

PART 1 - THE PROBLEM

Either read this quote at the start of the group, or have it posted where it's quite visible as the young people enter.

"I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."

-Gus Speth, climate scientist

INTRODUCTION

What do you think are the top environmental issues? Hand out these options on strips of paper, or visibly post these options, and have the young people discuss and arrange them in order of importance. (Print out available in Appendix 1)

Don't feel the need to correct the group during this activity, or comment on the order they choose, but move directly into the Scripture reading.

READ

Romans 8:20-22 "20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

DISCUSS

What do you think "God's curse" means? And why does the Bible say creation is in pain? (take just a few answers, but then move onto the following activity. You can say "here's something that might help us understand this verse.")

ACTIVITY



You will need: cloth bag with medicine cabinet contents, print out of Appendix 2

In a cloth bag, bring in a Lemsip, cough syrup, a box of tissues, calamine lotion and other items from your medicine cupboard. Bring them out one by one (or if appropriate have the kids pull them from the bag) and guess what kind of ailment someone might have if they needed these things. Allow them to share stories about their own experience with sickness if it comes up!

Christians believe that sin is the root cause of **all** that is wrong in our world, including climate change. This world is not running the way God intended it to, because we all do things out of selfishness, greed, etc. that negatively affect our environment and the whole planet.

Sometimes we think of sin as individual wrong acts like stealing or murder. Many people think that if they can keep themselves from doing these things, they would never sin! But it might be more helpful to think of **sin as a virus**. You can treat the symptoms of a virus, e.g. giving an ill person a tissue or even a paracetamol, but ultimately the virus itself must be dealt with for a patient to get better.

And **sin** is like a virus that all of humanity has! Its symptoms can be seen everywhere: stealing, murder, lying... and the harming of our environment. Climate change is a symptom of sin in the world, sin that ultimately comes from every human heart. Even if climate change is solved and the earth's temperature stops rising, humanity will never stop finding ways to destroy ourselves and this world until sin is defeated!

At the end, pull out and read the words of Mark 7:21-24 *'²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.'* This verse lists just a few symptoms of the illness called **sin**... an illness that we all have! I'm ill with sin, you're ill with sin, the whole world is groaning because of **sin**! And sin is also the cause of climate change and the destruction of the environment.

ACTIVITY



You will need: Video links and hand-outs available in Appendix 3 & 4

Split the group in two and invite each group to watch a short video and read a short article about two major environmental disasters: the Exxon-Valdez oil spill in the 1980s and the evaporation of the Aral Sea since the 1960s.

Have the small groups discuss one question: What were the root causes of the environmental disaster?

PRAY



Apathy is mentioned in the opening quote, what does that word mean? It is another heart condition, a sin, that hugely contributes to climate change. James 4:17 describes apathy perfectly: *'Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.'*

Understanding that sin is the ultimate cause of climate change shouldn't make us apathetic - it should motivate us! We know the root cause, and

we know the good things we can do to stop climate change!

Lord, forgive us for the sin of apathy. Holy Spirit, help motivate us to do the good things we know we should do, especially as we think about how to heal our environment and planet.

THE PROBLEM: APPENDIX 1

Environmental Problems:

Coal Power Plants (releases greenhouse gas CO₂)

Petrol Transportation (releases greenhouse gas CO₂)

Single-use Plastics/Waste/Landfills

Oil Spills

Deforestation

Ocean Pollution (plastics and habitat destruction)

Toxic Waste/Dumping of Chemicals

Oil and Gas Drilling

Use of Pesticides and Fertilizers in Farming

Raising Cattle (produces greenhouse gas methane)

Biodiversity Loss (destruction of habitats, endangered species, etc.)

THE PROBLEM: APPENDIX 2

²¹For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you." Mark 7:21-24

APPENDIX 3: EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL

Appendix 3: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7hfQ8mTVrU>

Recap: *An oil tanker, the Exxon Valdez, hits a reef in Alaska, spilling 10.8 million gallons of crude oil.*

Taken From Wikipedia:

Multiple factors have been identified as contributing to the incident:

- Exxon Shipping Company failed to supervise the ship's captain and provide a rested and sufficient crew for Exxon Valdez. This practice was widespread throughout the industry.
- The third mate failed to properly manoeuvre the vessel, possibly due to fatigue or excessive workload.
- Exxon Shipping Company failed to properly maintain the Raytheon Collision Avoidance System (RAYCAS) radar, which, if functional, would have indicated to the third mate an impending collision by detecting the "radar reflector," placed on the next rock inland from Bligh Reef for the purpose of keeping ships on course.

Captain Joseph Hazelwood, who was widely reported to have been drinking heavily that night, was not at the controls when the ship struck the reef. Exxon blamed Captain Hazelwood for the grounding of the tanker, but Hazelwood accused the corporation of making him a scapegoat. As the senior officer in command of the ship, he was accused of being intoxicated and thereby contributing to the disaster, but he was cleared of this charge at his 1990 trial after witnesses testified that he was sober around the time of the accident.

Journalist Greg Palast stated in 2008: "Forget the drunken skipper fable. As to Captain Joe Hazelwood, he was below decks, sleeping off his bender. At the helm, the third mate may never have collided with Bligh Reef had he looked at his RAYCAS radar. But the radar was not turned on. In fact, the tanker's radar was left broken and disabled for more than a year before the disaster, and Exxon management knew it. It was just too expensive to fix and operate."

APPENDIX 4: THE ARAL SEA DISASTER

Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzvEW1FHc60>

Recap: *In the 1960s the Soviet Union diverted the rivers that fed the Aral Sea for irrigation use. Since that time, over 90% of the Aral sea has disappeared, and irresponsible agricultural practices have made the region a toxic wasteland.*

Taken From Wikipedia:

The Aral Sea is considered an example of ecosystem collapse. The ecosystems of the Aral Sea and the river deltas feeding into it have been nearly destroyed, not least because of the much higher salt levels. The receding sea has left huge plains covered with salt and toxic chemicals resulting from weapons testing, industrial projects, and pesticides and fertilizer runoff. ...Due to the minimal amount of water left in the Aral Sea, concentrations of these pollutants have risen drastically in remaining water and dry beds. These make for wind-borne toxic dust that spreads quite widely. As a result, the land mentioned is heavily polluted, where inhabitants are suffering from a lack of fresh water and health problems, including high rates of certain forms of cancer and lung diseases.

The disappearance of the lake was no surprise to the Soviets, they expected it to happen long before. As early as 1964, Aleksandr Asarin pointed out that the lake was doomed, explaining, "It was part of the five-year plans, approved by the council of ministers and the Politburo. Nobody on a lower level would dare to say a word contradicting those plans, even if it was the fate of the Aral Sea."

The reaction to the predictions varied. Some Soviet experts apparently considered the Aral to be "nature's error", and a Soviet engineer said in 1968, "it is obvious to everyone that the evaporation of the Aral Sea is inevitable." On the other hand, starting in the 1960s, a large-scale project was proposed to refill the Aral Sea. However, due to its staggering costs and the negative public opinion in Russia proper, the authorities abandoned the project by 1986.

Later, in the 1990s, some attribute the shrinkage of the Aral Sea to Uzbekistan president Karimov's cotton policy. The enormous irrigation system was massively wasteful, crop rotation was not used, and huge quantities of pesticides and fertilizer were applied. The runoff from the fields washed these chemicals into the shrinking sea, creating severe pollution and health problems. Forced labour was used and profits siphoned off by the powerful and well-connected.

PART 2 - THE SOLUTION

Either read this quote at the start of the group, or have it posted where it's quite visible as the young people enter.

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READ



Romans 8:20-22 NLT "20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

DISCUSS: FEAR AND SHAME



You will need: three pieces of flipchart paper, colouring pens or sharpies.

The Bible says all of creation will someday be free of death and pain. That's good news! But how will that happen? Split into two groups and give each group a piece of poster or flipchart paper. On the top of one paper write fear and on the other shame, and have each group design one monster, either fear or shame. What does the fear monster look like? What does the shame monster look like? Use this as an

Use this as an opportunity to get the group thinking about what these words mean and how fear and shame make them feel.

To transition, ask the group: *'How have fear and shame been used to try and save the environment, or stop climate change? Do you agree or disagree with using shame and fear to make people care for the planet?'* Write down a few of the group's thoughts on the pages with the monsters.

Christians believe that God desires to save this world through His Son, Jesus Christ - not through shame or fear! (Option: at this point you could also bring out a pre-prepared paper with a simple outline of a cross, and either John 3:16 or Psalm 24:1.) Christ came to love and save his creation so that it would no longer be enslaved to sin. Environmental care is a part of Jesus' mission in the world, and each of us can be a part of His redemption plan when we believe in and follow Jesus. And this is so exciting because God's plan doesn't just deal with a few problems in the world, but with the root cause of everything that's wrong: sin!

ACTIVITY OPTION 1

THUMBS UP OR THUMBS DOWN



A Christian catchphrase from the 1990s was WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? So, what do you think Jesus would think and be doing about climate change and the environment, if he were physically here today? Have the young people respond to the questions below with thumbs up for "yes", thumbs down for "no." There are no right or wrong answers here, just try and tease out from kids why they think Jesus would or wouldn't do any of these things:

- Would Jesus drive a petrol car?
- Would Jesus eat organic?
- Would Jesus join a group like Extinction Rebellion?
- Would Jesus join climate change protests?
- Would Jesus recycle?
- Would Jesus petition the government to make environmental changes?
- Would Jesus compost?
- Would Jesus be a vegetarian?
- Would Jesus be a vegan?
- What else might Jesus do, if he were here now??

Does your life and care for the environment look like the Jesus you imagined? What areas of our lives need to be transformed so that we're more like Jesus? Maybe this is to do with your care of the environment, or maybe there's something else in your life that needs to change. To finish, we are going to take some time in prayer to ask for the Holy Spirit to show us how we should change and grow, to be more Christ-like in every way.

ACTIVITY OPTION 2

DESERTS INTO POOLS OF WATER



You Will Need: large posterboard, colouring or art supplies

Read: Isaiah 41:17-20 NIV. As we read this passage, think about how God wants to transform both us and our world from desert wastelands to thriving ecosystems. In what areas of your life or situations would you like to see transformation from the Holy Spirit?

*'The poor and needy search for water,
but there is none;
their tongues are parched with thirst.
But I the LORD will answer them;
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.
18 I will make rivers flow on barren heights,
and springs within the valleys.
I will turn the desert into pools of water,
and the parched ground into springs.
19 I will put in the desert
the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive.
I will set junipers in the wasteland,
the fir and the cypress together,
20 so that people may see and know,
may consider and understand,
that the hand of the LORD has done this,
that the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

Prepare a large piece of paper or posterboard. This can be white, yellow or brown to represent a desert. Using any art supplies you like (pens, paints, crayons, paper cutting and pasting, etc.) have the group create a small mural together to turn the wasteland into an oasis with images of water and greenery.

PRAY



Jesus, help us to not give into shame or fear, but to know your deep love for us, that leads to our transformation. We pray that our lives and our world would be freed from sin, healed and transformed by you. Help us to trust you and to be a part of your great saving plan.