

*Micah Challenge* →

tearfund

# Session 9



**GLOBAL EDITION**

EDITED BY: JASON FILETA



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Micah Challenge USA  
1033 SW Yamhill St. Suite #102  
Portland, OR 97205

1.888.789.4660  
[www.tearfund.org/livejustly](http://www.tearfund.org/livejustly)  
[www.micahchallengeusa.org](http://www.micahchallengeusa.org)  
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Cover photograph by Jennifer Wilmore  
Editor: Jason Fileta  
Assistant Editor: Mari Williams  
Assistant Editor: Naomi Foxwood

Contributors: Mari Williams, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Jason Fileta, René Padilla, Ronald J. Sider, Alita Ram, Ashley Walker, José Marcos da Silva, Daniel Solano Maldonado, Gaston Slanwa, Sunia Gibbs, Kimberly Hunt, Naomi Foxwood, Eugene Cho

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*Designed by Danny Palmer.*

# Session Nine

## Justice and Creation Care: A Vision for All Creation to Flourish!

“Tackling the issue of climate change presents us with an inflection point in human history - a climate justice revolution that separates development from fossil fuels, supports people in the most vulnerable situations to adapt, allows all people to take part, and, most importantly, realise their full potential.”

- Mary Robinson

“Mom is crying!  
Our mother Earth is dying!  
She is really burning!  
Lord have mercy on us  
and lead us and help us,  
to save our beautiful mom,  
our Earth, our globe.”  
- Belaynesh Bekele

“In the words of St. Theresa of Avila, we are God’s  
hands and feet on earth, now is the time for us,  
rooted in prayer, to step up and take action on the  
climate crisis.”

- The Archbishop of Cape Town and Primate of  
Southern Africa, the Most Revd Dr. Thabo Makgoba

“It is not possible to love an unseen God while  
mistreating God’s visible creation.”  
- John Woolman

## Definitions

**Creation Care:** Active concern for the environment and work to restore it, both for positive impact on the natural world, and positive impact on humanity.

**Climate Change:** Long term changes to the earth's climate including rising temperatures, more floods, more droughts and less reliable rainfall, mainly caused by human activity.

**Restorative Economy:** A vision for life-giving economic and social structures, where all of society is engaged in living within the planet's resources, keeping inequality within reasonable levels and where everybody has their basic needs met.

## Pedro, the Face of a Changing Climate by Kim Hunt

It's easy to understand why Brazilian farmer Pedro Santana Oliveira has struggled to feed his family when you try and get to his smallholding.

The track to his place in the north eastern state of Pernambuco is so sandy that the tyres of any vehicle have difficulty getting traction, and that same sand permeates the soil around his home, making crop growing extremely hard work.

Access to water in this arid area is a problem. There was a reservoir but the changing climate and environmental degradation means it has dried up, leaving Pedro and his neighbours facing seven mile round trips using donkeys to fetch water from the nearest source.

It's little wonder that many local people are giving up working the land in favour of migrating to Brazil's cities, but many encounter further hardship as they discover their agricultural skills are insufficient to find an urban livelihood.

Due to help from one of Tearfund's partners in his area, Pedro and his neighbours are able to remain on their ancestral grounds as farmers.

Pedro has had help to install a rainwater harvesting tank to capture whatever falls when the heavens do open, and they have also implemented an irrigation system which uses solar panels to power a pump that moves the water around to serve twenty families!

Pedro has now started growing crops again for his family's consumption and hopes to be able to sell them in the market soon.

It's estimated that some 300,000 people are dying each year due to changes within our climate. As Christians, God has entrusted us with caring for his creation and all those living within it. We can and should take steps to allow creation to flourish.

## A Restorative Economy: For the Love of All Creation by Naomi Foxwood

From the beginning, God's intention for peace in creation (shalom) meant much more than just the absence of violence. Central to a Christian understanding of God's intention for his creation is the idea that life is inherently about intertwined relationships and relatedness. Millennia before the emergence of modern ideas of symbiosis, ecology or complex adaptive systems, the creation account of the Bible centres on wholeness, the fundamental unity of all of God's creation. As theologian Margaret Barker writes:

*The biblical world view is a vision of the unity of all things, and how the visible material world relates to another dimension of existence that unites all things into one divinely ordained system known as the eternal covenant, the creation covenant.<sup>1</sup>*

This is a worldview that stands in marked contrast to the materialist approach to creation that is one of the defining hallmarks of modernity. Far from a prevailing cultural practice of dominating the earth for material gain, the **Christian worldview on creation starts from a universe that is radically alive and precious. In this universe, humans have a unique role that encompasses, but also goes far beyond, 'stewardship'.**

God's intention for creation includes a powerful emphasis on humans' role **to show steadfast love for God and each other, and care for God's creation as part of an interconnected set of shalom relationships.**

When our relationship with creation is broken, it has devastating impact for all of our relationships. We're living at a time when the strain on creation is greater than ever before. This is a result of unsustainable development, unbridled consumption and environmental

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1 Barker M (2010) "Creation: a biblical vision for the environment", T&T Clark, London

degradation. This is a violation of God's intention for creation, but it's also taking a toll on people, particularly the most vulnerable among us. It's a special challenge for our generation. In the last 25 years more people have escaped poverty than at any other time in history, because the world economy has grown - but the way we've done it is unsustainable. We've changed the climate and damaged the environment, and if nothing changes, this will push millions of people back into poverty.

Scientists tell us that if average global temperature rises by more than 1.5 degrees, compared with pre-industrial levels, the consequences could be disastrous. The rise in temperature may not sound very large, but it has a huge impact on **lower income countries, who already face huge development challenges**. Some of the current and future impacts of climate change include:

- Unpredictable rainfall: many regions are experiencing huge variations in rainfall, leading to droughts, floods and crop failures
- Extreme weather events: heatwaves, floods and droughts are increasing in intensity and frequency, leading to an increased number of disasters
- Sea-level rise: as the oceans warm, water expands, leading to rises in the sea level. There is also the threat of polar ice caps melting, leading to an even more dramatic sea-level rise. This threatens low-lying islands and coastal zones
- Other impacts include increased migration to urban areas, conflicts over food and water and increases in diseases like malaria. Climate change will also have a huge impact on plant and animal biodiversity

We need an economy that restores and safeguards God's covenant of peace; a restorative economy rather than destructive economy. In Leviticus we find the biblical concept of Jubilee: a story that provides

us with hope and inspiration for how God's people can live in right relationship with him, each other and with the land:

Firstly, Jubilee speaks of environmental restoration. In practice this would mean us living within environmental limits, ensuring that our economy works with, rather than against, the creation that God has given us. In keeping with Psalm 24, the abundance of the earth belongs to all of us, and ultimately to God. That comes with responsibilities both to steward it carefully, but also to share the proceeds of that natural wealth fairly, just as jubilees reset land ownership on an equal per capita basis.

Secondly, Jubilee speaks of rest for those living in poverty. A restorative economy would ensure that everyone was able to meet their basic needs, providing an enabling environment and basic floor of economic security and protection to each and every one of the world's seven billion people. It would offer a foundation for human flourishing and all people being able to realise their potential.

Finally, Jubilee proclaims the need for fair allocation of wealth. A restorative economy would keep inequality within reasonable limits. This does not just include income inequality, but also unequal benefit from the natural wealth of the land which is our shared inheritance.

Many of the changes needed to respond to our environmental crisis and related humanitarian crises involve sacrifice – but also, paradoxically, offer us the chance to live more fully. They require us to reject conformity with the lifestyle patterns around us and blaze a new trail.

If we do things differently, everyone could have enough to flourish, and we could be a lot less unequal too. The church is called to lead by living simply, thinking differently and speaking out, and when enough ordinary people do that, governments will make the big changes we need them to. If we leave it to the next generation, it'll be too late.

## Read Genesis 1 Together

### The Beginning

- 1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
- 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.
- 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.
- 6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."
- 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.
- 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning - the second day.
- 9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.
- 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.
- 11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.
- 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.
- 13 And there was evening, and there was morning - the third day.
- 14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years,

- 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.”  
And it was so.
- 16 God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.
- 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth,  
18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.  
And God saw that it was good.
- 19 And there was evening, and there was morning - the fourth day.
- 20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”
- 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
- 22 God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”
- 23 And there was evening, and there was morning - the fifth day.
- 24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.
- 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.
- 26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
- 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- 28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

- 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.
- 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food." And it was so.
- 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the sixth day.

## Read Genesis 2:1-15 Together

- 1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
- 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.
- 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

### Adam and Eve

- 4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.
- 5 Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground,
- 6 but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.
- 7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.
- 8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.
- 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- 10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.
- 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold.
- 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)
- 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.

- 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.
- 15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What is the clearest connection you see between brokenness in the environment and brokenness in humanity?
2. What is your theology of creation care? Do you have one?
3. What are some of the ways you try to care for God's creation in your daily life?
4. Why do you think the church historically has been largely silent on care of creation? Do you think this is changing?
5. What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?

## Together

Take a moment and write down three justice issues you are most passionate about. There is no “right” answer here, create a list of what’s on your heart, whether that be refugees, conflict, education, hunger, human trafficking, extreme poverty, climate change. Share your list with each other, and write down the three issues that get mentioned the most. Now, as a group discuss how creation care (or the lack of creation care) impacts those issues. This will help show the relationship between the environment and what we typically think of as humanitarian issues.

Let’s take human trafficking for example:

- Areas impacted by disasters are often the perfect environment for traffickers to thrive
- People displaced because of famine, lack of water, or disaster are vulnerable to being trafficked

Begin learning together how care for creation and care for people are intertwined.

## **Solo Work**

Examine the actions you take in a week that may impact the environment. Look at your lifestyle and the decisions you make that depend on God's creation: consumption of resources, food, waste etc. Add a "creation care" piece to your action plan. Come up with three things you can begin to change about your regular habits that will have a positive impact on creation.

## **Prayer**

Lord, forgive me for actions I have taken that harm your creation. Please guide me to be more aware of protecting the world you have made. Help me see how the actions I take affect your creation and my brothers and sisters around the world. Guide my decisions to live in shalom with all of creation.

END

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