



A time for celebration and care



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Group study and reflection

Prepared by Revd Dave Bookless for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

as part of a programme of resources to encourage and assist churches to observe a Time for Creation between 1 September and 4 October each year, for the protection of God's creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. This year's theme links into the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity.

Job 38

Aim

To deepen appreciation of the links between our relationship with God and our relationship with nature, leading to a refreshed love for God and a deeper commitment to the flourishing of God's world.

Starter for Ten

Put a large sheet of paper on the floor / stuck to a wall and give everybody a coloured pen / felt tip. Read out the following short list of newspaper headlines about environmental stories and ask people to think about the words that come to mind first when they hear these...and after you've read them out ask people to write the words on the sheet of paper (3-4 words max for each headline).

"Bolivia wildfire threatens world's largest wetland" (AFP)

"World leaders have failed to stem biodiversity loss" (The Independent)

"Eco island is plastic fantastic" (The Sun)

"Every household 'will have to pay £500 a year to fight climate change" (The Daily Mail)

"BP used cheap type of casing on oil well, Congress papers reveal" (The Times)

"Gulf Wildlife Dead-Zone keeps Growing" (Discovery News)

"UK inquiry finds emails do not undermine climate science" (Reuters)

"Global warming: Reasons why it might not actually exist" (The Daily Telegraph)

"Germany targets switch to 100% renewables for its electricity by 2050" (The Guardian)

"Lack of Biodiversity may make us Sicker" (Newsweek)



Listen to

God's Grandeur by Gerard Manley Hopkins

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

- Get somebody with a good voice, and who has had a chance to practice, to read this. It should be read slowly, savouring each word, and perhaps twice through.
- Give everybody a piece of paper and something to write with as they listen, and ask them to write down words or phrases that strike them.
- Share what has struck you. Words and phrases to look out for include:
 - 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'
 - 'all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil'
 - 'wears man's smudge'
 - 'nature is never spent'
 - 'dearest freshness deep down things'
 - 'the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods'
 - 'ah! bright wings'
- Discuss the ways in which group members have experienced God's grandeur in nature.
- Discuss the ways in which people have personally experienced humanity's negative impact on nature.

Alternatively

Watch a short extract from an inspiring nature video (e.g. BBC 'Life on Earth', or the film 'Microcosmos')



Read together: Job 38:1-27

(Ideally use 'The Message' – a fresh, modern version. If you don't have a copy, you can find the text for this passage at www.biblegateway.com – simply choose 'The Message' in the versions menu and 'Job 38' in the passage look-up box.)

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Why does nature flourish? What does Job suggest about this?
- What images does Job 38 use to describe God's work in creation?
(Answers include designer / architect / parent / ruler / provider)
 - What do these tell us about God's character?
 - What other attributes of God's character have people seen in their own experience of nature?
- What does Job 38:25-27 suggest about whom creation is for? Is it only for people?
- How does human behaviour today inhibit creation from flourishing?
 - What are the root causes of this – where have we gone wrong?
- How do we need to re-orientate ourselves to regain the perspective of Job 38?
What might this mean for:
 - our priorities?
 - our lifestyles?
 - our church-life?
 - our work-life?

Watch

Psalm 104 – Wildly Wonderful World

(PowerPoint presentation available to download at www.arocha.org.uk/resources - select Environment Resource Packs / 2010: What a wildly wonderful world!¹) This could be watched with a suitable classical musical background or with somebody reading the text.

Pray

Spend a few moments in silence together, asking God to show each person what practical response they should make to enable God's creation to flourish more.

- Pray for areas of the world that are suffering the effects of Climate Change and biodiversity loss.
- Pray for those who work in the environmental & conservation sectors.
- Pray for Christian organisations which are seeking to care for God's world, such as A Rocha, Christian Ecology Link, Eco-Congregation, John Ray Initiative, Operation Noah².
- Pray for God's Church worldwide to recover the foundational importance of creation care in its worship and mission.

Final Prayer Together

*The power of God, displayed in creation,
fill us with grace to serve God in his world;
The peace of God, breathing in every living thing,
enable us to spread God's peace wherever we go;
The love of God, which fills the universe,
flow through us that we might reflect his image,
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.*

Amen.

¹ This PowerPoint is part of A Rocha UK's Environment Resource Pack for churches, available to download at www.arocha.org.uk/resources along with many other resources for church and group worship.

² More information at www.ctbi.org.uk/BAA/67

