

ROOTED FAITH

PRACTICES *for* LIVING WELL
on a FRAGILE PLANET

STUDY GUIDE

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USING THIS GUIDE

This study guide is designed to help you reflect on the main ideas in the book, either by yourself or as part of a book club, Sunday school class, or other community group. I hope that it also helps you begin to practice living well on our fragile planet as you connect your faith with your everyday life.

As you prepare to read this book, here are some questions to get you thinking:

- What do you know about the non-human inhabitants of your landscape?
- What are you most worried about when you think about the earth?
- What have you heard from faith leaders about the role of faith in caring for the earth?

The study guide for each chapter contains several elements that can be adapted for you or your group to use as needed. Each session begins with a grounding exercise to help you connect with the earth in a tangible way, followed by a scripture to orient the discussion. The guided questions are meant to help foster a productive conversation about the material in the book and help you connect it with your own experience. There is a closing prayer at the end that you can recite throughout the week as a reminder of your commitment to caring for the earth.

INTRODUCTION

GROUNDING EXERCISE

As an opening meditation, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Concentrate on how your body feels in this particular time and place. Where are you holding tension? What worries and joys do you bring with you here? Take a few more breaths and focus on the present moment. When you open your eyes, look around at those gathered with you, and offer a smile to someone. Sometimes the plight of our earth can be a frightening thing to talk about, but there are many others who also care deeply about our fragile planet.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. What were you taught about nature when you were growing up? When you think about nature and your faith, do these seem like separate things, or do they seem connected?
2. How do you feel the tension between the shalom of creation depicted in the Bible and the consumer culture we all inhabit in the modern world? What are some ways you might work in your own life to foster the kin-dom of heaven where you are?
3. When you hear about climate-related disasters on the news, what is your first reaction? Do you feel anxious and upset? Do you feel tension in your body? Do you have the urge to reassure yourself that this is happening somewhere else and so you don't need to be worried? (Be gentle with yourself and remember these are all common responses to our almost daily onslaught of bad news.)

CLOSING PRAYER

O Holy One,

fill us with wonder at the beauty of your creation.

Break open our hearts to both the joy and the tragedy that unfolds daily on this earth.

Help us be your eyes and hands in the world this week, working to restore your creation.

Amen.

ALL CREATION IS ALIVE

GROUNDING EXERCISE

If possible, go outside and take off your shoes. Feel the grass, dirt, leaves, or concrete beneath you. Take a few deep breaths and feel the energy of the earth enter through the soles of your feet. Take a moment to sense the world around you. Do you feel wind on your face? Do you feel the warmth of the sun or the cold bite of a winter day? If you are inside, what natural elements do you see and feel around you—whether a stone or wood floor, or sunlight reflected through a window?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Psalm 98:4–9.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. On page 32, the quotes from David Abram describe how we are sometimes literally moved by the natural elements of the world around us. Have you ever had an experience in nature that moved you? What did you feel like afterward? How do these experiences relate to your faith, if at all?
2. *Animism* is a word used to describe the concept of a sentient earth full of beings who are not necessarily human. Does it feel like a stretch to think of creation as being alive? If so, why?
3. On page 40, the author describes the Celtic practice of studying the two books of scripture: the Bible and creation. What is one way you might study the book of creation in your daily life?
4. How might the landscape around you be speaking to you? What do you hear or see as you go about your daily life in your neighborhood, whether urban or rural?

CLOSING PRAYER

Sacred creator of the grizzly bear and the manatee,
help us hear your voice speaking to us in creation.
May we look for your light in the people we encounter in our daily lives,
in the checkout line and on the sidewalk.
May we also recognize our kin in the plants and animals with which we share this land,
raccoons and pigeons, redwood trees and sea bass.
Help us be awake to the startling life that surrounds us in all times and places.
Amen.

THE LAND BELONGS TO GOD

GROUNDING EXERCISE

Fill a glass with water from your tap and place it in the center of your group or, if you are alone, in front of you. Or, if you have a body of water nearby, go outside and stand near it, whether it be a pond, lake, stream, or coastline. Take a few minutes to contemplate the water. Where did it come from? Where is it flowing toward, either now or in the future? Our own bodies are composed of between 55 and 65 percent water. We cannot survive long without it. Take a moment to give thanks for the water that flows through your life.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Leviticus 25:18–19, 23–24.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. What landscape has most shaped your own life? If you are living in a different region from where you were raised, what does it feel like to inhabit a different kind of landscape? What do you most appreciate about the land where you live—tall trees, a big dark night sky, abundant water, mild winters?
2. Visit the Native Land website (Native-Land.ca) and find the Indigenous groups who were the original inhabitants of your land. How does it feel to look at a map without its usual modern political borders? What can you find out about the Indigenous nations that live or used to live in your area?
3. We are people completely fixated on time. We feel anxious when we're late or running out of time. We feel happy when it seems like we're making progress, and despair when we are not. But this chapter discusses how time is an abstract concept that can keep us from inhabiting the present and cultivating a connection to the spaces where we dwell. What small steps might you take to lessen your grip on time?
4. What do you know about your local watershed? Using the resources listed on page 67, find the watershed where you live and where your drinking water comes from. Who lives upstream from you? Who lives downstream? How might you become a better steward of your watershed?
5. Does your congregation or community have a land acknowledgment? If not, consider writing one and reading it at the beginning of worship or other group events. The Native Governance Center has excellent resources for crafting a land acknowledgment (<https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment>).

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator, the provider and sustainer of all life,

help us remember that you flow through us like living water.

Help us remember that we live on sacred land that once belonged to others.

May we tend it with utmost care, recognizing that all places are bound up with one another.

Amen.

A WILD AND ANIMATE EARTH

GROUNDING EXERCISE

If you're able, take a few minutes to stand outside and listen to the sounds around you. Alternatively, sit near an open window or play a soundtrack of nature noises if you have access to one. Pay attention to each distinct source of noise, even if it is human or industrial. What do you notice about the soundscape around you? Can you recognize any species of birds calling? Do you hear crickets, or frogs, or the sound of traffic? Each sound reverberates in our own bodies. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, what vibrations do you feel in your body? Do you hear/feel the sounds that come from your body or those around you, the beating of your heart, the quiet exhalation of breath, the movement of feet on the floor? Listen for the voice of God reaching out to you in these sounds and vibrations.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Job 12:7–12.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. How might Jesus' ministry have been influenced by his bioregion in Galilee, where most people were small subsistence farmers or fishermen? How do you imagine the stories of his ministry might have been different in a different place?
2. What are some of the features of a gift economy that Jesus promotes, as discussed on pages 78–79? Do you participate in a gift economy within your church or community? If so, how does this make you feel when you are able to share and receive in abundance? If not, how do you think you could take steps toward this?
3. Discuss some of the features of your own bioregion. What plants and animals do you see in your daily life? What geological substrate is under your feet? If you're not sure, you can use the USGS map of North America or another map relevant to your region to find out. (The USGS map is available at <https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/geologic-map-north-america>.)
4. How does the weather affect your life and how you feel in different seasons? Do you feel closer to God in some seasons or weather events than others? Why or why not?

CLOSING PRAYER

Wise creator God,
we listen for the sound of your voice in the trees and the wind.
We look for your presence in the fierceness of a summer sunset,
and the open face of a newborn child.
Open our hearts to receive your wisdom for our lives.
Amen.

LAMENT AND THE CREATION

GROUNDING EXERCISE

Find a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Feel your heart pumping in your chest. Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest as you inhale and exhale. Slowly scan your body. Where are you holding tension? Wherever you notice your muscles feeling tight, take a deep breath and let them loosen. Spend a few minutes being present with whatever you are feeling, gently letting thoughts pass out of your mind.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together the first creation story, Genesis 1–2:4a, then Jeremiah 4:23–26.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. When in your life did you first become aware of the effects of climate change or environmental destruction? Was it through personal observation, a news article, or a story on television?
2. What most worries you about climate change?
3. On page 98, the author cites Randy Woodley, who talks about how hard it is for those of us raised in the dominant Western worldview to sit with a problem for any length of time before jumping to solutions. Why do you think that is? How might we take time to lament what is being lost in the world?
4. Consider writing a lament about some aspect of loss you have witnessed in the natural world. What would you choose as the subject for a lament? Would your lament be told in words, in a song, or in some kind of visual art?

CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful, wounded, healing Holy One,

you created the world with your dream of what it could be.

You dreamed of people and plants, animals and air, all living in right relationship to you and to each other.

We confess how we have not lived by that dream.

Because of our disregard for your limits, we live in a world threatened by a changing climate that harms our atmosphere, that wounds the poorest and most vulnerable, that leaves this wonderful planet in poor shape for future generations.

Help us listen to your voice, your Word, and your creation.

Amen.

RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH AND OUR BODIES

Sacred Words

GROUNDING EXERCISE

Sit with your feet flat on the floor, close your eyes, and take several slow deep breaths. With each inhale, feel any tension in your body. With each exhale, release that tension into the floor. Feel the energy of the earth, which is the energy of God, moving up through your feet and giving light to your whole body. Remember that you are created in the image of God, holy and whole. Sit for a few minutes in this awareness before slowly opening your eyes.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Psalm 104 and Psalm 139:1–15.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. When you hear the words of the first two verses of Psalm 139 (“O Lord, you have searched me and known me . . .”), what reaction do you have in your body? Do you feel loved, or does such closeness feel intimidating?
2. If God has such intimate knowledge of us, what does that suggest about God’s connection to the rest of creation? How might we learn more about God by learning more about the plants and animals of the created world?
3. In what situations do you feel disconnected from God? What keeps you from feeling God’s presence in your own life?
4. What is one thing you can do this week to feel more at home on the earth?

CLOSING PRAYER

All-loving God,
you have searched us and know our every thought and breath.
You walk beside us always, even when we cannot feel your presence.
Help us remember that your holiness pulses through our bodies
and through the vibrant earth around us.
Amen.

RECONNECTING WITH THE HOLY

Practicing Sabbath

GROUNDING EXERCISE

If possible, go outside and stand in an open area. Take a few deep breaths. Imagine your future and your past in front of you and behind you, like two balloons making an hourglass, with your body in the narrow center. Now imagine these two balloons slowly leaking into the present moment, with the narrow center where you are standing becoming larger and larger, until the future and the past are two small knots at the edge of your awareness of this rich present moment.¹

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Exodus 20:8–11.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel after the grounding exercise? What are ways you might remember to give space to the present moment in your daily life?
2. Did you grow up celebrating the Sabbath in your home? What did it look like? How do you practice Sabbath now?
3. How do you feel after you've had a good, long period of rest? How do you feel after a period of constant work and stress?
4. How might you make space for sabbath rest in your life, whether it is one day a week or a shorter amount of time each day?

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator of sabbath rest,

help us remember that we were created not for toil,
but for joy and communion.

We are grateful to be called to meaningful work,

and we are grateful for the chance to lay down our burdens and rest in your love.

Amen.

1. This exercise comes from David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthy Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 202.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

Climate Justice and Restoring Creation

GROUNDING EXERCISE

For this exercise, it's helpful to look at a map of your city, town, or county. If you don't have a paper map, pull up a map online. Take a few minutes to notice all the streets and any geographic features on the map. Find the spot where you live. Find the places you regularly visit—where you shop, go to the doctor, attend church; a park or other spots you frequent. Are there places in your community that you do not regularly visit? Imagine the people in these areas, going about their daily lives. Look for places on the map where there is green space. Look for places on the map that are industrial areas. Imagine what ecological restoration might look like in each of these places. Imagine what your community might look like if it was a place where all people were able to flourish along with the earth.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together Revelation 22:1–5.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. What are examples of environmental injustice in your own area, town, or neighborhood? What examples of ecological restoration do you see happening in your community?
2. What is your greatest hope for the future, no holds barred?
3. What might the restored kin-dom of God look like in your own community? What is one thing you might do to help bring that about?
4. Where do you feel called to work for a better world?

CLOSING PRAYER

O Holy One,
you are with us wherever we go,
in forests and fields,
industrial parks and factories.
May we always be alert to injustice and oppression,
and may we have the strength to confront it
as we work to foster the kin-dom of heaven on earth.
Amen.