

# Good News people

## Study 5: The Gospel and Creation: "reconciling all things to God"

### Leader's Notes



Aim: to encourage people to see creation care as an integral part of God's mission.

#### Opening discussion:

1. Without opening bibles, invite the group to tell the story of Jonah with as much detail as they can remember.
2. In what ways do we share a similar mission to Jonah's?
3. How many elements of the natural world feature in the story of Jonah?

*ch.1: sea, storm, wind, big fish.*

*ch2: currents, waves and breakers, seaweed, roots of the mountains, shore.*

*ch3: dust, herds of cattle, flocks of sheep.*

*ch 4: branches [for shelter], vine, worm, scorching east wind, blazing sun, many cattle.*

### Reading: Jonah chapter 3.

1. Jonah's message in v 4 refers to an imminent destruction which (according to v10) the citizens of Nineveh avoided by turning from "their evil ways". However, we're given no details about what form that destruction would take or what kind of evil ways the people turned away from.

If we were to fill in these details ourselves and relate them to our own society, how far would the form of destruction be ecological and how far would the evil ways be our greedy and thoughtless behaviour towards the natural world?

*The word used for 'destroyed/overturned' in v4 is the same as that used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, implying a violent event within nature rather than a military overthrow. Many coastal cities are at risk of rising sea levels, exacerbated by human induced global warming. A 2017 report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (the pre-eminent climate science agency in the US) estimates sea levels could rise by more than eight feet by 2100; a grave threat to many coastal cities. The Thames Barrier will soon need upgrading.*

*Another topical issue concerns the citizens of Cape Town, South Africa, who are currently on water rationing and face having their taps turned off in favour of stand-pipes by April 2018 because of three*

*years of drought. Wildfires in California destroyed a million acres and killed 40 people during 2017. So far, action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has been insufficient to prevent such distressing scenarios from becoming more frequent.*

2. Notice how the call to fast and wear sackcloth in v7-8 included the animals.

What does this imply about our common predicament?

Should we feel convicted by the very last verse of Jonah (4v11) regarding our attitude to God's creatures?

*The last four words of the Book of Jonah, according to the RSV Bible, are: "and also much cattle."*

*The attitude Jonah displayed towards creation in chapter 4 was entirely self-centred and utilitarian.*

*He valued the plant only for the shade it offered to him; not for it being "good" in God's eyes (Gen 1), and for its value to the ecosystem (food for other creatures – including the worm!)*

*The Book of Jonah is a lesson in how God requires us not just to fulfill his mission, but to do so with grace towards our fellow human beings and towards the natural world in which we all live.*

3. What caused the king of Nineveh to take action? (v5-6).

What are the implications of this for how we campaign for creation care?

*Repentance began with the people – v5, and it was only when news reached the king that he took action.*

*It was rather like the applause at Princess Diana's funeral after Earl Spencer's speech which began outside among the crowds before spreading into the Abbey to be taken up by the dignitaries.*

*It looks like Jonah may have needed the voice of ordinary citizens to help him convince those in power.*

In Luke 10, Jesus encourages the people he sent out on mission to look for "people of peace" to stay and work with. Who are the "people of peace" when it comes to creation care? How might working alongside such people enhance our witness for Jesus – to them and to others?

*More chance to engage with people on issues they care about; deeper conversations when you are serving alongside people in a common task; etc... Correcting impression people may have gained in the past that Christians aren't interested in the environment – only "saving souls". Also, many people feel more in touch with their spirituality when outside appreciating nature and this can make them more open to meaningful conversations.*

Readings: Colossians 1vs 19-20; Romans 8 vs 19-21

Ask someone to read these short passages.

How do these scriptures reinforce the idea that creation care is part of our God-given mission?

*God's desire – through Jesus – "to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on or earth*

*or things in heaven." God also wants to see creation "liberated from bondage" as well as humanity – (Luke 4v18, session 2).*

### Concluding thoughts:

Last week we looked at the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Has this story got anything to say about our care for creation?

- *An important role for the donkey!*
- *Have we in the affluent west robbed those living in poorer countries of their resources “leaving [them] half-dead”? Surely, those people of different nationalities who are suffering the effects of our fossil-fuel-driven economies are our neighbours too?*
- *Could our neighbours also include the tame and wild animals we share this planet with? How could we restore them (as the Samaritan did the wounded man) to the life God created them for?*
- *Should we also think about our neighbours in time? Are we robbing future generations of the healthy environment they will need to live fulfilled lives? How can we invest our equivalent of the Samaritan’s two silver coins to ensure this planetary “inn” can continue to heal the damage caused by past and present ecological crimes?*

### **Something to consider:**

1. Are there any practical ways we can include creation care within the mission God has given us, both as individuals and as a church?

With your church leaders prayerfully consider whether there be someone in your church who already has a passion for this and the gifting to encourage others and may act as a creation care champion among you?

2. With your church leaders, consider whether there might be a local group/organization\* who feel passionately about our environment. Might they be interested in sharing/hosting with your church (or a particular group from your church) an event exploring some of ecological challenges that we face - and helpful responses to them? Is there scope, for example, for some sort of exhibition in or beyond your church premises (maybe held for one week)? If so, might classes from local schools and other community groups be invited to come and see the exhibition as part of their learning? You could conclude with an interactive All Age service on Sunday which focuses on creation care etc. - maybe even hold an appropriate lunch (Fair Trade etc.). (You could apply for a Home Mission Project Grant to help with funding for this).

\*Such as Transition Town initiatives, the Wildlife Trusts, canal restoration groups, etc...