–14; Psalms 84:3 and 103:5; Isaiah 31:5, 40:31, and Luke 13:34. Write down what is being said about animals in these passages.

Spend an hour or two in the presence of animals wherever you might find them: in a zoo, on a farm, in the countryside, or in your back yard. Observe their behavior and settings. What life functions do you see them carrying out (eating, drinking, caring for young, courting, grooming, playing, and so forth)? If you could understand their speech, what do you imagine them communicating? If you have children, be sure to include them in this venture.

If your family eats meat, dairy, or eggs, learn where you can find producers committed to the welfare of land, animals, and workers. How do prices compare? How might a meal—or a week’s menu—be planned that neither uses CAFO products nor raises your grocery budget? If it raises your budget unavoidably, how much increase is acceptable for conscience’s sake?



Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to a king's son.

.....

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy,  
and crush the oppressor.

—*Psalm 72:1, 3–4*

# Environmental Fairness

## **A. Vineyard Stories** (p. 111)

What do you feel when you read the story of Naboth's vineyard?

How does the writer create sympathy, revulsion, suspense, and sorrow?

What kinds of greed or injustice does Isaiah decry?

Who are today's equivalents of Isaiah's needy, poor, orphans, and widows?

In this discussion, how is environmental justice related to other forms of justice? What instances of environmental justice or injustice are you aware of in your locality or in the news?

**B. Trampling Sheep** (p. 116)

Ezekiel speaks metaphorically of fat sheep and lean sheep, and of the brutal actions of stronger sheep. Read the surrounding passage in your Bible. What actual behaviors and circumstances do you think Ezekiel was pointing out?

When he said these things, what might have been some self-justifying responses from those he accuses of injustice?

**C. Environmental Justice** (p. 117)

What does it mean for some people to “bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental, and commercial operations or policies”?

Do you think that happens today?

What circumstances might contribute?

Are you familiar with the “baby in the river” parable? If not, you can find a version of it through the hunger advocacy organization Bread for the World’s website by searching on “Bread for the World parable of the river.” According to this story, how might a church’s assistance of the poor relate to the search for causes and cures of environmentally-related issues?

**D. Toxic Pollutants** (p. 119)

Think of people you know who have suffered or even died from cancer. What did the cancer cost them and their families—physically, psychically, spiritually, emotionally, financially?

If the statistics of environmentally-related cancers and other diseases are as alarming as Shrader-Frechette and others report, what factors may be keeping us in the dark about this?

How do you respond to the notion that toxins may be present in our environment without our awareness of their dangers?

**E. Epidemics in Slow Motion** (p. 122)

The term “precautionary principle” is introduced in this section. In what other areas of your life do you find such a guiding principle instructive or helpful?

What would the precautionary principle look like when it came to the introduction of new chemical substances?

Listen to the NPR segment mentioned in the chapter, which you can find by searching online for “LOE Retrospective: Cancer Alley.”

What, in your view, is the good news in this story? What is the bad news?

**F. Christian Commitments to Justice** (p. 126)

Many churches are reluctant to engage with toxic waste issues because they see them as being, at best, not the church's job, and at worst, political and divisive. Yet there is much that church members can do to help bring these problems into public view. People from all walks of professional life, who are responsible for many environmental decisions, sit in the pews thinking about their own discipleship. In addition, since religious leaders and congregations are often well respected even by nonreligious people in the community, concerns they raise are often more thoughtfully heard than those of individuals speaking only for themselves.

Identify one environmental justice problem that lies close at hand for you, and do a thought-experiment: Ask yourself what theological reasons exist for addressing this problem; i.e., what would Jesus do? Ask yourself also what resources you have at hand for doing so. Imagine the possibilities. Then commit yourself to one step in the process you imagined.

**Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 128)

1. What is your reaction to the Naboth story, and to the speeches of Isaiah and Ezekiel?

Do you think they apply today? How?

2. What do you think are Christians' responsibilities to the poor?

What forms do such responsibilities take?

3. Do you see people today as healthier or unhealthier than our parents and grandparents? What makes us healthier?

What makes us unhealthier?

4. What are the results of chronically poor health (such as cancer, asthma, and allergies) for children?

5. What kinds of toxins do you think you encounter in daily life? Which ones are avoidable and how?

6. What does it mean to be a citizen and a responsible consumer?

If you were to imagine a skill that you or your congregation possessed that could help change your community's pollution problems, what would it be?

**Try This at Home** (p. 128)

Take another inventory: what chemical products, from what sources and serving what purposes, do you find in your garage, basement, garden shed, cleaning closet, medicine cabinet, and vanity?

What plastic products do you possess? Do you know how and where they were made?

How are your electricity and gasoline produced? What are you unable to find out? Do some Internet searching, finding Web sites that rate the ecological impacts of some product lines.

Go to the EPA Web site, EJView (<http://epamap14.epa.gov/ejmap/entry.html>), type in your address, and learn about the sites nearby that must report toxic waste to the EPA. Scan your sources for information about local toxic pollutants. Visit some places you read or hear about.

We can learn how unnecessary many toxins are by reconsidering household cleaning products. Seek out “green” product lines such as Seventh Generation or Ecover. Better, find a Web site offering formulas for making your own cleaning products inexpensively, usually out of ingredients on hand. There are many, but the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) at the University of Massachusetts Lowell offers this one:

[http://www.turi.org/About/Library/TURI\\_Publications/Tip\\_Sheet\\_Series/Twelve\\_Home\\_Cleaning\\_Recipes](http://www.turi.org/About/Library/TURI_Publications/Tip_Sheet_Series/Twelve_Home_Cleaning_Recipes). Try some out. What do you notice?



Our days are like the grass;  
we flourish like a flower of the field;  
when the wind goes over it, it is gone,  
and its place shall know it no more.

But the merciful goodness of the Lord endures forever on the  
God-fearing,  
and the righteousness of the Lord on children's children.

—*Ps 103:15-17, BCW*

## Our Children's Inheritance

### **A. The Unimaginable Future** (p. 131)

For how many generations or centuries back do you have information about your own ancestors' lives and choices?

How many centuries back do you know about world-shaping choices in history?

What is the farthest horizon in the future that you can distinctly imagine? What do you envision there?

In what ways do you think our collective choices today affect conditions for future generations in your family?

**B. Sour Grapes** (p. 132)

This section introduces discussion about climate change. Americans tend to have polarized, often politicized feelings and opinions about the topic. Now is a good time to do a check: from where has most of your information about climate change come?

Have you heard conflicting information?

What feelings does the topic inspire in you? What questions remain for you?

**C. Carbon and Energy** (p. 135)

What new information, if any, does this discussion present that helps explain what climate change is?

What questions remain for you?

The footnotes point to resources that may be informative, including some available on the Internet. (For live links, go to: [inhabitingeden.org](http://inhabitingeden.org) and click on "Inhabiting Eden Footnotes with Live Links.") What else can you learn?

For you personally, do the scientific details matter? Why or why not?

**D. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (p. 139)

Take half an hour to go to the IPCC website at [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch). You may especially want to go to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) Summary for Policymakers or the slideshow Highlights of the New Report. What do you learn?

What questions remain?

Whose are the voices of skepticism about climate change that you are aware of?

Do you sense any distinction between those who are genuinely confused or doubtful about the information and those that may be trying to confuse or sow doubt? How can you distinguish?

**E. The Rest of Us Nonspecialists** (p. 141)

Take a little time to find and peruse on the Internet some of the statements from religious groups that are relevant to your faith, or search online to find statements from your own denomination. What do they communicate?

How does the precautionary principle apply to the subject of climate change?

What, besides addressing climate change, do we stand to gain or lose by reducing greenhouse gases?

**F. An Imaginable Future** (p. 144)

Some innovations are already taking place that spell hope for the future. Professor Mark Jacobson at Stanford University and his partners, for instance, have created a 50-state plan for moving to 100 percent renewable energy not only affordably, but in a way that saves lives and expense. (<http://thesolutionsproject.org/>). Another technology being developed is Solar Roadways (<http://www.solarroadways.com/intro.shtml>). A new video introducing the project (called Solar Freakin' Roadways) is on their website. Take a little time to look at these or other sites offering affordable and realistic solutions.

What kind of world can you imagine ten, thirty, or a hundred years from now if the majority of Americans became serious about addressing climate change?

Often people hesitate to act, not because they doubt the science, but because they feel their own actions are insignificant. This is the same reason some people fail to vote. But our actions not only move the world incrementally in one direction or another, they also influence the actions of others around us, who influence others, who influence others. What one action will you take today? Tomorrow?

**Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 146)

1. Jeremiah lived through extraordinarily tumultuous times. What do you think kept him steady?

2. Have you ever been uncertain which “prophets” to believe?

What is at stake when that happens?

What is the safest action?

3. What has been your understanding of climate change?

What have been your information sources?

Do you think continued debate is worthwhile?

4. Which governmental, corporate, or religious leaders are taking climate change seriously?

What are they doing?

5. What do you think churches need to do to address climate change?

What do you believe families and communities should do?

**Try This at Home** (p. 147)

Go to the IPCC Web site and read some of the information provided there. What catches your eye?

What concerns are raised?

What do you learn?

Use Web searches to find out the energy policies and plans of other nations around the world. What is the tone of their discussions?

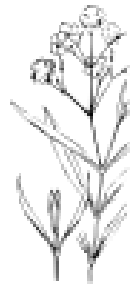
What are they accomplishing?

Read *Cooler Smarter: Practical Steps for Low-Carbon Living*, by the Union of Concerned Scientists (Washington: Island Press, 2012). What practical actions are suggested?

Can you reduce your household's greenhouse gas production?

What other benefits can you see for doing this?

Write to your local and national politicians and your energy providers, telling them it is time to change our energy course.



“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

—*Matthew 7:13–14*

## Living within Our Means

### **A. No Other World** (p. 149)

Describe a moment or scene that you remember that captures your sense of companionship or biophilia as described in this section.

The book *What Has Nature Ever Done for Us*, by Tony Juniper, describes the multitude of details that went into the building of the Biosphere 2 project in Arizona in the 1990s. A team of scientists attempted to recreate, in a sealed dome, all the elements of nature that eight people would need to survive. Despite the care that was taken in planning, there was too much that they didn't know about nature to recreate a fully sustainable world. If you had to evacuate the earth—as in a science fiction movie—what would you miss the most, not only aesthetically, but for the continuation of life itself? List some of these.

**B. Micah's Vision (p. 151)**

Stories like the discussion of Micah's prophecies by people of Jerusalem in their deliberations about Jeremiah give modern readers a "box-within-a-box" impression of the Bible as a self-reading book. We can imagine the controversies in Jeremiah's days that led them to read Micah closely. When you read Scripture closely, as we have done throughout this book, what new insights do you have about our responsibility for good conduct toward creation?

**C. Biblical Eschatology** (p. 155)

Do you know anyone who holds the view that it doesn't matter what happens to this world, because God will give us another?

Even some mainline churchgoers can unknowingly adopt this view, since it is prevalent in the U.S. What do Jesus' words about the future recommend?

How is this lived out day by day?

**D. The Human Problem and the Church** (p. 157)

Name three important ideas that have become clearer to you from reading this book, and you think will stay with you.

What are humans here for, in your view?

**E. Making Plans** (p. 159)

What are your areas of professional or avocational expertise?

Is there a place for your skills in efforts toward a healthier creation and society? In what possible (or actual) ways?

What does it mean to imagine the earth as the “pearl of great price” of Jesus’ parable? What implications does it suggest?

What will you do?

**Questions for Thought and Discussion** (p. 162)

1. What ambivalences haunt you as you consider the state of the physical world?

To what specific places or natural things do you find yourself attached?

What fears or worries do you have?

2. Can a person such as Micah be both patriotic and critical of the actions of a government, its leaders, or its citizens?

What are constructive ways to express differences?

Under some circumstances, can silence be less than faithful?

3. Do you know someone who is working full time to help address ecological issues? What do they do?

What do they say about how they arrived at vocational decisions?

How do they feel about their work?

4. What talents, interests, skills, or passions do you bring to mending the earth?

Whom would you like to invite to work with you?

5. What specific issues matter the most to you?

Do you already envision some ways to address them?

If you have already begun to address them, what have you learned?

## **Try This at Home** (p. 163)

Look at the list of seven actions in the section called “Making Plans.” How would you flesh out this list for yourself? What is your action plan? How will you involve children, family, and friends?

If you read this book with friends or church members, you might look together at the “For Further Reading” section in *Inhabiting Eden* or at <http://inhabitingeden.org> and consider another book to read together. If you read this book alone, you are now qualified to lead a group in reading this one together. Please consider doing so.

The first action suggestion in chapter 1 was, “For the next week, as you read the Bible or hear Scripture read in church, pay attention to what you hear being said about creation, the earth, and its creatures. Try your hand at a little writing. It may be a poem, a prayer, or simply a list. Try putting on paper two things: first, the gifts of life that you cherish most, and second, what concerns you most about the state of the world. If you have children, you might consider inviting them to express their joys and concerns as well.” Try this again now, and next week, and the next.





# Further Notes...







# Things To Do...









