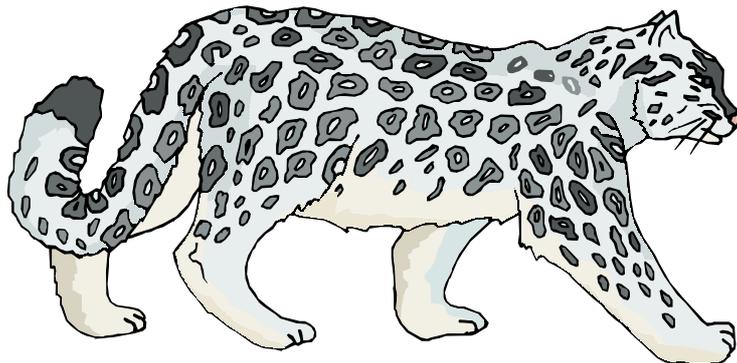


A CHRISTIAN LOOK

AT The

ENVIRONMENT



FIVE BIBLE STUDIES

A CHRISTIAN LOOK AT THE ENVIRONMENT

Study 1. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. (Psalm 24)

Lead in Prepare an exhibition of photos, slides, etc. or obtain a short video showing the diversity and beauty of Creation. Look at these with the group.

Bible Passage Genesis 1. Read this together. Other useful passages which may be referred to are Psalm 104, 96, 98; Revelation 4, v11.

Questions for discussion

- 1 What does Genesis 1 teach us about God's work of creation?
- 2 Look at Leviticus 25,v23. How are we to think of ourselves and our planet's resources. What are the differences between owning our house and garden or renting them from someone else?
3. In view of what we have already discussed, what should a Christian's attitude be to caring for the created world? How might this affect our attitude to a) the proposed draining of an estuary with much wildlife in order to build an airport runway? b) buying furniture made from irreplaceable rain forest wood? .
4. Does it matter if plants and animals become extinct? Why? Look at Genesis 7,vv1-3, ch8,v17, Psalm 19,v1, Rom1,v20.

Prayer

1. Spend time praising God for His creation. The Psalms mentioned above are a good basis, and group members can add their own personal thanks. Remember especially local subjects for praise such as beauty spots, gardens, etc.

2. Ask God for guidance as to how we use these resources, both as communities and individuals.

Background notes

1. What is happening to the environment has become of great importance. Changes have always taken place but now the rate of temperature change, pollution, and using up of resources is proceeding on an unprecedented scale. Much of the alteration of the environment is due to the need for enough food, and therefore to farming practices. Rain forest is often cleared to provide more grazing land for animals, as well as logging. The land so used does not easily revert to rain forest, and degenerates, and becomes unproductive. Stephen Rand¹ tells how he was travelling with a local pastor through the rain forest of Honduras. They came to a peaceful place where cows were grazing along the bank of the river. But the pastor wept. A few weeks before there had been trees right down to the edge of the water. Now they had all been all cut down in order to rear cattle for beef burger production, at least some of which would be consumed in other countries. When the cattle came to drink water they would gradually destroy the river bank. The ensuing pollution would destroy the fish stocks on which the local Indians depended for healthy food. Water, too, is a serious problem. In the developed world, we each use many litres of water a day, whereas in the developing world average consumption is very limited. The water is often only obtained by walking long distances and

is frequently contaminated. The problem is not only increase of population, but is also in believing that we have unlimited rights over resources. Sustainable development is essential and this will involve restraint. "Productionism without restraint is tantamount to coveting without limit."ⁱⁱ

There have been some success stories. In this country, since the 1980s many of the very dirty rivers in this country have been cleared up. Trout can now

be found in the Thames. Otters have returned to rivers

in the West Country. A Royal Commission dealing with polluted rivers in the 19th century wrote their report in the water of the River Calder in West Yorkshire to prove how dirty it was! Today anglers come for many miles for the excellent fishing.

A Christian believes that the environment is God's and should be looked after as He desires. There is a need for balance between increasing food production and providing human needs, and restraint, so that the land is not exhausted. In the Old Testament the Israelites were commanded to practise restraint as in the Sabbath rest and the way they harvested their crops and the Jubilee. (Exodus 20, v10; Leviticus 19, vv9-10 & 23-24; Leviticus 25, vv1-23; Deuteronomy 22, v6)

2 Biodiversity. Many species are now in danger of extinction. The rate of loss in more recent years has been greatly accelerated by human activity, e.g.

Destruction of habitat -

Cultivation, clearing, building, etc.

Livestock industry
Overgrazing and fishing
Pollution - dumping of substances on soil and in water, without understanding the effect they may have.
Air pollution, and increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
Over-exploitation such as over-hunting.

Uses of species.

1. Provide food, medicines, raw materials. Their loss limits our response to new problems and opportunities. Species are given for man's use. (Genesis 1,v29;2,v9;)
2. Stable natural communities usually need high numbers of different species to be stable. Extinction of some of them may

result in the whole community breaking down

3. A source of beauty and wonder. (Genesis 2,v9;)

4. Reminder of God's personality, power, and creative genius. (Romans 1,v20). Meant to lead to wonder and worship of the Creator. (Psalm 104v1,v33; Psalm 19,v1 ;Psalm 148;Romans 1,v20;Revelation 4,v11;) Much species loss results from the demands of consumerism. In effect, by unbridled consumerism, we are saying that we like many *things* more than looking after the species rich environment that God gave us. (see J. Sale)ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ RAND, Stephen. 2000. Love your neighbour as yourself. In: R.J.Berry (Ed) *The care of creation*. Leicester. Inter-Varsity Press, pp142-143. (By kind permission of IVP)

ⁱⁱ see: CARRUTHERS, Peter: 2002. Farming in crisis and the voice of silence. John Ray Initiative.

ⁱⁱⁱ SALE, John: Biodiversity Loss. JRI Briefing Papers No.4