

Lesson 13 | November 26, 2023

The Bible on the Environment

Study Text: Genesis 1:26–31; Psalm 8:1–9; Proverbs 3:19–20; Isaiah 11:5–9; Luke 12:22–31; Romans 8:18–25; Colossians 1:15–17; Revelation 22:1–5

Central Truth: Christians must be faithful stewards of God’s creation.

Key Verse: Psalm 8:9

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! (KJV)

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! (NLT)

Learning Objectives:

- Students will discover how they can learn about God from His creation.
- Students will see themselves as stewards of God’s creation.
- Students will explore ways they can steward God’s creation and represent Him to others.

Introducing the Study

Say: Like many other issues today, caring for our environment has become a political hot button. People often express opinions based on what they have read on social media or what their favorite political party says. But as believers, we have access to a higher Authority—the One who created our environment and has a plan for each of us and the earth on which we live.

Opening Activity—Protecting the Planet

Ask: What are some things people do with the intention of protecting the environment?

Examples might include recycling, driving electric cars, purchasing repurposed or sustainable products, conserving water, planting trees, installing solar panels, and using less plastic.

Say: Whether or not we are active environmentalists, we should understand God provided our earth and its resources. He expects us to be good stewards of these and all the other gifts He has given us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Where should we turn for answers regarding environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, pollution, and extinctions? Does one political party or nongovernmental organization have all the answers? Before we try to evaluate the many scientific and ideological viewpoints, let’s explore what Scripture says about the environment. First, the Bible clearly teaches God is the Creator of the universe, including the earth and all living things. Second, the Bible tells us we should be good stewards of all God has made. Third, the Bible describes the redemptive future of God’s creation.

Part 1—God Is the Creator

God Created the Environment and Holds It Together

Colossians 1:15–17

Say: The truth that God created the universe is as real for us as it was for the ancients. Scientific advances do not override this biblical truth, so our views about the environment need to be founded on this certainty. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Along with numerous other passages, Colossians 1:15–17 establishes with clarity the origin of the universe, the earth, and its inhabitants. This is in stark contrast to materialistic (as opposed to supernatural) theories that say the matter making up the universe came into existence naturally from nothing. Mainstream science theorizes about the beginning of the universe by applying laws of mathematics, physics, matter, and energy. But science cannot explain the source of these natural laws. We know from this passage that God himself is the source.

Not only did God create the universe, but He “holds all creation together” (verse 17, NLT). This means He created and is the Sustainer behind the physical and biological processes studied by environmental scientists and ecologists. Because God is the Source, Paul was able to write in Romans 1:19–20 that we can learn about God’s eternal power and divine nature by studying His creation. Another way of saying this is that we can learn about God by studying His two books: His Word (the Scriptures) and His world (the environment). Studying God’s world provides an amazing supplement to His Word and enhances our understanding of Him.

Discuss

? How can scientific studies provide insights into our understanding of the Bible? How can our theological knowledge contribute to science?

? In what ways might Christ be holding all creation together?

God’s Creation Teaches about Him

Proverbs 3:19–20

Say: You can learn a lot about someone by the work they do. Their vocation can reveal their work ethic, the types of skills they have, and even some of their interests. Similarly, we can gain knowledge about God by studying His creation. The exercise of knowledge and understanding required to create everything from nothing teaches us a great deal about God’s nature. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Augustine is thought to be one of the first writers to express the idea that all truth is God’s truth. In other words, God as Creator is the source of every truth, whether it is discovered in Bible study, rational thinking, or scientific studies. Some Christians have taught that philosophy and science oppose God, but many Christ-following philosophers and scientists through the millennia speak against such a viewpoint. It was through God’s wisdom that He created the earth and the heavens (Proverbs 3:19–20). Therefore, we can learn a great deal about Him by studying His creation.

We can and should pursue God's truth wherever we can find it, even if it's through studying environmental science and ecology. God has equipped us with curiosity, logic, discipline, and common sense. He expects us to use these abilities in our Bible study and in discovering ways to relate biblical truths to all kinds of other knowledge.

Resource Packet Item 1: Lessons from Creation

Review the Scriptures and scientific facts listed on the worksheet. Answer the questions and discuss what we can learn about God from His creation.

Discuss

- ? How do God's wisdom and understanding differ from ours?
- ? What are some challenges we encounter when relating knowledge from the Bible to other disciplines like science?

Creation Is Designed to Thrive without Our Worries

Luke 12:22–31

Say: God designed His creation to thrive, so plants, animals, and humans grow and reproduce in miraculous ways. But He did not abandon His creation once He set everything in motion. God appointed us to be stewards of His creation, but He wants us to trust Him in this process, as in all things. While we shouldn't worry about the troubles of this world, we should do our best to follow God's instructions on how to care for it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God's creative works are ordered and elegant. For example, ecologists have discovered that most ecosystems flourish when they are left undisturbed. They were designed by the Creator to do so. As Jesus said, "Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27, KJV).

God planned and guided life to adapt without dying off. However, the system He put into place can be disrupted and damaged. Careless practices like pollution and overuse of natural resources can lead to trouble. As good stewards, we should be concerned and careful about our management practices, but we must not fear that God has abandoned us to a catastrophic fate!

Speaking to the concerns of His listeners, Jesus said, "These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need" (verses 30–31, NLT). God cares for the earth with all its resources and for each of us.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways humans have disrupted or damaged God's creation?
- ? Based on what Jesus taught in Luke 12:22–31, how can Christians effectively battle worry?

Part 2—Christians Must Steward Creation We Must Regard Creation as God Does

Genesis 1:26–31

Say: As we discussed in Lesson 8, being created in God’s image comes with benefits and responsibilities. The greatest benefit is our identity. We are of such value to Him that He made a way for us to be His sons and daughters—in spite of humanity’s disobedience. Our responsibility as image-bearers is to watch over and care for His creation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We are set apart from the rest of God’s living creation because we bear His image. “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground’” (Genesis 1:26, NLT). As children of God, we are His representatives and ambassadors in the world. When people watch our lives, they should see the qualities of God reflected in us. Part of working in the world on God’s behalf includes faithfully fulfilling our responsibility to steward His creation. Remember, even in the sinlessness of the Garden in Genesis 2, God commanded Adam to tend to that garden (verse 15).

God placed great value on His creation, because He “saw that it was very good” (1:31, NLT). We must value God’s creation as well, being careful to strike the proper balance. While creation is indeed “very good,” we should not worship it. Paul warned against this kind of worship when he discussed the depravity of humanity: “They worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise” (Romans 1:25, NLT). By acting properly as His representatives in the world He created, we are worshiping our Creator.

Resource Packet Item 2: Creation Care

Distribute the information sheet and discuss ways to worship God by caring for His creation, either individually or as a group.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think God assigned humans to be stewards of His creation?
- ? What are some ways to avoid crossing the line between stewarding creation and worshiping creation?

We Have Been Instructed to Be Good Stewards

Psalms 8:1–9

Say: Taking care of God’s resources is a responsibility we should not take lightly. We must be faithful to every aspect of God’s call, whether it is taking care of the earth or representing Him well to others. As Paul said, “A person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2, NLT). He was speaking specifically of

explaining God’s mysteries to his listeners, but the same principle applies to our stewardship—both in caring for the earth and the spiritual needs of our fellow human beings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalms 8 features an *inclusio*—parallel opening and closing lines that encapsulate the meaning of the psalm (see verses 1,9). In this case, the theme is God’s majesty filling the earth. The first “O LORD” in each verse is *Yahweh*, the holy name of God, while the second “Our Lord” is *Adonai* which indicates God’s position as sovereign master. In the intervening verses, the Psalmist extols the beauty of God’s creation and expresses wonder that God would even think about “mere mortals” (verse 4, NLT). Yet God has gone so far as to give human beings “charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority” (verse 6, NLT).

As representatives of our majestic and sovereign God, we have been commanded to exercise thoughtful control over the environment. What an awesome responsibility! Jesus illustrated the seriousness of one’s responsibility in the Parable of the Three Servants in Matthew 25:14–30. May we one day hear the same praise from our Master as the good steward heard from his: “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!” (verse 21, NLT).

Discuss

? What can we learn from Jesus’ parable about being good stewards of creation and the environment?

? What good or bad spiritual consequences might result from the quality of our environmental stewardship?

? The theory of intelligent design says we can see evidence of the Creator in nature (see Psalm 8:3–4). What are some examples that you find inspiring?

Part 3—God Will Redeem Creation A Future Free from Death, Decay, Sin, and Suffering

Romans 8:18–25

Say: Are you good at waiting with patience and confidence? God has promised a new creation, but that inevitability doesn’t mean we can disengage from this world. In the meantime, we have work to do! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We do not know the timeline, but one day the effects of the Fall will be reversed. Paul writes, “The creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s creation in glorious freedom from death and decay” (Romans 8:21, NLT). In the Book of Revelation, John describes his vision of this promise coming to pass: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared” (21:1, NLT). We can trust God’s promise with the highest level of confidence. As God’s image-bearers, it is likely we will have important roles to fulfill in that future kingdom. Until then, we would be foolish to think we have no responsibility to this version of God’s creation.

As God's ambassadors, our job is to combat the effects of death, decay, sin, and suffering. That includes sharing the good news and showing compassion to those in need. One way to allocate more money for missions and other charitable giving is by reducing our consumption and recycling nonrenewable resources. Not only does this kind of lifestyle allow us to provide for the work of the ministry, but it also improves the overall health of the environment.

Resource Packet Item 3: New Heaven, New Earth

Distribute the worksheet, read the Scriptures, and note what they teach us about the new heaven and new earth God will one day create.

Discuss

? Though we are promised a new earth, how important is it to consider future generations and choose to be wise stewards of the environment?

New Natural Laws

Isaiah 11:5–9

Say: One day, all living things will know the Lord and creation will experience harmony. Broken relationships will be healed, age-old enmities will cease, and the peace of God will fill all creation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah prophesied that during the millennial reign of Christ, the natural order will be radically different from our current reality. The roles of predator and prey will be removed, as “nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9, NLT). The focus will shift from the survival of the fittest to the universal worship of the King!

The peace Isaiah described can never happen in the world as we know it. Yet we can anticipate this miracle as we look forward to the time when Christ will reign on earth. Meanwhile, as God's stewards, we must care for what He has entrusted to us and offer His hope of abundant, eternal life to others.

Discuss

? Read Isaiah 11 in its entirety. How does the context help you better understand and interpret verses 5–9?

The Curse Is Lifted

Revelation 22:1–5

Say: You may have heard someone say, “I read the end of the book, and we win!” The final chapter of the Bible does paint a beautiful picture of the ultimate victory, but it has nothing to do with our efforts or merit. Jesus alone provides victory. Because God still cares for humanity even in our rebellion and disobedience, the curse will be lifted. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The purpose behind the new creation is to free us from the turmoil of our present life, allowing us to experience unrestricted connection to God. (Compare Genesis 2:17–19 with Revelation 22:3.) Our new home will be vibrant, bountiful, and restorative. No death or disease will tarnish it. We will have a direct and intimate relationship with God. We will see His face and bear His image in a new way—with His name written on our foreheads (verse 4). God himself will illuminate our universe. We will reign alongside the Lamb for all eternity (verse 5). “He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon!’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (verse 20, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How does this promise of a completely unrestricted connection to God motivate us to do everything He has called us to in the meantime?
- ? Which part of the new creation do you most look forward to experiencing?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: When God created the earth, He gave humanity dominion over it, intending that we would care for it and use its resources in a responsible manner. Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, followed by the continued sin and rebellion of all humans since then, the earth itself has suffered greatly. But rather than giving up on us, God loved us so much that He sent His Son to restore our relationship with Him. And He is preparing a place for us without the decay, death, and disease that accompanied the Fall. He calls us to faithfully carry out our responsibilities as stewards of creation until the time He reveals the new heavens and new earth and all barriers between God and us are removed.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take at least one new action this week to be a good steward of God’s creation.
- Use your stewardship of the earth as a way to share the love of Jesus with someone in your circle of friends and neighbors.
- Ask God to help you be a better steward of all He has given you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Human Stewardship over Creation.
Genesis 1:26–30

Tuesday:

The Earth Is the Lord’s.
Psalm 24:1–10

Wednesday:

God Knows His Creation.
Psalm 50:7–12

Thursday:

Jesus at Creation.
John 1:1–5

Friday:

People Set over God's Works.

Hebrews 2:6–8

Saturday:

Destroying the Earth's Destroyers.

Revelation 11:15–18