

Simple Sundays

**Would Jesus
Recycle?**



Would Jesus Recycle?

Session 1. How Are We Related to God's Creation?	1
Session 2. What Does the Old Testament Say about Taking Care of Creation?	4
Session 3. What Would Jesus Recycle?	8
Session 4. What Else Can I Do to Be a "Green" Christian?	12

0953

© 2019 Geneva Press

Published especially for use in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), by Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

All rights reserved. Except where permission to photocopy is expressly granted on the material, no part of these materials may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission. In some instances, adaptations have been made to a Scripture or a confession to make the language inclusive.

Excerpts from *Book of Order* and *Book of Confessions* have been used throughout this resource. Both are reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.

Every effort has been made to determine whether texts are under copyright. If through an oversight any copyrighted material has been used without permission, and the publisher is notified of this, acknowledgment will be made in future printings.

690538



Main Idea

Scripture tells us many things about our relationship to God's creation. From the very first chapter of the Bible, we learn that we are part of creation. In Genesis 2, God gives us a responsibility to care for the world. This session will help participants consider their role in the creation and their responsibility to it.

You Will Need

Bibles

Faith Statement

Q. 17. How did God create [humankind]?
A. After God had made all other creatures, [God] created [humankind], male and female, . . . endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; made them after [God's] own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it, with dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.

—Larger Catechism (7.127)

Background

This session centers on God's creation: our relationship to it, our role within it, and our responsibility for it. Genesis, along with the next four books of the Old Testament, is actually a compilation from a number of writers, or groups of writers. The two creation stories in the first chapters seem to be written by two of those groups. Scholars think that the first story, about seven days of creation, comes from the Priestly source (so named because much of the writing from that source, especially in Leviticus, is concerned with priestly matters) and that the second story, about Adam's rib, comes from the Jahwist source (so named because much of the writing from that source uses the sacred name for God, Yahweh).

Both stories about creation began in oral tradition hundreds of years before they were written and edited into their final forms. Scholars believe, however, that the Jahwist version of creation was codified during the kingship of David or Solomon (1005–928 B.C.). The Priestly version in chapter 1 seems to have been codified during or soon after the Jewish exile in Babylon (586–538 B.C.).

The Priestly writers finished this version of Genesis 1–2:3 under stress of religious oppression, or under the equally stressful pressures of acculturating Jerusalem and reestablishing the temple. It is likely that one of their goals was to express, in no uncertain terms, their faith and commitment to their sovereign Creator. Hence, their narrative presents us with the important truth of our solidarity with the world.

The Jahwists' context, on the other hand, was of relative comfort and national stability under the monarchy. It is possible that this allowed them to further consider the responsibilities implicit in creation. Hence, their narrative presents us with the important truth that God calls humankind to care for creation.

You and Your Youth

Some young people may come to this session with preconceived notions about the first two chapters of Genesis. Hopefully, they will still be open to discuss interpretations, implications, and applications of the text. Even so, the creation narratives can be polarizing for youth in terms of the creation-versus-evolution debate.

One way to prepare for potential friction is to explain early in your time together the specific purpose for today's study. Assure the youth that they will be exploring what these stories say about our relationship with creation, not what they say about creation per se. Accordingly, be prepared to discuss the issue of humanity's unique role in creation. Obviously, there is something special about us. And yet, whatever that "specialness" is—a discussion for another session—we are not separate from creation.

You might also hear questions about why God cannot take care of God's own creation. Be prepared to discuss with participants how God uses us as tools of justice, in no exclusion to God's omnipotence.



Enter

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

All the Time or Not So Much

Designate one side of the meeting space as "All the Time" and the other side as "Not So Much." Invite the participants to gather in the middle of the meeting space. Tell them that you are going to ask them a series of questions and they will respond to each question by moving to wherever they want between the extremes of "all the time" or "not so much." Read each of the following questions, one at a time, and give the youth plenty of time to respond. Take time to discuss the responses to each question:

- How often do you reduce your use of something to help the earth?
- How often do you reuse items to help the earth?
- How often do you recycle items to help the earth?
- How often do you approach reducing, reusing, and recycling as a spiritual matter?
- How often do you think or talk about needing to be a good caretaker of God's creation?
- As a person of faith, how much of your time and energy do you think needs to go toward taking care of God's creation?

Opening Prayer

Creating God, you made the world out of the empty darkness of chaos and created each of us in your image. Be with us as we open your Holy Scripture and find ways to explore your Word together. Help us to listen and share as we challenge each other to grow in faith and love in our time together. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



Explore

Study the Bible

Bibles

Read Genesis 2:7, 15, 18–20a and discuss:

- Who named you? What have you named in your life?
- What words would you use to describe the relationship between someone who names something and the entity that was named?

- Why do you think God let humans name the animals in Genesis 2?
- In verse 7, God formed man (Hebrew *adam*) from the dust of the ground (Hebrew *adamah*). How does this word connection affect our understanding of the passage?
- What do verses 15 and 18–20a imply about your own relationship to God's creation?

Read Psalm 8. Discuss:

- What does *dominion* mean in Psalm 8?
- What is the relationship between naming creation and being given dominion over creation?
- What is the difference between *dominion* and *domination*?
- Imagine that Psalm 8:6 uses the word *domination* instead. How might human domination over creation affect the environment and all that lives on the earth?
- Dominion, as Psalm 8 intends, is not exploitation and abuse, but caring for, tending, and feeding. How might human dominion over creation affect the environment and all that lives on the earth?



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not relate to these situations, change them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue

Read several of the following scenarios:

The climate changes, causing stronger hurricanes, flooding, and drought.

Trees and other vegetation in the rain forest are cut down and burned, wiping out whole species of plants and animals.

To create new farmland, wetlands are drained and the water is pumped back into the river, which is contained behind new levees and dams.

Groundwater is contaminated by a leaking underground gasoline storage tank.

Trout are raised and stocked into a stream so fishermen can have plenty of fish to catch.

Scientists develop a new kind of corn that has a shorter growing season and is more resistant to insects and blight. This corn helps feed people in poor parts of the world who cannot afford pesticides and herbicides.

Legislators pass a law allowing hunters to shoot larger numbers of deer each season after learning that deer overpopulation is a threat to crops, to driving safety, and even to the long-term health of the deer species.

The builders of a dam, at great expense, add a system of ascending pools so migrating salmon can get past the dam in their efforts to return to their birthplace upstream to breed.

A person shopping in the grocery store decides to buy only products packaged in recyclable containers, which reduces the flow of materials to the landfills.

Discuss:

- How is each case an example of dominion?
- Which of these cases do you think are examples of humans exercising responsible care for creation? Which do you think are examples of neglect for God's creation?
- How do you feel about the responsibility human beings have for creation? If you were God, would you have given humans this much responsibility? Why or why not?

Action Steps

Have the participants organize a cleanup day in which the congregation adopts a roadway or community park that has an abundance of trash. During the experience, have one of the youth read one of the Scripture passages from this session aloud. Consider having the participants plant native flowers and other native plants during the experience. Discuss the possibility of making this an ongoing project for your congregation.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Holy God, be with us as we go from this place and help us to take what we've learned and experienced together with us as we go. In the days ahead, may we be your hands and feet in the world, searching for ways to take care of your creation and finding ways to connect with all that you have given us to protect. Amen.