



Small Group Resource:

Season of Creation: The Book of Jeremiah

5 Weeks

Discipleship Ministries is an agency of The United Methodist Church

© 2019 Discipleship Ministries. All Rights Reserved

Introduction to the Format

There is a pattern for each week. The times are suggestions and are loosely based on an hour timeframe. The times should be modified, as needed. Each session will consist of the following elements:

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). Each session will begin with an opening question to foster dialogue and help the participants settle in to the theme for the week. These questions are meant to be done in micro groups of two or three people.

Optional Exercises. Weeks 2 through 4 contain an optional exercise that bridges the ending exercises from the week prior. If the group chooses to use these exercises, which will help the ideas from the lessons become more practical, the facilitator will need to adjust the time accordingly, as they are not figured into the timeline.

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). This guide does not include a lot of questions. The intent is for group dialogue and not merely giving the correct answer. During the dialogue sections, you will see guidance and possible answers to the given questions with brackets []. These are only possible answers and are not meant to be exhaustive of other answers. It is a helpful practice to allow participants plenty of time to process these questions internally. Don't be afraid of silence.

Prayer (10 minutes). Allow each participant who would like to do so to lift up a person or situation he or she would like the group to be in prayer over. Following each request, the leader will pray, "Lord, in your mercy...", and the participants will respond, "Hear our prayers." If the situation is warranted and if the participant is willing, surround the participant and lay hands on him/her and allow those who are willing to do so to pray for this person and/or situation.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). Ask for a volunteer to send the group out with the printed blessing; or read the prayer in unison.

Week 1 – Caring for Creation

[Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

Fellowship – Snacks (10 minutes)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have each participant finish the following statement: “My hope for our time together in this study is . . .”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Read [Luke14:1, 7-14](#)

- While sitting nearest the host of a dinner party was a way to flaunt status in Jesus’ day, how do people display their status today? [Neighborhood they live in, car[s] they drive, certain job titles, etc.]
- How can environmental abuse be an issue of idolatry? [God is giver of abundance not profit or things; trusting in our own ability to provide rather than trust God’s provisions for all.]
- According this passage, what makes a person blessed (v.14)? [Giving to others who cannot repay.]
- Working as a group, name as many selfless acts as you can. (Use a fair amount of skepticism. For example, when we give towards a charity, are we doing so from pure motives or because it makes us feel better or relieves us of guilt?)
- How is creation care linked with our mandate to care for the poor and vulnerable? [The poor are more affected by natural disasters and environmental abuse than the rich. For one example, wealthy people can afford insurance to cover loses and provides a safety net in the event of a natural disaster that poor are unable to afford.]
- What is the difference between creation care and environmentalism? [Environmentalism can become idolatry when creation is the supreme ideal or ultimate end. Creation care or ecological stewardship honors the Triune God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world and we are stewards of the good gifts God has entrusted us.]
- How can we take creation care seriously in our community?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (1 minute). Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

Creator God, we confess that we have not noticed when environment exploitation has happened and have not advocated for proper stewardship of the resources you have entrusted to us. Create within us a desire to see all people made in your image have access to clean water, adequate food supplies, and reliable shelter that we might all experience your provisions. Help us to be the stewards of abundance you have called us to. Amen.

Week 2 – Life and Death in Creation

[Luke 14:25-33](#)

Fellowship – Snacks (10 minutes)

Gathering and Opening (10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, discuss the following:
“Describe a hard choice you had recently?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes)

Read: [Luke 14:25-33](#)

- Do you find Jesus’ words in verses 26 surprising? (Hint: Remember the Fifth Commandment) Why or why not?
- What does Jesus’ analogy about building a tower have to do with discipleship (vv. 27-28)? [Can’t have half-hearted discipleship. Discipleship requires we prioritize our apprenticeship to Jesus as higher than anything else i.e. our reputation, our dreams, our status.]
- What do we learn about what needs to be sacrificed in order to be a disciple (or apprentice) to Jesus from this passage (v.33)? [Allegiances, status - image of respectability (those who “carry crosses were criminals” and a half-built tower would look ridiculous), possessions, etc.]
- How are sacrifice and generosity essential characteristics of the life of discipleship? How does’ Jesus’ message about the cost of discipleship connect with how disciples approach profit? [Means don’t justify the ends. People have more value than profits. Profits, when used for the benefit of the common good, positively contribute providing safety nets and aid to those in need.]
- What guidance would you give to a church member who’s is struggling with how his or her company profits from deforestation? [There is a value in providing jobs, but economic greed harms the earth and often the poor are impacted most.]
- How can your church practice ecological stewardship? [Promote recycling as an act of compassion and ecological stewardship. Use recycled goods instead of Styrofoam. And so on.]

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). Before ending in prayer, spend at least one minute in silence:

God who lifts up the humble, we confess that we have contributed to and enabled systems that have harmed the earth and others made in your image. Give us guidance to see how we might be part of your mission of the redemption of the world. Give us the eyes to see where harm is being done. Give us the ears to hear from those who are positively and negatively impacted by economic growth. Give us the lips to advocate for just policies. Give us the hands of compassion to extend your love and grace. Amen.

Week 3 – Creating from Chaos

[Luke 15:1-10](#)

Fellowship – Snacks (10 minutes)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, discuss the following: “Share a time you were physically or felt emotionally lost.”

Read: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

- Who is this parable directed toward? [Pharisees and scribes complaining about who Jesus was extending fellowship with the outcast and seemingly “lost.”] How does that impact our understanding of this parable?
- Which group (outcast/lost or Pharisees/scribes) are the ones feeling in chaos? [The Pharisees would have named tax collectors and sinners as lost sheep of God’s flock. The implications of Jesus’ parable is that they (religious leaders) are part of the lost sheep. Thus, Jesus’ ministry to the lowest, least, and the lost would cause the religious leaders to feel as though their world is in chaos.]
- While many are more familiar with the so-called Parable of the Prodigal Son in the next part of the parable following Luke 15:1-10, Jesus tells all three stories as one parable (15:3). How do these first two stories set up the following parable? [There is sacrificial searching (leaving the 99, sweeps even at night), there is finding (sheep and especially coins are unable to return), and there is a celebration from the one who found. Uncritically read, the story of the prodigal son is misread as a “returning” story instead as a “searching,” “finding,” and celebratory story.]
- Who, in our world, would consider themselves as “lost” or feeling chaotic? How would this parable be received as good news? [God is with them, searching for them, desires reconciliation, and to celebrate with them.]
- How is ecological stewardship an extension of our baptismal and membership vows? Part of our discipleship? [In our baptismal covenant we promise “to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin; to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.”]

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End by praying the following or similar prayer:

Lord, your mercies are new every morning and all day long you work for redemption. Stir up in us the desire to be your disciple in all areas of our life, that others would see in us your grace, mercy, and love. Amen.

Week 4 – Creation at Risk

[Luke 16:1-13](#)

Fellowship – Snacks (10 minutes)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, discuss the following: “Share a story of someone who acted in a crafty or shrewd way.”

Read: [Luke 16:1-13](#)

- This is the second time (of three) that Jesus tells a parable about “a rich man.” In this story, the rich man has a manager who has been wasteful. Now let go of his responsibilities, the manager acts in way to secure favor for himself which also makes his former owner look generous (by reducing the amount owed).
- What motivates the shrewd manager to bargain and thus make friends? [His motives are selfish. Possibly to be hired by one of the other owners or just to have a place to stay once his employment ends.] Does it strike you as odd for Jesus to use a shrewd manager in a positive light? Why or why not?
- How is this parable of the shrewd manager an illustration for those who serve God as their master (16:9)? [Those with wealth should use it for kingdom purposes or make one fit to be welcomed in the eternal kingdom.]
- How is this message of Jesus similar to other stories and passages from Jesus? [see also Luke 6:38, 12:33, 14:14, 14:33. Shares themes of generosity and caring for others.]
- Read the Confession and Pardon from A Service of Word and Table in the United Methodist Hymnal:
 - **Merciful God,
we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have failed to be an obedient church.
We have not done your will,
we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.
Forgive us, we pray.
Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**
- This is a corporate confession. The intent is not to incite guilt. Confession is acknowledging what we have done or failed to do, as a church and as an

individual, and because of God's pardon we resolve to act differently. How might you and your congregation resolve to act differently to be wise ecological stewards that respond to the cry of the needy and display love to neighbors?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End by praying the following or similar prayer:

O God, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen:

You place us in your creation, and you command us to care for it.

Your works declare glory and splendor, and you call us to praise and reverence.

Where we have degraded or destroyed earth's bounty, forgive us.

Where we have taken beauty and majesty for granted, have mercy upon us.

Where we have become estranged from the creatures with whom we share this planet, grant us your peace.

Renew us in the waters of baptism,

refresh us with the winds of your spirit,

and sustain us with the bread of life.

In the name of Jesus Christ, and for the sake of the new creation, we pray. Amen.

Week 5 – Creation Renewed

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

Fellowship – Snacks (10 minutes)

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, discuss the following: “Who is the wealthiest person you have met?”

Read: [Luke 16:19-31](#)

- Read I Timothy 6:17-19. What does being rich in the kingdom of God look like?
- Jesus tells the story of a rich man for the third time. What might it mean that the rich man is not named but the poor man, Lazarus, is named? [Reverses who is important.]
- Why would this story have been surprising to Jesus’ audience? (Who would they have assumed to be carried away by angels to be with Abraham?) [The audience would have expected to hear of a lowly Israelite being carried away, while an oppressive Gentile figure to be in Hades. In Jesus’ telling, an Israelite (son of Abraham) is in Hades while someone of lowly status is lifted up.]
- Who does the rich man express compassion for? [His brothers.] Why is it easier to express compassion on those closest to us and so hard to express compassion to those we do not know?
- What does it say of the rich man that he requests for Lazarus to be sent to soothe his tormenting? [That’s what poor people are supposed to do – serve the rich.] What does it reveal of the rich man? [He had known Lazarus’ status and did not help and doesn’t seem to have changed even in Hades!]
- What caused the rich man to be sent to Hades? [His lack of extending compassion and generosity to Lazarus.]
- John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, commented on this passage, “it is no more sinful to be rich than to be poor. But it is dangerous beyond expression. Therefore, I remind all of you that are of this number, that have the conveniences of life, and something over that you walk upon slippery ground. You continually tread on snares and deaths. You are every moment on the verge of hell!” (Sermon 112: “The Rich Man and Lazarus.” Quoted in the Wesley Study Bible p. 1268.)
 - Reflect on this quote as a group.
- As a result of this worship series, how has your discipleship been impacted or challenged?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End by praying the following or similar prayer:

Gracious God, we desire to be apprenticed in your ways. Continue to prompt us by your Holy Spirit where our lives need amending that we might glorify you in all we do. Amen.