

Study 3 - Love, Justice and Creation

Jesus tells us to love our God with all our heart with all our soul and with all our mind and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Our call to love God directs us to care for the things that he cares about, including the earth and its people. Our call to love our neighbour means that we must be aware when our use of God's creation harms others. The first Caring for Creation study looked at elements of the command to love God and aimed to give us insight into what our response should be to Creation. This study looks at the second command and aims to develop our understanding of how 'loving our neighbour' affects the way we deal with the environment and climate change.

1. From the other studies, it may be apparent already that climate change is much more than just an environmental issue. It is also just as critically a justice and relational issue. From the other studies, it may be apparent already that climate change is much more than just an environmental issue. It is also just as critically a justice and relational issue. If I recklessly destroy a fruit tree, I could be accused of needlessly harming the environment. If I destroy my neighbour's fruit tree, (s)he'll will have a right to get pretty angry and demand that I make amends.

How would you feel if your neighbour started tearing up plants in your garden (if you have one)? How does this compare to how our actions are affecting developing nations through climate change?

Watch "IRIN News – Creeping Desert"

2. In the world today, around 1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water. Unchecked climate change is set to make this problem far worse. Though Australian water supplies will be affected by climate change, the average Australian continues to consume around 286L of water per day (*ABS Water Account, 2006*).

Think about the way we use and enjoy water now, contrast this to Alioune's (the nomad identified in the video) predicament. How would it change the way you use water if you and the members of your family had to each live on 25L of water per day?

3. Jesus commands us to love our neighbour, but this often begs the question 'who is my neighbour' and specifically if Alioune the nomad is 'our neighbour'. When Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan he addresses this very issue.

Read: Luke 10:25-37

What many do not realise is that the command to love your neighbour was not first uttered by Jesus but rather it was part of Old Testament Law. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The issue confronting people in Jesus' day was who then do they consider to be a "neighbour". Many simply believed that it referred to someone from "among your people". That is an Israelite should show love to fellow Israelites

but were under no compulsion to love foreigners. How does the parable of the Good Samaritan address this question? What implication does this carry for the way we respond to those throughout the world that are being affected by climate change, like Alioune? What particular things could you do to show love to Alioune and those like him?

4. In the story of the good Samaritan the Israelite is beaten by robbers and left half dead. The Samaritan acts out of compassion in tending to the Israelite man even though he did nothing to contribute to the man's suffering. On this point, our place in Alioune's story is arguably very different to that of the Samaritan's, for our actions may well have contributed to his suffering. Given this it is helpful to reflect on the teaching of the prophet Amos.

Amos prophesied during a time where Israel was enjoying great prosperity and had reached new heights of political and economic strength. However as Israel's prosperity increased, so too did its moral corruption and societal injustice – "You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain... you oppress the righteous and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts"(Amos 5: 11-12). The following verses show Amos chastising Israel for its unwillingness to follow God's will, to serve the poor and to seek justice.

Read: Amos 5:21-24

Australian's are now the biggest per capita emitter of greenhouse gas emissions in the world. In contrast to this the poor and developing nations have contributed 1% (or less) of the greenhouse gasses that are in the atmosphere. If the climate science is accurate, it is partly because of our actions and nations like us that the deserts of the Sahara continue to grow and that individuals like Alioune will find it ever harder to get access to water. Do you believe that this is a breach of justice? If so, what do you believe this passage in Amos has to say to Christians in Australia and other developed nations about how they practice their faith?

5. The problem of human caused climate change is not one that we were aware of or could have predicted when we began the modern industrialisation process. Prior to 1800 humanity had relied on energy from just a few sources, like fuel wood, some wind energy or the stored energy of the sun in food. Since this time however, technological breakthroughs have allowed us to tap into the captured energy that is stored in fuels like coal, oil and natural gas. This caused an explosion of growth, which for many nations helped to increase wealth, generate new medical technologies, reduce child mortality, improve access to education and increase life expectancies. However, we are now realising that we cannot keep using this energy the same way we have in the past without doing significant harm to Creation, including those that are now amongst the world's poorest. The concept of

“sustainable development” provides a framework on how to tread lightly on this planet whilst still allowing for further progress and development for all people.

The United Nation’s Bruntland report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Given that God has created the earth to sustain not just the current generation, but the generations that have come before and those that will come after, do you agree that the mandate to love our neighbour extends to future generations? What are some of the reasons then that Christians should be concerned with sustainable development?

Factbox

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is widely recognised as having three pillars: economic, social and environmental. In economic and financial circles these together are often referred to as the triple bottom line. They form a framework to guide society to no longer think about growth and progress in purely economic terms.

The economic component is concerned with increasing material living standards. The social component looks at ensuring that development is equitable, that all people have access to its benefits and that non-economic and non-material needs are also accounted for. The environmental component focuses on ecological sustainability and preserving the earth’s bio-diversity.

Though progress is being made, on most measures society is failing the sustainable development test. While the material needs of some in the current generation are being met, billions of others do not have access to adequate resources. And even for those who have their material needs met, many of their other needs continue to be unfulfilled. There have been some wins for the environment, such as fixing the problems of the ozone layer and increased awareness about the importance of bio-diversity, however the manner and magnitude of current production is severely damaging the environment and left unchecked will compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Climate change and over consumption of resources continue to pose the most serious environmental threats.

By following a path focused on sustainable development rather than just economic

6. The concept of sustainable development echoes forth from wisdom that some people have known for hundreds of years. There is an ancient Native American Proverb that states, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”.

Spend some time thinking about the world you would like to 'return' to your children and/or the children of those all around the globe. What would that look like?

7. Consider taking some action now to help people struggling to get access to clean water like Alioune, or others that are suffering from the crippling effects of climate change. There are a number of projects that you or your group could donate to do this. Baptist World Aid Australia's Commit to Community programs help poor communities build resilience, while The Baptist World Aid Australia Emergency Relief fund goes to help people suffering from a crisis. Not all of these will be climate related, but the need for relief funds continue to increase with the increasing frequency of climate induced disasters. Donate via baptistworldaid.org.au

You can also join with Catalyst in lobbying the government to set up a climate change adaptation fund, an international fund designed to specifically help people dealing with the effects of climate change which include increasing water scarcity, failing crops, disease, coastal inundation, floods, droughts and storms.

Just for Kicks

Australian's are also so affluent now that we think nothing of spending \$2-\$3 on a bottle of water, an amount greater than the daily income of 3 billion people. We do this despite the fact that tap water is available to us for virtually nothing.

Commit to going on a bottled water fast. When you go out just take a refillable bottle of tap water. Not only is tap water about 2000 times cheaper, it's healthier too. Stacks of energy goes into the production bottled water so you'll cut back on green house gas emissions as well. You can then use the money that you save to donate to projects that help people suffering from the impacts of climate change, like the ones above. You'll be healthier, you'll save lives and you'll reduce your climate impact.

IRIN News – Creeping Desert, Mauritiana (Transcript)

Alioune Ouhd Modhi {Nomad}: *We are going to get water - but it's very far. We have to go 13 kilometres.*

Narrator: These people are members of Poole tribe, nomads and herders by tradition. They have lived on the fringes of the desert for centuries, but each year the desert spreads and places that use to be semi-arid are now too dry to support them. Most have now given up their nomadic ways in order to be near to main water sources. Life has been reduced to little more than an endless search for water.

Alioune meanwhile has arrived at the water source and started digging

Alioune: When I was young it was easy to get water. Not these days. We have to dig many holes to get water. Sometimes I dig 12 holes and still don't find water. I spend most of the day looking for water. It's our biggest problem.

Narrator: A problem made worse by the large herds of animals that the poole keep. Not only must they find water for themselves but their animals as well. Being their only means of livelihood, the animals come first. And with the Sahara growing by thousands of square kilometres every year, this struggle for survival will only intensify.