STUDY GUIDE

WHAT ABOUT: the environment (Week 5)
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Genesis 1.

11 Then God said, ``Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed,and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them''; and it was so.12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good....20 Then God said, ``Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.''21 God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good....

24 Then God said, ``Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind''; and it was so.25 God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

Goodness of Creation
Some argue that Christianity promotes the exploitation of creation. Lynn White's famous 1967 article claims that:

Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. ... Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. ... We shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.
- *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*

However, if you look at the Bible, it clearly claims that even before man was created, creation was good. In and of itself, creation was good.

Questions for Reflection
1.   Why do you think people hold opinions similar to Lynn White's?

Ought. Is. Can. Will.

While most may not agree "why," most would agree that something is "wrong" with the world. Crime, greed, abuse, pollution and on and on goes the list of things that don't seem "right." Things were created GOOD but they aren't all GOOD now. What happened? If you analyze the problems you face, you might hear yourself saying things like this:

"It shouldn't be this way, but it is. But, I can do something to fix it and so I will."

This universal pattern can be reflected in four simple words: Ought, Is, Can, Will. This isn't was is supposed to be but something went wrong but this is what I will do to restore the situation. Further delineated, we might express these ideas in this way:

Creation: things were made perfect
                    Fall: what is is not what should be
Redemption: we can do things to fix it
                    Restoration: ultimately, things will be made new.

CREATION. FALL. REDEMPTION. RESTORATION.

Questions for Reflection
2.   Can you see this pattern play out in the problems you face today?

Our Call.

When God created mankind He told us to cultivate the earth. To care for it. Like a curator in a museum, we are called to care for God's artwork...His earth.

> *...the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. - Genesis 2:15*

The Fall.

Unfortunately, it didn't take long for mankind to mess up God's plan. Instead of doing things God's way, we decided to disobey and when we did that, things dramatically shifted:

> *...to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field;19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." - Genesis 3:17*

Questions for Reflection

3.   Do you think you fully comprehend the effects of sin on the earth? Why or why not?

Redemption.

Even though mankind disobeyed and brought sin into the world, God wasn't about to give up on the Earth or man. God has always had a plan to redeem and save:

> *I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth.14 "It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud,15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. - Genesis 9:13*

God enters a covenant with something to save it. God has a covenant with us AND the earth. In light of that, Christians should do whatever they can to make sure the Earth is used responsibly. This doesn't mean that the earth is elevated ABOVE God, but it does mean that man has a responsibility to care for the earth and cultivate it.

> **We Redeem because of our mandate, and our love for life, all life.**

This means we push back against the effects of sin in our world and fight to redeem what has gone wrong. Perhaps C.S. Lewis said it best when he wrote:

> *When a Christian is confronted with cancer or anything wrong in nature, the secular person may say: this is just the way things are. But the Christian replies don't talk such damn nonsense for Christianity is a fighting religion. It thinks God made the world that space and time, heat and cold and all of the colors and tastes and all the animals and vegetables are things that God has made up out of his head. ... But, it also thinks that many things have gone wrong with the world and that God insists and insists very loudly in our putting those things right again.*

When Jesus sees his good friend dead because of a sickness, Jesus shows us a vivid picture of God's attitude toward illness and how a broken world has lead to death and disease:

> *When Jesus saw them weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." John 11:33*

Jesus is FURIOUS (*en-bri - mē-sato*) because He knows this isn't the way it is supposed to be. So he steps into redeem this situation:

He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."
- John 11:43

Questions for Reflection
4.   How can we be a part of restoring creation? Think about animals, plants and humans (we are, after all, a part of creation!)

Restoration

It is one thing to redeem a situation, it is entirely different to restore something to its original deign...or to restore it to better than new. That is what God says He will do:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains;12 Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy13 Before the LORD, for He is coming, For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness. - Psalm 96:11

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." - Revelation 21:1

Jesus will ultimately say "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH"... enough crying, enough tears, enough cancer, enough poverty, enough hunger, enough is enough is enough. He will gather all who have humbly come to Him and restore all that has been lost and we will celebrate.

Questions for Reflection
5.   Describe restoration in your own words.