

PART TWO - SESSION FOUR

We Have Not Loved Our Earth as Ourselves

Payton Hoegh

At the conclusion of this session, participants will:

- Recognize how consumerism and post-industrial human habits have contributed to climate crisis.
- Articulate the ways our culture and human priorities have been out of step with God's call to love and care for Earth as demonstrated in biblical creation narratives.
- Think critically on and explore recourse for personal and communal habits that do not reflect the love of God for all creation.
- Describe a theological mandate for creation care that challenges consumerism and promotes deep, loving engagement with and love for Earth.

Please review the primary resources, guiding Scripture, and reflection and discussion questions prior to the small group gathering. Optional resources are available for a deeper dive.

PRE-GATHERING PREPARATION

Find these resources online at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care/love-god-love-gods-world-curriculum/session-four/>.

Primary Resources:

- Film: “Three Seconds” | Spencer Sharp & Prince Ea (4 minutes)
- Film: “The Problem with Consumerism” | Our Changing Climate (10 minutes)
- Reading: “Pope Francis on Consumerism, Environmental Ecology, and Human Ecology” by Dan Dileo, from Millennial.
- *Emergence Magazine* podcast: “The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance – Robin Wall Kimmerer,” found on Apple Podcasts (47 minutes).

GUIDING SCRIPTURE

Job 38: 4-11; 40:3-4 (NRSV)

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb,

when I made the clouds its garment

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

and prescribed bounds for it,

and set bars and doors,

and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

Then Job answered the Lord:

“See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.”

SMALL GROUP GATHERING

Facilitator or volunteer can use the prayer below to open your time together.

OPENING PRAYER

By Payton Hoegh

Creator God,
You formed this world in your loving hands.
With a resonant word you brought forth life:
Beautiful plants and beloved creatures you called good.
From the soil, you shaped humankind
And breathed the spark of life into our lungs.
Placing our feet on this Earth, our home,
Your desire has always been for us to walk alongside you,
Mindfully engaging with, tending to, delighting in, and caring for creation.
All too often, we have failed to live into this call.
We have not loved as you love.
We have been selfish and shortsighted.
We have been blind to the consequences of extraction, consumption, waste, and pollution.
Forgive us these shortcomings and open our eyes once again
To the beauty and blessing of this world you have created.
Set our hearts and guide our hands this day
To move once more into balanced relationship with Earth
So that all you have touched and stirred into life
Might be loved as you have taught us to love.
Amen.

CHECK-IN

Facilitator leads the group through brief check-ins from each participant.

REFLECTION

Group can choose to read the reflection out loud together or go directly to discussion questions depending on timing and how many participants were able to do the reading prior to the gathering.

Sitting on a shelf in my house is an old wooden pipe. It’s a dull, stained cherry, swirling with pits and scars of use and age. It was my grandfather’s. He died when I was 12, but whenever I look at it, I’m reminded of his smile, the way his laugh would build from his belly, and how he would cradle that pipe in his palm and thrust it out as he shook. It would sway and spark, smoke whirling as if playing along with the joke. That pipe holds memories of calloused hands, a cozy lap, warm hugs, and, most of all, love.

Sometimes I wonder at how we can wrap up so much sentiment in little mementos like that and miss the grand reminders of God's love all around us. I wonder how we can hold so dear and preserve with such determination precious tokens of our past while we fail to love and cherish what God has created with sacred intent.

In the book of Job, God details the attentiveness and care with which the world was made, saying, "Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundation ... Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7). This passage goes on to intricately outline God's passionate familiarity with the movement of water, patterns of weather, and the richness of life in all creatures. It celebrates how God formed all that is with the intimacy of touch and sighed the spark of life into creation.

As Prince Ea affirms in his poem "3 Seconds," all of this is a miracle.

Having formed humankind in the divine image, the God who traces the boundaries of the sea and who counts each month before a deer bears her fawns offers one simple charge: Love and tend to all that has been made with the same care and delight manifest in its creation.

As we have moved into the industrial age and harnessed new technologies to serve systems of extraction and consumption, Earth has been thrown wildly out of balance by a sharp rise in atmospheric carbon and the manufactured dominance of humanity over the rest of the natural world. Our "care" has not reflected God's love. Selfish and shortsighted, we have destroyed countless habitats, clear-cut forests, poisoned streams, rivers, and oceans. Our behavior has led to a mass extinction crisis that threatens innumerable species of wildlife as rates of loss rise to an estimated 1,000 to 10,000 times average natural occurrences. Calling us to wisdom, Prince Ea cries, "We willingly covered our ears to Mother Nature's screams... we see storms that are stronger than ever before or more droughts, hurricanes, and wildfire than ever before, because there's more pollution than ever before, more carbon, more trees cut down than ever before."

Whole communities—most often communities of color and those least responsible for the practices driving climate change—are desperate and displaced, increasingly imperiled by climate-related disasters made worse by values and choices so many of us spare only passing thought. Our Changing Climate's video essay, "The Problem with Consumerism," traces in heart-wrenching detail how the habits of consumers in relatively wealthy communities and countries contribute to the global environmental crisis we face: "Despite the fact that 100 companies were found to be the root cause of 70% of global emissions, the reality is, the people using those companies' products and burning their fuel are us."

We have been seduced into an ecologically costly system of accumulation that suggests the things we buy not only address needs and desires but establish status, nurture happiness, and demonstrate love. Our habits of consumption and waste have created whole continents of trash that float across the oceans. Junk heaps overflow, laborers are mistreated, and resources are exhausted as we manufacture more and more things to fill a void that only spiritual wholeness can satisfy.

As an alternative to this economy of manufactured scarcity that is destroying our environment, contemporary prophets like Robin Wall Kimmerer suggest we must embrace an economy of abundance—an economy characterized by gratitude, relationship, and reciprocity. This is a gift economy, or, put theologically, an economy of grace.

Surely this is the appropriate response to the intention and care expressed in Job. As we wrestle with the reality that we have not loved as we are called to love, we must acknowledge our complicity in the crisis we face, and, like Job, cover our mouths in humility as we set our hearts to graceful, faithful care of and relationship with creation.

What would it look like for us to see God’s loving craftsmanship in all of creation? What would change in us—in the way we live, purchase, and pray—if we saw in every stone and seed, creek and creature something of value beyond anything we could buy?

I imagine it might be like holding an old pipe passed on to a grandson, feeling the warmth of a grandfather’s embrace.

Perhaps, like Job, we would proclaim, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you.” In saying so, perhaps we would be newly inspired to love this Earth, God’s creation, our home.

Discussion Questions

Facilitator guides the group through the discussion questions.

1. The book of Job offers a rich, poetic outline of God’s creation of Earth and the artistry and loving care that defined this creative act. How have our own habits and choices reflected the tenderness and intention seen in God’s care for creation? How have they departed from God’s careful dominion?
2. In the poem “3 seconds,” Prince Ea explores loss of connection to the Earth as contributing to ecological imbalance and the environmental crises our global community is experiencing. As we seek to rekindle that connection as a reflection of God’s own care in creating each and every part of the universe, what most reminds you of the love God has for you and for all of creation?
3. “The Problem with Consumerism” outlines the way our consumer culture and habits of consumption are tied to the fearful consequences of the environmental crises we face. What factors do you believe have made unhealthy consumerism so prevalent in contemporary society? How might The Episcopal Church play a role in challenging consumerism and promoting an economy of abundance or “grace economy” akin to that described by Robin Wall Kimmerer?
4. What practices can you embrace individually or with your community that will help demonstrate loving care for and engagement with creation?

CLOSING CHECK-OUT & PRAYER

What word describes how you feel right now? After you’ve shared, please invite another person to go.

After all have offered a word, the facilitator or volunteer can pray a simple prayer bringing together the hopes and prayers of the whole group.

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

These are activities and engagement opportunities to explore different ways to get involved and learn more.

- Go out into the natural world, your backyard, a local park, a nearby trail. Step into that space with intention. Open your eyes to creation as if seeing with God’s eyes. Reflect on how this changes your perception. Journal about your experience.
- Connect with your local Interfaith Power & Light chapter and get involved with efforts to promote loving care of creation in your community. <https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

- Complete the free training to become a Blessed Tomorrow Climate Ambassador. Lead your congregation in deeper engagement with climate issues and organize creation care efforts that demonstrate loving care for your local ecosystem and community.

<https://blessedtomorrow.org/blessed-tomorrow-ambassadors-training/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



***Payton Hoegh** is the program director for the Center for Spirituality in Nature. A postulant in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, he is passionate about community weaving, ecology, environmentalism, agriculture, justice, and equity. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Claremont School of Theology. Hoegh has worked as chaplain and director of a faith-based young adult service program as well as a communications professional, specializing in creative digital design and storytelling for church and nonprofit partners. He also founded *All Wanderers*, an interfaith community that gathers in nature to hike, break bread, and engage what it means to be a spiritual being in the contemporary world. Hoegh lives with his wife, Jazmin, and cat, Zooey, in a tiny home near the Angeles National Forest in California.*