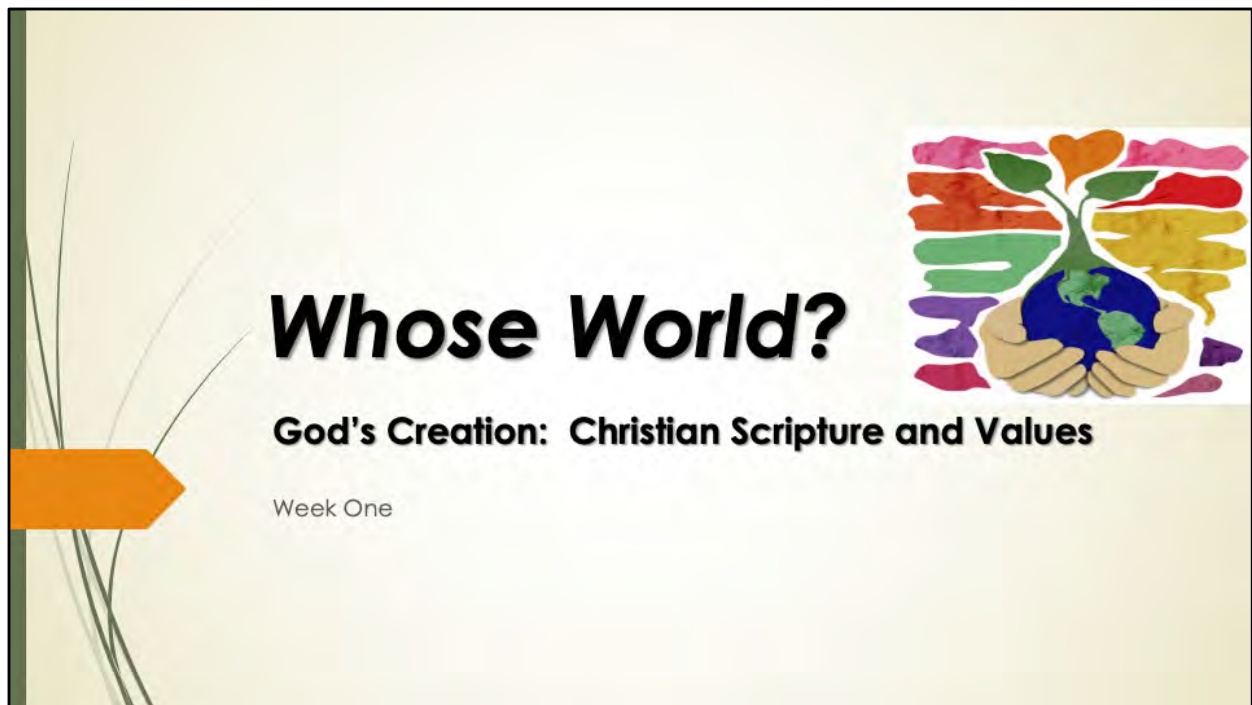




Welcome

JENI: Welcome everyone! We're glad you're here! I'm Jeni Cook Furr and this is my husband Ray Cook Furr. Normally, we teach the Crossroads Class -- and more of that class will likely be here shortly. They are in that time of life in which dressing and wrangling young children and dropping them off in Sunday School takes a lot more time and effort than I can even remember. It's all a blur to me now. But they are used to us starting later than we can for the next 4 weeks. So...please be patient as some may straggle in. We also want to welcome the Connections Class this morning, and all other individuals who have or will join us as we study God's call on our lives and the Scriptures and Christian Values that require a response on our part. Ray will take the lead in most of the next 3 more scientific

lessons. So today, you'll hear more from me than usual.



JENI: About a year and a half ago, Woodland started an Oikonomos Ministry Team to consider the Christian's and the church's responsibility to care for Nature. Oikonomos is the Greek word for Stewardship. This morning we begin a 4 week series on this topic. We start today where most all Christian searches begin. At the beginning. What does the Bible say about human responsibility to care for this world? What values do the scriptures instruct us to operate from in living on this planet? And how well are we doing in responding to God's commandments about this?

In the Beginning...Remember 2 Things



- ▶ God said, It is Good! Each and every day of Creation
- ▶ We often read Scripture with a very narrow vision. (We are too quick to dismiss what we assume is not relevant for us today.)

JENI: Ok. So to begin with, let's establish 2 things. First, God created and pronounced this World to Be GOOD. When finished creating, God said, "Very Good!" And as we'll see later, God LOVES this world.

Second, We need to acknowledge our self-interest when reading the Bible. It's not a bad thing. Our course we want to know what God wants from us, individually. But we tend to pass over too quickly what doesn't seem directly related to our current lives. In the OT, when God speaks to an agricultural community half-way around the world, centuries ago...that doesn't mean there isn't a message in there for us too. If God still means for us to live by the 10 commandments, then God's other commandments in the OT are important for us today also. If God speaks of caring for animals and trees then & there...can we afford to ignore those commandments today?

Whose World?



- ▶ How often do we think, “Our World is gorgeous?”
- ▶ It’s not our world, it belongs to God
- ▶ “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”Ps.24

JENI: Linguists have demonstrated that the way we speak impacts the way we think, and thus, also our actions. How many of you went to Bible School as a child? Well, if you did, you probably sang the same song every year, and every day of Bible School. “This is My Father’s World.” As children, we learned and knew that this world belonged to God. But somehow as we grew, we started thinking, saying, and acting as if this were OUR world. It’s a subtle difference, I know. And we probably did it with reverence to God: We might say, “Didn’t God GIVE US a wonderful, gorgeous world?” But God never transferred ownership to us at all. It is still God’s world. It will always be God’s world, and we are here to take care of it.

Whose World?

- Then God said, "Let us make humanity [*'ādām*] **in our image** [*šelem*], according to our likeness; so that they may rule [*Hebrew: rādâ*] 2 over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen 1: 26)



JENI: So now, let's start in Genesis. Chapter 1:26

READ

In all of our human diversity, we are ALL created in the image of God.



God's Image

- We are created in the **Image of God**: To think, act, LOVE like God. We are meant to reflect God's character in our daily lives
- God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth** so that you may take possession of it [kābaš]." 4 **Rule over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28)

JENI: So, in creation itself, humans are intended to reflect the image of God in the world. To act, think, speak, and especially LOVE like God loves. That's not just for Adam and Eve. We are created in the image of God...to think about the well-being of others (like God does), not just ourselves & our families. Now just two verses later, when God says, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth," our ears perk up. We like those instructions and we like to remember that God said "Rule over" everything. But we are to do this in the same way God rules over us. Doing so would be reflecting the image of God. So, does God dominate us? Or does God watch over and care for us? Ruling and having dominion means something different when we do it reflecting God's image."

...What Else Does God Say?

- **Responsible stewardship of Creation is the role God entrusted to those made in God's own image**
- **We are designed to love what God loves (image), to act as God's custodians of God's world, not as independent kings**



JENI: Read slide—So this is a picture of Napoleon's throne. What different kinds of kings: Napoleon and God. Napoleon was iron-fisted and TOOK WHATEVER HE WANTED. God never intended for us to rule creation like that. Throughout the OT, God never wanted kings. There are many references to OT kings who were corrupt, wicked and cruel.

And...What Else Does God Say?

- **Genesis 2:15** - The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to fill it and keep it.* (NRSV)
- **Till:** *Le obdah* means to serve/tend it
- **Keep:** *Lesomrah* means to guard/protect it
- **Humans are to Assigned to Tend & Protect Creation!**



RAY: Read heading and verse. Now we are skipping to the 2nd chapter of Genesis. In the KJV. It says “to dress it and keep it.” That sounds like lovingly caring for a young child. And like a child, it implies that the earth is fragile and needs care. We won’t bore you with a lot of Hebrew words in this seminar, but these 2 words are translated literally here...and this is an important part of God’s first assignment to humanity. Oh, it’s easy to be fruitful and multiply...we can do that without much effort. But in this assignment, to take care of creation and protect it, God has given us some work to do. In some of the very first words God speaks to humanity, God tells us to take care of ALL of God’s beloved, valued creation, that is entrusted to us!

Is “Creation Care” a Biblical Value?

- ▶ Many Christians think that “taking care of Creation” is peripheral to the message of the Bible.
- ▶ Is this value (caring for Creation) systematically represented in the Bible as an expression of the Reign and Rule of God?



RAY: So, a lot of Christians think that creation care is just a peripheral message in the Bible. Not that important. But as we go through this study, I think we'll see that holding that opinion means we haven't really been paying attention. We've been reading the Bible with pretty narrow blinders on. We've been looking for just the messages from God that we WANT to find, rather than hearing God's messages in scripture that tell us what's important to God...Judeo-Christian values...the information that tells us how to reflect God's image in our lives and in God's world.



2 Theological Misunderstandings

- ▶ **Reckless Dominion**: “Regardless of what we do to Creation, God will fix it.”
- ▶ **God’s Plan is to Destroy the Earth before Christ returns**: “We can take whatever we want because it will be destroyed anyway.”
- ▶
- ▶ **Both of these ignore the first commandments God gave us and attempt to absolve us of our responsibility**

RAY: Before we go further, let’s address two theological misunderstandings. READ

Is “Creation Care” a Biblical Value?

► To argue that it is a Kingdom value, it must be:

1. Is it a consistent theme of God's instruction to humanity?
2. Is it a consistent attribute of God's character and values?

► Let's see...



RAY: So these are the criteria we would expect to see if creation care is an important Biblical message. It's a consistent message of God throughout scripture, and it's clearly established as God's character, God's values, and what God loves. So, Let's take a look at scripture.



Creation Care Throughout the Bible

- We find in the Pentateuch that God created and owns this planet.
- Both the Garden of Eden and Israel were “*land grants*”
- Lev. 25:23-24 “...*for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.*”

JENI: We are reminded throughout the OT that everything and everyone in this world is God's. In Lev. Ch. 25, God is very specific that not only is the land his, but that we humans are responsible as God's tenants. READ We hold the land. We don't own it. And God says we must save it, redeem it.



Creation Care Throughout the Bible

- ▶ Lev. 26:3ff “If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments...I will give you rains...and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit...v 14ff But if you do not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments...you shall sow your seed in vain...I will break your proud glory...your land shall not yield its produce and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit...your land shall be a desolation...v 34 Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it.”

JENI: In this passage (one chapter later), the people of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land. God gives them lots of commandments about how their relationship with the Almighty will work. This is a long passage, and for the purposes of this seminar, we have drawn together the statements about caring for the land.

READ Notice that God says that if we don't keep these commandments, God will “break your proud glory.” It sounds like he's warning against getting on our “thrones” and acting like kings. Also, notice that the Sabbath laws also apply to rest of the land.

Tenants Can Be Removed



- ▶ In Lev. 26, among other catastrophes, God announces that if they mistreat the land, they can be exiled or evicted from the Promised Land, and the land will get the renewal it should have “enjoyed” under their care
- ▶ Israelites are RENTERS, not LAND OWNERS
- ▶ BUT...Deut. 4:40 “If the nation will keep Yahweh’s commandments, they will keep the land of Canaan.”

JENI: Lev. 25 introduced the word (not the concept) of tenants. So in the next chapter READ



Israel's Approach was Unique among Neighbors

- ▀ **Recognizing God as the landowner:**
 - ▀ **Tithes and offerings are to be brought to the tabernacle/temple, because**
 - ▀ **The land AND the produce both belong to God**
- ▀ **Very likely a result of their understanding of God's character and God's commandments**

JENI: Neighboring cultures did not recognize God as Creator, nor did they understand themselves as tenant/stewards of the land. To demonstrate this understanding in Israel, the people brought tithes and offering from the land, sacrifices of grains and animals, to God -- which reminded them that God owned everything, and all they had was a gift from God.

What does the Lord Require? (Creation Stewardship)

1. **Sustainable Land Use: Sabbath**
Laws applied to land (rest, rotation, long-term well-being)
 - Sabbath and Jubilee (Ex. 23: 10-12)
 - Cutting trees (Deut. 20: 19-20)



RAY: So what are the values of biblical stewardship that reflect God's image and apply to us today also? The first theme is Sustainable Land Use. The Sabbath laws applied to the soil, the trees, & domestic animals, as well as God's people. All must be allowed to rest and regenerate. The sabbath laws are to ensure the sustainable resources of Creation. The Talmud, which is rabbinic commentary on the Bible tells this story of a man named Honi: Honi saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, "How many years until it will bear fruit?" The man replied, "Not for 70 years." Honi asked, "Do you believe you will live another 70 years?" The man answered, "I found this world provided with carob trees that my ancestors planted for me. So I am planting these for my descendants." This story makes the point of long term sustainability.

What does the Lord Require? (Creation Stewardship)

2. Humane Treatment of Domestic Animals:

- Gn. 9:10-11 Noah must rescue & care for all kinds of animals,
- Dt.25:4 no muzzling working ox,
- Dt. 22:10 no yoking donkey to ox,
- Ex 23:4-5 help the enemy's hurt animal



RAY: We see examples of God's love and instructions to care for animals throughout the books of the Law. In Gen, we know God saved all kinds of animals in the Great Flood. In Deut., we know God doesn't want the working animal to be deprived of food, and God says an unequally "yoked" animal is being worked too hard...both are ways of mistreating animals for personal gain. In Exodus, God commands the Israelites to help an injured animal, even if it belongs to an enemy. God has a soft heart when it comes to loving all animals and instructs us to do the same. The Jewish tradition says that Moses and David were both chosen by God because they showed compassion to their flocks. We know that animals care about each other, and the Jewish law forbid the slaughtering of one animal in the presence of another.

What does the Lord Require? (Creation Stewardship)



3. Respect for Flora & Fauna:

- Dt. 20 – Even in battle, cannot destroy grape/olive trees, slow growing food producing trees,
- Ps. 104 God created, loves & respects ecosystems, springs, trees, grass, seas, rocks mountains, and all they contain



JENI: The 3rd theme related to nature that we see reflected in the OT, which tells us about the values God expects us to hold is Respect for Flora & Fauna. READ slide

What does the Lord Require? (Creation Stewardship)

4. Care for Vulnerable People:

- ▶ Dt. 24 – leave grain, grapes & olives so “aliens,” poor, orphans & widows are cared for,
- ▶ Dt. 26:6-9, Job 5:15-16, Job 34:17-19, Lk. 4:17-19, Lk. 6:20-12, James 2:5)



JENI: Finally, As you know, the Bible is full of commands about taking care of the poor and the vulnerable, like widows and orphans. Here are just a few examples in scripture. READ first bullet. Also, you find the same instructions in the rest of this list, and others.

Caring for the Vulnerable



The foreigners residing among you must be treated as native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 19:34

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, "You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land." Deuteronomy 15:11

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.—*Hebrews 13:1-2*

JENI: The vulnerable include immigrants. God commands us to love them as we love ourselves, in fact. God commands us to be generous with the poor, and show hospitality, not just to our friends, but even to strangers.

READ verses

Of course, Jesus tells us to care for the poor, visit the sick, imprisoned...and how we should care for marginalized people.

No Excuses for Disobeying these Laws



- ▶ Israel struggled with insufficient yields, property loss, poverty, & taxes
- ▶ But short term management that exhausts resources OR ignores the poor was not acceptable to God
- ▶ No Excuses for personal economic viability

JENI: God is very clear about caring for the vulnerable. Israeli archeologist Baruch Rosen tells us that when these words were written down, the average Israeli family included 5 people and livestock. He says their shortfall of food was about 60 days per year, which he calls the hungry season. In spite of their shortfall, they still had 15-20 mouths to feed. If they killed an animal to eat, they may have deprived themselves of milk or eggs, so they rationed food and hunted to supplement. They were still hungry. And yet, God commands them to leave food in the fields for the vulnerable.

Following this command would be far more sacrificial than most of us can imagine when tithing today!



Message of OT (re: Creation Care)

► Proverb

***The earth is the Lord's and all it contains;
you may make use of it in your need, but
you shall not abuse it in your greed.***

Richter, Sandra, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says about the Environment and Why It Matters.*

JENI: This proverb comes from a book by Sandra Richter called *Stewards of Eden*. She holds a Ph.D. from Harvard Divinity School and is a biblical scholar who teaches at Westmont College. We've borrowed some of the outline in her book, and we think this proverb is a good summary of God's command to us to care for Creation.

READ proverb



What About the New Testament?

- ▶ Rm. 8:19-23 Paul says that: Along with humanity, Creation groans to be set free from bondage. As originally intended, God's plan for redemption *isn't just for humans*, but for all of creation. When humans are "made new," they will exhibit Christ-like values that include Creation's redemption
- ▶ Col. 1:13-20 Everything was made by God; through Christ & for him
- ▶ Rev. 21:1 A new heaven & *new earth* are restored, healed & redeemed
- ▶ Rev. 22:1-2 The imagery of a new Eden reminds us that God loves and redeems Creation, as well as humanity

RAY: We've used some NT references previously, now let's focus more on it. All of these passages demonstrate that God never intended to only redeem people. We've read that narrowly. Creation has also suffered as a result of humanity's sinfulness. As we become redeemed individuals, we must become concerned for nature. Eventually, God's plan is to heal and resurrect us all...in a new heaven and new earth.

What Does Jesus Say/Do?

- ▶ Mt. 6, Lk. 12, God loves and takes care of birds, flowers, grasses
- ▶ Jn. 1:1-4 The Word created all things and gives life to all creation
- ▶ Mt 5: 17-19 "Do not think I have come to abolish the law...but to fulfill it...whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven



RAY: We are comforted by the thought that God loves us more than the birds, the flowers and the grasses. But Jesus doesn't mean that God is dismissive of them! John's gospel says that Jesus himself was present in creating all things and giving life to them all. When Jesus makes reference to the OT verses we've just been discussing, he says he doesn't abolish any of them, and that whoever DOES them AND TEACHES THEM will be great in the kingdom. Does this mean Christians should also be teaching others to care for Nature and God's creation?



What Does Jesus Say/Do?

- Mk 4:39 Jesus calms the storm. He interacts with nature to take care of the vulnerable, but he doesn't fundamentally change the balance of the sea, pollute the water, or permanently change the winds
- Many parables about soils, sowers, plants, trees, etc. in which creation is protected

RAY: Read slide



Assessment of our Response to God's Commandment Today

- ▀ **Humanity has used our superior gifts to “rule over” (exploit and abuse) Creation.**
- ▀ **We have taken what we wanted with no concern as to consequences to others/nature**
- ▀ **We have become a society obsessed with “disposables.”**

RAY: In the next 3 weeks, we're going to suggest, that in far too many cases, humanity has NOT followed the commandments we've discussed this morning. Just as couple of supporting examples, in 2018, in the U.S. alone, we wasted 63.1 million tons of food. What might that have done for poor and vulnerable humans in our country, as well as hungry animals? Maybe we are also overly committed to a lifestyle of “ease,” which leads to far too much trash and enormous landfills. As Christians, we know we have “fallen short” of what God wanted for us in the Garden of Eden. These commandments are another example of how we have fallen.



But What Can We Do About That?

- **But as God's people – The Church:**
 - **We are to live our lives as Adam & Eve should have, as Jesus Christ did**
 - **We are called to live in a way that the intentional stewardship of God's creation is evident in our lives**

The earth is the Lord's and all it contains; you may make use of it in you need, but you shall not abuse it in your greed.


JENI: Read the slide. Remember this proverb:



JENI: Read...

Not science – recently many have started distrusting science. They believe that science wants to mislead them. But since the abolition of slavery, the church hasn't worked toward a value with as much financial impact for the wealthiest and most powerful in our country...as loving and taking care of God's creation

And the problem is not really politics either – Republican and Democratic Christians alike are trying to follow God's commandments and demonstrate God's values in caring for our planet.



I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these, we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that.

Gus Speth (Cofounder of National Resource Defense Council, founder of the World Resources Institute, CEO of the UN Development Program, and former Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality.

JENI: So, here is a scientist who is explaining that he was wrong about something. That science is limited and needs assistance. Gus Speth is founder of the World Resource Institute and former Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, as well as CEO of the UN Development Program. He says...



Questions for Christians...

- Does our current culture promote profit over people?
- Are we allowing nature to be ravaged for our short-term gain?
- Gus Speth is a scientist *asking for HELP from the church!*

JENI: So Mr. Speth leads us to ask ourselves...as Christians looking honestly at our culture... READ 1st 2 bullets

Does he have a point? Do we need to think about morality more than science & politics?

.

The Church Can Help!



- ▶ The Church has led the way on many social issues, such as:
 - ▶ Abolition, Homelessness, Orphan & foster care, Medical services for the poor, Civil rights
- ▶ We've built more hospitals & orphanages than any other organization
- ▶ We've taken our God-ordained, self-sacrificial posture to places in crisis around the world, and

JENI READ

The Church Can Lead in Protecting God's World!

- ▶ Served as educators, physicians, nurses, botanists, engineers, as well as preachers...
- ▶ We have embraced our role as the moral compass of society, confronting corruption & defending the voiceless



JENI: READ –

We can and must defend God's Creation, as well. It, too, is voiceless if God's church doesn't speak up.

The Church Cannot Fix it All...But



- We must stand against environmental destruction of God's Creation
- We must live and speak for lifestyles of restraint & Christian stewardship of the Earth

JENI:

Admittedly, at this point in our history, the church is not able to solve the massive problems by ourselves. But we didn't solve abolition alone either. We must do our part to influence others to join this cause and speak for God's creation. We have voices that need to be heard in our culture, and our children and grandchildren are begging us to care about their futures on this planet.



The Church Cannot Fix it All...But

- ▶ We must demonstrate a value system foreign to our fallen world, which Speth says is consumed by pride and greed.
- ▶ *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.* –Margaret Mead

JENI: Read 1st bullet – then

JENI: I don't know that Margaret Mead was speaking about the church here, but her quote certainly fits. READ. Think about what that small group of Jesus' first disciples, who encountered the resurrected Christ have been able to accomplish. Imagine what we, as Christ's resurrected body, the church, might do today.



Conclusion for Week 1

- Redemption of ALL creation is the gospel; it's not *merely* a message of social justice or a political action item
- It is a life-posture that reflects the image of God in each of us, and embraces the plan of God for redemption of all things
- Paul said (Rm 12:2) that our calling is to demonstrate with our lives "what the will of God is"
- Gen. 2:15 told us that the will of God for us is "to tend and protect the Garden"-- all of it!

JENI