

Preparation for Session G31-- Our Place in Nature

Our next Small Group Ministry gathering will focus on ecology, which, according to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, is "the branch of biology dealing with the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms" We will be examining our attitudes and actions with regard to this issue. In preparation, please think about these questions. On the reverse of this sheet are some readings that might help stimulate your thinking.

We will also be deciding on a one-time environmental project to do as a group. Please look over the list of upcoming projects and choose several that appeal to you. (If you know of another possible project, feel free to bring information about it.) Be sure to bring your calendar so we can set a date.

* * * * *

What feelings do you have about making personal efforts to live in harmony with the Earth and improve the environment? What level of personal responsibility should individuals assume? Do you feel you can make a difference? What are some ways you can magnify your effect?

List some of the things you do now that have a positive effect on our planet.

List some things you think you should do for the environment but haven't gotten around to yet.*

Think of a "stretch goal," something that you could do to make a significant difference in the environment that would involve some degree of sacrifice on your part.

* These books and Web sites provide information about practical measures you can take to make a positive difference in the environment.

The Green Home Handbook, Friends of the Earth 1996

Don't Throw it All Away!, Friends of the Earth 1998

Use Less Stuff: Environmental Solutions for Who We Really Are by Robert M. Lilienfeld & William L. Rathje (Fawcett 1998)

Blueprint for a Green Planet by John Seymour & Herbert Girardet (Prentice Hall, 1987)

50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth, The Earth Works Group, 1989

<http://www.mattneuman.com/49simple.htm>

<http://www.under-one-roof.net/spiritual/earthcare.html>

http://www.talkcity.com/theinsite/earth/earth_simple_things.html

http://www.ran.org/info_center/factsheets/01c.html

<http://www.baaction.org/earthday/10things.html>

<http://www.coopamerica.org/individual/marketplace/IMBSTT01.HTM>

<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/1996/9604/earthday.htm>

Basic Principles of Deep Ecology

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. The richness and diversity of life forms are also values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
6. Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation, directly or indirectly, to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

- Bill Devall & George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, read an excellent sermon , "A Case for Deep Ecology" by a Unitarian minister, the Rev. Sam Trumbore:

<http://www.cyberstreet.com/trumbore/sermons/s623.htm>

"The edifice of civilization has become astonishingly complex, but as it grows ever more elaborate, we feel increasingly distant from our roots in the earth. In one sense, civilization itself has been on a journey from its foundations in the world of nature to an ever more contrived, controlled, and manufactured world of our own imitative and sometimes arrogant design. And in my view, the price has been high. At some point during this journey we lost our feeling of connectedness to the rest of nature. We now dare to wonder: Are we so unique and powerful as to be essentially separate from the earth."

- Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance, Ecology and the Human Spirit*

"Most inhabitants of the developed Western nations are aware by now that the demands that we are making on our planet are excessive and that our present course is unsustainable. Most of us have an uneasy feeling that all is not well aboard spaceship Earth and that we, as individuals, should really do something about it.

But there are two considerations that many of us feel exonerate us from doing anything. The first is that we think the present state of abundance will last for our lifetime at least. There can be no one who does not realize that our oil supplies will run out one day. But they surely won't run out in *our* time? And if we have children -- well, what happens after we have gone is their worry, isn't it? The second consideration is that in a world which already has an estimated population of four billion souls, surely what one individual does or does not do cannot matter a damn? ...

There are four angles from which to look at every action that is open to us. First, is its effect good, bad or neutral, on our living planet? Second, if its effect is good, how can we encourage and extend it? Third, if its effect is bad, how can we do without it? Fourth, if we think we *cannot* do without it, then what action can we take to reduce or mitigate its damage? ...

- John Seymour & Herbert Girardet, *Blueprint for a Green Planet*