

And the Leaves of the Tree Are for the Healing of the Nations

Study Guide—Single Session Overview

Instructions for Leaders

This study session was designed to be used in conjunction with the resource, *And the Leaves of the Tree Are for the Healing of the Nations* (Carol Johnston, 2006). You will find it useful for an adult or youth retreat, an officer training event, a Lenten study, an earth care working group, or for personal devotions. Portions of the study are ideal for ecumenical, interfaith or community groups who may come together with a common concern for God's good creation. The study is expected to take approximately two hours to complete. If your group has only an hour to devote to the study, please feel free to adjust activity times as needed or complete only a few of the activities.

Each participant should have a copy of the companion resource, *And the Leaves of the Tree Are for the Healing of the Nations*, as well as this study guide. If possible, participants should have read *And the Leaves of the Tree Are for the Healing of the Nations* before participating in this study. The companion resource can be downloaded in digital form or ordered in hard copy at www.pcusa.org/environment.

Materials needed: chalkboard or newsprint pad, markers, beanbag or plastic ball, clay or play dough, index cards and pens

Opening

1. Arrange the room with chairs in a circle if possible.
2. Welcome the participants and begin with prayer. Introduce yourself and the theme of this study. Explain that while it is helpful to have read the resource ahead of time, everyone is welcome to participate in the discussion.
▶ 5 minutes
3. Throw a beanbag or soft plastic ball to a person across the circle. The person who catches the ball should tell his/her name and then name some aspect of God's creation he/she enjoys. That person throws the ball to another person who will do the same. This can continue until everyone has had two or three opportunities to speak.
▶ 10 minutes

4. Pass out pieces of clay or play dough and ask participants to model some element of God's creation. Ask volunteers to show their creations to the other members of the group and to tell what they have created. After several presentations, ask the following questions to the whole group:
 - How does it feel to create something?
 - How would you feel if someone in the group destroyed or laughed at what you just made?
 - Does this exercise offer any insight as to how God might expect humans to treat the creation?

Arrange the creations on a table where they can be seen by the whole group.

▶ 20 minutes

Exploring

5. Provide an overview of the resource. (The five *Talking Points for Leaders* in the 5-session study guide provide helpful summaries of the chapters. The 5-session study guide can be found at www.pcusa.org/environment.) Invite those who have read the resource ahead of time to offer additional contributions to the overview.
- 10 minutes

Reflecting

6. Ask participants to tell their responses to the resource (or to the overview just provided). You may use the following questions to get the discussion started:
- What surprised you in the reading?
 - What questions did the reading raise for you?
 - What were the most important ideas you got from the resource?
 - What actions did you feel you were being asked to take?
 - How did you feel about the reading? ► 15 minutes
7. Provide a **10-minute break**.
8. Read aloud Genesis 1:1–2:4a, asking each participant to read a verse or two. If someone does not feel comfortable reading aloud, explain that it is appropriate to say “pass” when his/her time comes. Ask the following questions:
- What is the relationship of the creation to the Creator?
 - What do you find comforting or awe-inspiring about this passage from Genesis?
 - What questions or concerns do you have about this passage?
 - How do you think human beings have done with their job of caring for the creation? Give examples. ► 20 minutes
9. Read aloud John 3:16. Explain that the word translated as “world” can also mean “cosmos.” Ask the following questions:
- Why do you think God loves the world (or cosmos) so much?

- What does this tell us about the proper human response to God’s world? ► 10 minutes

Responding

10. Pass out index cards and pens. Ask the following question and allow about 3 minutes of silent reflection. People should jot their answers on their index cards:
- The Biblical and theological foundations encountered in the resource and in our group discussion call us to faithful discipleship. What sort of actions are we called to do as caregivers for God’s creation?

After a time of silence, divide the participants into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker. Ask each person to share one or more of his/her action ideas. One member of the group should write all of the ideas on the newsprint sheet.

Each group should report its ideas to the whole gathering. Post the newsprint sheets on the walls of the room.

Ask the following questions:

- Do you see any similarities in the ideas mentioned?
- Do any of these ideas stand out as especially important to this organization (congregation, community, committee)?
- Is there anything here that you think would provide a good direction for this group to undertake in the near future?
- What next steps do you think we should take?
- Who would be the best people or groups to take the lead in the next steps? ► 25 minutes

Closing

11. Pray for the group members, for the ideas mentioned, and for God’s creation. Close by reading in unison the following Affirmation of Faith. ► 5 minutes

Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God, the Creator and Lord of all that is.
In your hand is the life of every thing--
of trees and plants, animals and insects--
and the breath of every human being.

I believe in Jesus the Christ, the Redeemer of all that we
have damaged,
our broken souls and our broken world,
who offers new life when we love our neighbors,
neighbors sun and soil, water and air.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer of this community
and future generations,
and the source of hope and courage to care about creation,
especially when sustainability seems hopeless.

We promise to work together and with God, to be stewards
of this gift, our home.

(written by 2009 Eco Stewards for the Faith and Environment Conference,
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