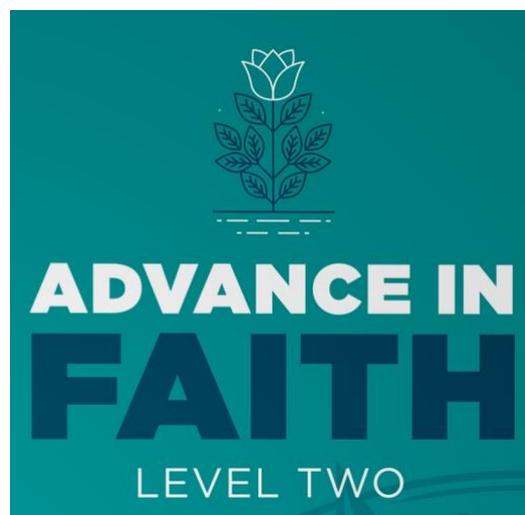


Earth Matters

Christian Faith and the Future of the Planet

Week 6

A Personal and Practical Response (Part 2)



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*

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

2. Be Inspired: The need for Motivation

3. Get Involved: The need for Activation

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 (E.g. 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

The key to making lasting *personal* change is to start small and be persistent. Adapting your personal lifestyle or that of your family is a challenging task that requires thoughtful planning and preparation. As such it takes time and is best approached as an ongoing process. Beware of the 'guilt trap' and recognise that we all live constantly in the tension between reality and possibility i.e. the potential of how things could be / should be and the reality of how they are. Idealism can be a slave driver and the bondage of idealism can leave you feeling discouraged and condemned. In an ideal world we would all have solar panels on our roofs, energy efficient lighting in our ceilings, Fairtrade coffee in our pantries and ethically made clothes in our cupboards but we don't live in the ideal world. We live in a broken, fallen and dis-ordered world where change for the better is often hard, long and costly.

Before attempting to make changes, it is important that we understand a number of key natural principles with which we need to align our living habits. In his landmark work, *The Closing Circle: Confronting the Environmental Crisis*, renowned biologist Barry Commoner outlines four fundamental laws of ecology as the foundation for an understanding of environmental stewardship. He suggests that embracing these as the primary principles of an environmental education is imperative to effectively addressing the environmental concerns of our time. They are described as follows:

a. *Interconnectedness and Interdependence:* Everything is connected to everything else. All living creatures play a role on the greater natural scheme of things. When humans interfere with any particular part of the environment there is a ripple effect throughout the system as a whole.

b. *Conservation of Matter:* Simply put this law states that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. It can change form physically and chemically as it moves through the cycles and systems of the earth, but it cannot be discarded or reduced in quantity. It is essentially constant. In normal eco-systems the same material may be used over and over again as it passes through a series of chemical and physical changes but when foreign matter is introduced to the system (E.g. plastics which are not biodegradable) or excess amounts of naturally occurring substances (like CO₂), the equilibrium within the system is affected.

c. *Nature knows Best:* If humans want to live sustainably on the earth, they must look to nature itself and emulate the ecological principles found within natural systems. There is a balance within nature that humanity must acknowledge and align with if we are to live in harmony with our environment.

d. *Energy Management:* One can never take out of a natural system as much energy as goes into it. The more complex a system becomes the more rapidly the energy within that system dissipates. This is the Second Law of Thermodynamics, also called the Law of Entropy. Managing energy ensures the balance of both inputs and outputs.

These ecological 'laws' are built into the fabric of our world by God the Creator and that as such they represent the wisdom and purpose of God, something Christians can and should align themselves with.

On a more practical level, the following can be used as a guideline for Christians who want to make an immediate and personal response to the environmental challenges of our time at home and at work:

At Home:

- a) Know your Impact – Eco Footprint, Greendex, Water Footprint calculators help you to assess
- b) Reduce – usage levels of water, electricity and paper. Have a usage Sabbath (E.g. Earth Hour)
- c) Reuse – exchange disposables for re-usables (e.g. batteries, food storage, ink cartridges, filters, shopping bags, etc.). Buy used products.
- d) Recycle plastics, glass and paper products.
- e) Repair – instead of discarding broken items try to restore them to functionality through repair.
- f) Collaborate and share with friends and neighbours (e.g. tools, equipment, gardens, books, magazines, etc.)
- g) Replace ordinary light bulbs with compact fluorescent or LED bulbs.
- h) Buy large household appliances (fridges, washing machines, dishwashers, etc.) with the best ENERGY RATING¹ Label.
- i) Schedule a home energy audit – many utility companies offer them for free.
- j) Choose renewable energy (solar) to power your home.
- k) Buy a fuel-efficient and ecologically friendly hybrid car. Alternatively cycle to work, car pool or use public transport.
- l) Choose a simple lifestyle. Think before you buy. Limit your consumption to what is necessary. Buy second hand.
- m) Shop ethically. Research where your products come from and what effect sourcing them has on the planet (E.g. Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance. See www.ethical.org.au).

¹ The Energy Rating Labeling Scheme is a mandatory scheme for a range of appliances which currently include: Refrigerators, Freezers, Clothes Washers, Clothes Dryers, Dishwashers, Computer Monitors, Air Conditioners, Televisions. When offered for sale, these appliances must display a label that shows the star rating and other useful information about energy consumption. The label gives the appliances a star rating between one and ten stars. The greater the number of stars the higher the efficiency. It enables consumers to compare the energy efficiency of domestic appliances on a fair and equitable basis. It also provides incentive for manufacturers to improve the energy performance of appliances. The Energy Rating Label was first introduced in 1986 in NSW and Victoria. It is now mandatory in all Australian states and territories and New Zealand for refrigerators, freezer, clothes washers, clothes dryers, dishwashers and air-conditioners (single phase only) to carry the label when they are offered for sale. Australia also applies a mandatory label to televisions.

- n) Refuse to use single use plastics like straws, bags, cutlery and packaging.
- o) Start composting, worm farming and mulching (vermiculture) (www.howtocompost.org).
- p) Consider alternative diets – vegan or vegetarian.
- q) Use natural / environmentally friendly detergents and cleaning agents.
- r) Grow your own organic fruit, vegetables, herbs and spices. Establish Community gardens with neighbours.
- s) Plant trees. Reduce lawn area.

In the Office:

- a) Avoid plastic. Use ceramic crockery, cutlery and real plants.
- b) Reduce, Reuse and Recycle paper.
- c) Recycle everything you can including toner cartridges, newspapers and magazines.
- d) Install energy-saving devices such as motion-sensor lighting, flow-control water faucets and double-glazed windows and buy as much energy as possible from renewable sources.
- e) If you are in charge of your own business, provide incentives to employees who carpool or ride public transport to the office.
- f) Encourage employee activity days that contribute to the environment in a positive way e.g. rubbish clean up days, tree planting, etc.

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. What aspect of the 6-week course has connected most deeply with you? Was it the theological / biblical basis for creation care as part of the mission of God's people in the world? The scope, scale and nature of the environmental challenges of the 21st century? The underlying macro-drivers affecting the environment negatively? The personal and practical changes we can all make to be better stewards of the earth?

2. Share 1 thing with the group that you have already done (e.g. adopted a specific lifestyle change, embraced a new approach to living, installed new technology, etc.) to be a more responsible steward of the environment and how it has positively impacted on your life.
3. If somebody asked you to give them 3 good reasons why as Christians we should care for creation and steward the environment what would you say?
4. Where and in what way could you help raise awareness and educate others regarding the responsibility we have to care for the planet and all its inhabitants?