

'AND EVERYTHING IN IT'

*Why does creation care
matter in mission?*

4 BIBLE STUDIES | LEADER'S GUIDE



**AFRICA
INLAND MISSION**

Introduction

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” (Psalm 24:1)
Through these four studies we will explore together what the Bible has to say about God’s creation and the role we play in it. We will celebrate together the beauty of the world and share how we each enjoy and see God at work in it. The studies are designed to provoke us into thinking through some of the theology around creation care, our responsibilities to look after the world, and to start thinking about ways that we could carry out those tasks as we respect and honour God’s good creation. Naturally, those questions lead us to discuss justice issues as we both acknowledge the privilege of living in countries with enough wealth to mitigate the effects of climate change, and the devastation levelled at those countries who are dealing more regularly with extreme weather conditions.

But how does this link back to mission? Firstly, the gospel is not just our means of personal salvation. Jesus’s redemptive work on the cross is good news for all of creation as we read in Colossians 1:19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Therefore learning to love and take care of God’s world is part of discipleship. You’ll also discover throughout this series that who we are, our challenges and our intersections with the gospel are profoundly linked to our environments. Mission and evangelism therefore is often most effective when it takes into account people’s daily struggles and demonstrates God’s great love for them, just as we are, and his plan for us to lead better lives. As such we’ve shared stories to illustrate the transformative work that is possible when the gospel is explained alongside demonstrations of practical love.

We hope these studies leave you and your group more in love with Jesus as you explore more of his love for us and his world. We pray too that they will excite you about practical action that we can each take to care for creation.

LEADER’S NOTES: At the end of each study is a challenge for the week ahead. You might like to hand out slips of paper with these on, so that people don’t forget during the week.

Some of these studies might have too many questions, depending on the group you have and the time allocated. Questions with an * indicate that if you don’t have time these are the questions that we recommend skipping.

“*Mission and evangelism therefore is often most effective when it takes into account people’s daily struggles and demonstrates God’s great love for them, just as we are, and his plan for us to lead better lives.*”



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Study 1: Creation is good

Introduction

Creation is good. That is the unmistakeable message of the opening chapter of the Bible. Six times God declares what he has just done to be 'good', and the seventh time 'very good'. In this study we'll start by reminding ourselves that creation is good and take the opportunity to share about our own interactions with the created world and the effect that has on us. We'll then consider the fact that creation is good in and of itself. Often, we view creation in terms of what it offers humans, or as how the created world provides for us. We'll pause and consider how God views creation, and what it reveals about his character.



Getting started: Why not start this study by reading this story together and then discuss the questions at the end?

Maureen Nyambura is from Kenya and served as part of a short term team in Korr, northern Kenya in 2019:

The pastor we were working with in Korr, Pastor David, wanted to have a kitchen garden and we were excited to be able to help him out. But when we looked at the soil, well, it was basically sand so we went down to the river and found some better soil. We mixed that with goat manure and laid it down. One of my teammates was an architect and he put a structure up that would protect the garden from direct sun and give it some shade. Then we got planting. We planted kale, spinach and carrots, and watered it heavily because this is desert soil. Several days later Pastor David's wife came to me and asked, "Maureen, what's that grass growing in the garden?" I said, "Oh, that's carrots!" She had never seen carrots grow, and it made me so happy to be able to share this knowledge. By the time we left there, there were vegetables in the middle of the desert. Pastor David had spinach and kale and carrots. It was such a beautiful experience.



- Have you ever been overwhelmed with the beauty of the earth?
- Former Archbishop Rowan Williams in the foreword to 'Sharing God's Planet' states, 'Receive the world that God has given. Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth.' How does spending time in creation make you feel? How does it make you feel about God?

Discussion questions

Through creation we can understand more about God and his character. Chris Wright likens our experiences to 'hearing' Beethoven in his symphonies, or 'seeing' Rembrandt in his paintings.



1. What are some of the verses that you can think of that talk about the nature of God as revealed through creation?

LEADER'S NOTES: If your group is struggling for ideas you could suggest they look at Psalm 50:6, Psalm 65:9, Acts 14:17 or Romans 1:20.



2. **Read Genesis 1:1-10 and Psalm 104:1-9.** How do these passages mirror each other? *If your group has the time, you could read all of Genesis 1:1-25 and Psalm 104.*

3. What do they tell us about God's relationship with our world?

4. In Psalm 104: 3-4 does the Psalmist make a difference between God and what God has made? How does he do that?

5. **Read Isaiah 66:1-2.** Have you ever thought of creation as God's temple? How does that image and the language used here make you feel?



This is what the Lord says:

*"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Where is the house you will build for me?
Where will my resting place be?
Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?"
declares the Lord.
"These are the ones I look on with favor:
those who are humble and contrite in spirit,
and who tremble at my word. (Isaiah 66:1-2)*

6. If creation was created to be God's dwelling, how does that affect our thinking,

- Firstly, about what it shows us about God?
- Secondly, about how we honour it?



*7. **Read Philippians 2:10-11 and Revelation 7:9-10.** What is the final outcome for the world? What happens when the whole world acknowledges Jesus as Lord?



Bringing it home: As you reflect on this study,

- has your view of how Christians should interact with creation changed at all? What's the main thing that you're taking away?
- Is there anything new that you've learnt or want to put into practice, that you can praise and thank God for?



Creation is God's temple

Chris Wright writes in [*The goodness, the glory and the goal of creation*](#) that "in the ancient world generally, and in Old Testament Israel specifically, temples were envisaged as (literally) 'micro-cosms' - i.e. small representations on earth of the shape and order of the cosmos itself. Meanwhile the cosmos could be seen as a 'macro-temple' - i.e. the dwelling place of the gods (or in Old Testament terms, of course, of the one true living Creator God). From this perspective, God's declaration that his work of creation was 'good' is a way of saying that he saw and approved the whole creation, functioning in all its ordered complexity both as the place prepared for him to install his 'image' (humankind), and as the place for his own dwelling. The Bible constantly speaks of the natural world in relation to God. The created order obeys God, reveals his glory, benefits from his provision, serves his purposes (in judgment or salvation), and is filled with his presence. So we honour creation as 'sacred' in that sense -not that it is 'divine' in itself, nor as something we are to worship (that is explicitly forbidden), but because of its God-relatedness."



Challenge for the week: Why not try and connect with God outside this week? Go on a walk, or find a place to sit, and take the time to stop and notice your surroundings. Walk slowly. Notice the details, sounds and smells. Even if you live in a city there is still so much nature to be found. What season is it? Are there buds on the trees? Ice crystals on blades of grass? Glorious sunrises or sunsets? A miniature moss forest on a lamppost? Where can you find signs of God's character and goodness? How does this make you feel about the way that God provides and cares for us? What Bible verses come to mind when you reflect on these things (for example 'From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.' Psalm 113:3)?

Study 2: Creation and us

Introduction

In our last study we looked at the fact that creation is God's, and it is good. In this session we look at the fact that it is also our earth. It is God's property, but it is also our responsibility. The earth is, in some sense, 'given' to human beings in a way that it is not 'given' to other animals. We'll look at what it means to act responsibly towards creation, and the responsibilities we have to look after God's world.



Getting started: How do we differ from the rest of creation? What distinguishes us from animals?

Discussion questions



1. Read Psalm 145. How does David describe how God leads and rules? What words does he use to express how God acts?

2. How do these characteristics of God's kingship compare with our own actions in caring for creation?

LEADER'S NOTES: We too are God's very good creation, with a unique responsibility to care for all that God has made. That doesn't give us a license to dominate, abuse, crush, waste or destroy. That behaviour is a result of our sin, not kingship modelled on God's character and behaviour.



***3. Look up Proverbs 12:10, Exodus 23:5.** When you think about creation, do you think about your responsibilities to animals as well as to the land?



*The righteous care for the needs of their animals,
but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel. (Proverbs 12:10)*

*If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down
under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.
(Exodus 23:5)*



***4. Read Genesis 2:7.** What do you think it means that humans are both 'formed from the dust of the ground' and that God breathes the breath of life into us?



*Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man
became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)*



Meaning of 'Adam'

Adam's name in Hebrew, *adamah*, literally means 'earth' or 'soil'.



5. Dave Bookless says in his book *Planetwise*: “*Being human means understanding two essential truths about ourselves: we are part of creation, yet we are also set apart within creation.... So the two sides to our human nature must be held in balance. If we ignore either, we will fail to take our true place in God’s world. However, if we remember that we are both creatures of the earth and also made in God’s image, this enables us to become truly human, to fulfil our God-given job description, and relate appropriately to our fellow creatures, the earth, and God.*”

- Do you ever feel the tension between those two ideas?
- Do you find yourself leaning towards one of these truths more than the other?



Bringing it home: God’s heart for restoration

Margaret and Andrew work among the Islamic Nyamwezi in Tabora, Tanzania, in conservation agriculture:

“When we started working among the Nyamwezi we offered training seminars about conservation agriculture. The Nyamwezi have so many resources and natural medicines right in their fields, including mango, papaya and moringa. At the mention of moringa, one old man piped up, “I use moringa regularly, too...we should pay attention to these ideas you have shared and put them into practice...”

One industrious Sukuma farmer was so enamoured with the methods that he organised teaching for others. He then started a church across the road from his farm, because he wanted to return to God the blessings which he had been given.

The training sessions also provided opportunities for important and life-changing spiritual conversations with farmers. Biblical farming principles reveal God’s heart to restore not only the land but also to restore our relationship with him. We share that the outcome of sin is death, but Jesus opens the way to be saved! In the training sessions, the earth becomes great teaching soil, literally watching it go from being depleted (dead), to being replenished with nutrients and a new nutrient profile. It’s the same when we follow Christ.”

- Read **Romans 8:19-22, Mark 16:15 and Colossians 1:15-19**. In what ways might creation be included in the outworking of the gospel?



*For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **(Romans 8:19-22)***



Margaret



In the training sessions, the earth becomes great teaching soil, literally watching it go from being depleted (dead), to being replenished with nutrients and a new nutrient profile. It’s the same when we follow Christ.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. (Mark 16:15)

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him... (Colossians 1:15-19)

- Are there any practical things that we can do to better reflect our understanding of the great gift of creation in our day to day lives?



Challenge for the week: Why not have a think through the coming week about whether there are different things that your church can do to care for creation in ways that point our communities to the Creator? For example, could you change the way you serve refreshments so that it doesn't cause a lot of waste? Do you have some land around your church that you could use to encourage biodiversity? Could you approach your church leadership and see if these changes could be made or projects could be started?

For some ideas from A Rocha to make your church more eco-friendly visit: eu.aimint.org/creationcare.

Study 3: The all-encompassing gospel

Introduction

In this study we look at how the gospel is for the whole world. We'll see how the Great Commission calls us to live out the gospel in all of our relationships, with God, other people and the rest of creation, as we seek to be and to make effective disciples for Jesus. We'll also see how we can't separate evangelism and creation care, but when the good news of Jesus is preached alongside messages about people's whole lives and locations, transformational work takes place.



Getting started: Cheptebo Development Centre

For over 35 years a Christian rural development programme in a remote and impoverished community in rural Kenya has been literally transforming not just the lives of the people but also the landscape itself. Bill Rettie, talks about the development of his thinking and the project itself:

"The focus at Cheptebo in the early days was on the practical problems which the community members themselves had highlighted - water, food, education and health. While the project would develop ways of tackling these practical problems, the church meanwhile would preach the gospel. Initially this seemed like a workable strategy, but there were serious weaknesses in this approach which we did not fully recognise at the time. Practical and spiritual ministries are not separate and largely unrelated activities but are each part of the transforming work of the gospel. One of AIM's earliest pioneer missionaries asked in a letter home: 'Tell me, what is the use of preaching the gospel to people who are gripped with the awful pain of hunger? How can they grasp it? They want bread, and a fearful account will be laid to the charge of a self-satisfied church unless the pitiful cry... is heard.' In Keiro valley the people were not only hungry, but had little expectation that things could ever really change. Even the government had classified the valley as a 'low potential area', reinforcing the notion that nothing of value was expected from it. The prevailing sense of hopelessness discouraged any initiative to improve their situation. The people well understood the challenges of living in the area and had concluded that, "we are poor, we'll always be poor and nothing is ever really going to change in this place." An understanding of this attitude led to a radical rethinking of how Biblical transformation could impact the situation. We had to abandon the secular development notion that by simply identifying the practical needs of the people and responding to these would bring about lasting change.

We realised that effective, sustainable transformation does not start with the practical work itself. It needs to start with what the people think, about themselves and their situation. In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul urges that we 'Do not conform to the



Bill Rettie

pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind'. This was to become a key principle for all the work of Cheptebo. We are totally dependent on the Lord to do this work of transformation in the minds of those we sought to help. This led on to a new understanding of what poverty, and a biblical response to development issues, was all about."

Discussion questions



1. In the Kerio valley the people had believed the lie that they and their land had little to offer. What lies do you think we believe that stop God doing a transformational work in our lives? Why not **read 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 2:1-10** and think about how those verses play out in our lives and the lives of others.



The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-10)



2. What does it mean to be transformed by the renewing of our minds as it says in **Romans 12:2**?



Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)



***3.** How does this renewing go on to affect all of our relationships?

4. Bill discovered that the practical action of farming had to go hand in hand with gospel proclamation. How can we share biblical truths about creation care and the good news of Jesus in ways that people can respond to?

"The gospel calls me to recognise Jesus as Lord not just of my personal discipleship, but of the whole environment in which I live, for 'all authority in heaven and on earth (i.e. in all creation) is given to me', said Jesus. If the gospel declares Jesus to be truly Lord of all creation, then how I live out my discipleship to Jesus must also include creation." - Chris Wright, [*The goodness, the glory and the goal of creation*](#).

5. In his analysis of the nature of poverty, *Walking with the Poor*, Bryant Myers acknowledges that while it is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, he goes on to identify the root cause of the problem as being fundamentally relational. The basic problems do not lie in a lack of resources and training, vital as these may be, but rather it begins with broken relationships. The primary relationship is that between God and man, which has been spoiled by man's rebellion and rejection of God's authority. If that is not addressed, then all other relationships will continue to obstruct positive change and development. Secondly, broken relationships between people can lead to greed, exploitation and conflict at both a local and international level. The third relationship of crucial importance is that of man's relationship to the created order. God's mandate is to care for creation and use its potential responsibly. In this, across our world, we are failing spectacularly. The destruction of productive agricultural land on a massive scale and the effects of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions on the whole global system is already well known.

- What do you think of the idea of poverty stemming from our broken relationships?

6. Myers contends that our broken relationships lead to greed and exploitation. Do you agree that our lifestyle choices lead to other people's poverty? If yes, how does that make you feel about your lifestyle choices?



Bringing it home: Dave Bookless in Planetwise remarks, *"Jesus says: 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation' (Mark 16:15)... Our mission, our God-given great commission, includes the whole of God's creation, not just people. We could joke about how to preach to a goat or a garden, but that would miss the point. This is not only about preaching with words, but about how we communicate Jesus's message in our relationships, attitudes and lifestyles. What is the good news for a rainforest that is being chopped down to feed our meat-hungry lifestyles? What is the good news for those who face the spread of deserts and failing crops as a result? What is the good news for creatures that God lovingly made but are now driven to extinction? What is the good news for the world's climate systems as they become thrown off course by our polluting lifestyles?"*

- What do you think about this quote from Dave Bookless?
- Do you think about your lifestyle choices as ways in which you share the gospel?



Challenge for the week: As you think about your life and the various things you are involved in, friendship and family groups, hobbies, how does the person you are in each of those settings reflect your relationship with Christ? If your church friends and work colleagues met would they all know about Jesus's impact on your life? Why not spend some time thinking through intentional lifestyle choices you could make that allow you to grow in honouring God?



The world can sustain...

Our consumption of natural resources in the UK is so much greater than other countries. If everyone consumed as much as the average Brit then we would need 2.8 earths to sustain the earth's current population. If everyone used the same amount of resources we would all need to live lifestyles similar to the average Nigerian. (data from <https://data.footprintnetwork.org>).

Study 4: God and justice

Introduction

In this study we will look at how justice is a central part of God's character and heart for the world, and how that might shape the way that justice plays a part in our discipleship and evangelism and the way that we care about creation. We'll also think about how we can be engaging with justice in ways that honour and respect human dignity and worth.



Getting started:

- What injustices make you angry? From queue jumping to poverty, what are the things that concern you?
- Are there other things that spring to your mind when you hear the word justice?
- What do you think about when you think about justice in the Bible?

Discussion questions



1. Read Psalm 146:7-9, Deuteronomy 10:17-18 and Zechariah 7:10-11. Why should we care about justice?



*He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.*

The Lord sets prisoners free,

the Lord gives sight to the blind,

the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,

the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the foreigner

and sustains the fatherless and the widow,

but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. (Psalm 146:7-9)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.' But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. (Zechariah 7:10-11)



2. In his book *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller says: ‘We must have a strong concern for the poor, but there is more to the biblical idea of justice than that. We get more insight when we consider a [...] Hebrew word that can be translated as ‘being just,’ though it is usually translated as ‘being righteous’. The word is *tzadeqah*, and it refers to a life of right relationships. Bible scholar Alec Motyer defines ‘righteous’ as those ‘right with God and therefore committed to putting right all other relationships in life.’ [The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction Commentary by Alec Motyer] This means, then, that biblical righteousness is inevitably ‘social’ because it is about relationships. When most modern people see the word ‘righteousness’ in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the Bible *tzadeqah* refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity, and equity.’

- What do you think about this quote? Does it stir up any feelings or emotions for you?
- How might this change or shape our views on what justice is?

3. When our relationship with creation is broken, what impact might that have on our relationships with people and our relationship with God? Think both about the people we see on a daily basis, as well as others we share the earth with but may never meet.

***4. Read Leviticus 25:1-17.** God’s laws allowed for the earth to recover from our farming, and for us to take care of each other from what the earth naturally produced. How radical do these ideas sound now? Is there anything we can do that’s similar?

5. Many of the areas worst affected by climate change are in the world’s poorest countries. A recent report by Christian Aid states, *‘People in the, as-yet, more sheltered corners of the global North are now starting to experience the force of the climate crisis, but across the global South it is something they have already been feeling the effects of for years.’* When you think about justice, do you think too about the consequences of climate change?



Bringing it home: “There’s a cyclone coming!”

The radio announced, ‘There’s a cyclone coming! Get ready!’ But few people knew what that meant, or how to prepare... In March 2019, Cyclone Idai made landfall on the coast of Mozambique, wreaking havoc as it moved inland. Claire works with local churches in Chimoio, Mozambique. She shares:

A lady in her seventies told how she only survived because her grandson pushed her up a tree and held on to her – for three days. Others told of miraculous escapes, and then another shared his story:



He and his wife had twins aged eight, twins aged four, and triplets aged eight months. Life was difficult and hunger a constant companion.

Then the cyclone struck.

It destroyed their home, all their possessions, and ruined the crops that were to have sustained them through the coming months. The cyclone took everything, including their hope. His wife was trying to breastfeed triplets – while unable to find any food for herself or family. But thanks to the spontaneous, generous donations from my supporting churches, we had been able to buy food and other basics for people in need. As we prayed with this man and handed over a month's supply of food and baby milk he gazed, incredulous, and declared, "God exists! GOD EXISTS!"

Later his wife shared how she had heard their neighbours saying, "How can she feed three babies? They will die. They cannot survive!" But today, with three strong, healthy toddlers, everyone knows that it was God's provision that saved these – and many other – precious lives.

As the relief efforts moved from rescue to reconstruction, we began rebuilding homes, beginning with the most vulnerable – widows, orphans and the disabled. God was glorified and many asked questions about God, declaring that he must really care about these widows and orphans, because he provided for them in their need.



6. How might we live justly and make sure that we are doing so in a way that does not sacrifice the dignity of people who are experiencing poverty, injustice or oppression?

***7.** What can we be doing to address the underlying causes of these things?



Challenge for the week: Have you ever thought about all the people who are involved in and affected by each purchase that we make? Why not take the time this week to take a closer look at one of your purchases this week, whether it is tomatoes from the supermarket that have been grown in Morocco or a new pair of jeans from a high street shop made in India or Bangladesh, and do a bit of research into the supply chains and people involved. Why not spend some time reflecting on and praying about the different ways we are connected to people each day and how we can be reflecting God's character in our choices and actions.