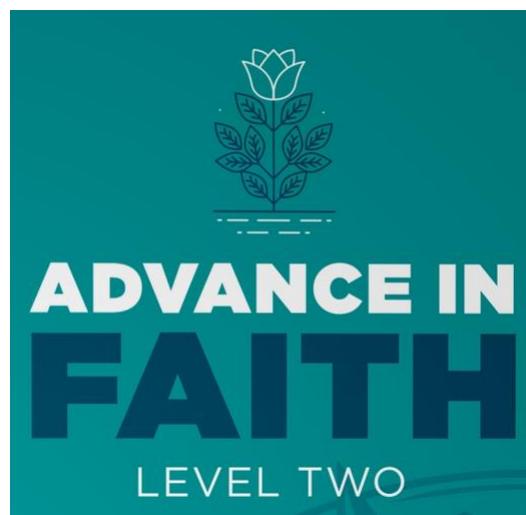


Earth Matters

Christian Faith and the Future of the Planet

Week 5

A Personal and Practical Response (Part 1)



Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To offer Christians guidance on making a personal and practical response to the call to participate in creation care*
- *To encourage believers to engage with the issues relating to the current environmental crisis and help provide solutions*

Introduction: Start at the Heart

In his book *'For the Beauty of the Earth'* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2001) Steven Bouma-Prediger suggests that before we ask the question *'what should we do?'* we need to ask the question *'what kind of people should we be?'* In other words, what are the essential virtues that we should embrace and embody in our efforts to better relate to the planet and represent the kingdom of God in doing so? He offers the following six pairs as a list of essential values:

1. Respect and Receptivity

Respect is an understanding of and proper regard for the well-being of another. A respectful person shows deference to another because of the unique nature and value of the other. A person who respects neither overlooks nor undervalues the place and purpose of another.

Receptivity is acknowledgement of our interdependence with other creatures and a willingness to embrace our mutual dependence on one another. It is expressed as acceptance and inclusion and is the hallmark of true community.

2. Humility and Honesty

Humility is the sober and proper estimation of one's abilities and limitations and recognises the need of others. In the context of creation care it is the absence of contempt for the other life forms on which we depend in response to our need of them.

Honesty is the virtue of truthful living. Honest people are not duplicitous or deceitful and have no secrets to hide. They own their mistakes, take responsibility and avoid passing the blame. As earth-carers it is our responsibility to deal truthfully with the rest of creation as well as each other.

3. Wisdom and Hope

Wisdom is sound, practical judgement based on insight and experience that is vital to the collective good of all. Wisdom calculates the long-term impacts and ultimate outcomes of a course of action and responds accordingly with the best interests of all in mind.

Hope is the confident expectation of future good and for the Christian earth-carer hope is double-sided i.e. for immediate improvement and ultimate fulfilment.

4. *Patience and Serenity*

Patience is the virtue that spawns endurance and perseverance and keeps us from embracing the temptation to take the short cut. As custodians of the earth we are often enticed into making short-term decisions for immediate gain or instant satisfaction often at the expense of long-term well-being.

Serenity is inner peace and assurance amid the raging storm of circumstance and concern. Christian stewards of creation should engage in their creation care duties with peace and rest and not angst or anger.

5. *Courage and Justice*

Courage is the strength of moral conviction to act bravely in the face of fear and danger, often at the risk of one's own well-being. Swimming against the current of popular opinion or social, cultural and political trend often requires it.

Justice is the desire to act fairly and rightly particularly for the sake of the vulnerable, the voiceless and the defenceless.

6. *Benevolence and Love*

Benevolence is generosity of heart and hand that results in acts of kindness toward all others.

Love is the feeling of strong affection for another that translates into the outworking of the above-mentioned virtues and their corresponding actions.

As those called to be *'the salt of the earth and light of the world'* (Matthew 5:13-16) our role as Christians is to serve as a preserving additive and transforming agent in the world in which we live by exemplifying these virtues. Our presence and participation in earthly affairs should enrich and enhance life for others and ultimately show people what a world under the lordship of King Jesus could look like. This representation of kingdom life certainly includes the way we relate to the natural world and the other sentient beings with which we share the planet.

The following are 4 important guiding principles to help achieve this:

1. *Stay Informed: The need for Education*

It is important for Christians who want to answer the call to engage in creation care and help address the ecological concerns of our day to keep deepening their understanding of both their calling and those concerns. Ongoing learning is a vital part of being equipped to adequately respond to the complexity and ever-changing dynamics of environmental issues. Ignorance is a barrier to credibility when engaging with the broader community around these issues and in order to effectively contribute to the larger conversation Christians need to be well-informed. In his book *'Ecological Intelligence; How knowing the hidden impacts of what we buy can change everything'* (Broadway Books: NY, 2009), Daniel Goleman argues that the primary problem at the heart of the current ecological crisis is one of ignorance and misinformation. It is not that we as people are *bad* but rather that we are *blind* to the impacts of what we buy and make. Knowledge and understanding

are key to growing effectiveness in addressing the issues of environmental concern and participating in constructive creation care.

2. Be Inspired: The need for Motivation

Firstly, Christians can fan the flame of enthusiasm for the call to creation care by **recognising the opportunities** that involvement will generate for evangelism, mission and community transformation. Doors into sectors of society that have been largely untouched by Christian influence can be opened to the gospel and whole communities can be empowered, uplifted and transformed. Secondly, believers can also motivate themselves by continually **highlighting the urgency** that a response to these issues requires. For many the stakes are high and the solutions to the challenges imperative for their survival. Constantly reminding ourselves of the seriousness of the issues at hand will help keep us focused and inspired for the task ahead.

3. Get Involved: The need for Activation

The enormous scope and scale of environmental concern means that it is impossible for each individual to be fully involved in or respond to every aspect of environmental concern. A helpful key to getting involved and effectively contributing to change is for each individual to identify their particular area of interest / concern. People are far more likely to address issues in a meaningful way if they believe in or care deeply about those issues. A particular personal concern may be water scarcity, animal welfare, coastline protection, marine life preservation, global warming, renewable energy or any number of specific environmental issues. Once the issues of personal interest of concern are identified, the following can be used as expressions of involvement:

a) Awareness

Help create awareness by:

- a) Using social media
- b) Hosting information or discussion evenings
- c) Having personal conversations
- d) Engaging other creative communication channels (eg: T-shirts, bumper stickers, gifts, posters, flyers, etc.)

b) Activism

Help create change by:

- a) Volunteering for an environmental organisation
- b) Joining a protest group
- c) Signing petitions
- d) Lobbying local government
- e) Fundraising for an environmental organisation
- f) Making financial contributions to projects or organisations

4. Start making small changes: The need for Personal Transformation

Conclusion

A vast amount of information and resource is available to individuals who want to make personal and practical changes to their daily lives in order to contribute positively and sustainably to the environment. The key to changing is to simply start and learn as you go, remembering to give yourself time and space to adjust to the changes.

Reflection Questions

1. Is there a particular aspect of Creation Care / Environmental Stewardship that interests / energises you (E.g. wilderness preservation, animal rights, education, Global Warming, pollution and waste, etc.). Why is this particular issue important to you?
2. What practical things could you do to raise the level of your involvement in addressing that area of concern? Identify at least 3 immediately actionable steps that you could take to begin addressing your area of concern.

Memory Verse

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father”.